

Die, Biker Scum!
The Motorcycle Outlaw in Genre Fiction

Dr. Ross S. Fuglsang

Department of Mass Communication
Morningside College
1501 Morningside Avenue
Sioux City, Iowa 51106
(712) 274-5129
fuglsang@morningside.edu

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Introduction

The Vipers and the Rock Machine, outlaw motorcycle clubs, declare war in Kathy Reichs' *Deadly Decisions*. A Viper is killed in a drive-by. As payback, two members of the Rock Machine, twin brothers, are blown up. Nine-year-old Emily Anne Touissant dies in the crossfire. As they prepare themselves for even more carnage, Canadian law enforcement officials hunker down to share information about the clubs' efforts to control the country's illegal drug trade. Over the course of nine pages Reichs provides a quick course in *les motards*, outlaw motorcycle clubs: their history, their culture, and, more critically to the plot, their single-minded dedication to violence. Reichs uses the setpiece early in the novel, prodding her readers with graphic imagery and righteous indignation, leaving them convinced that this "deviant fringe" deserves nothing better than extermination.

For the majority of citizens the world of motorcycle outlaws is foreign, but one that *we believe* we know and understand from our exposure to television, films, comic books and novels. The outlaw biker myth is an all-purpose, meaning-making device that allows, depending on context, for fear, humor, drama and heroism. Bikers are, as Reichs and others have discovered, ideal felons, thugs and killers. They can represent an attitude and lifestyle to be admired, despised, feared or even emulated. And as non-conformists, bikers are made to order for addressing society's definition of deviance, communicating just where the line is between law and disorder. Men's adventure novels seem particularly indebted to the myth for

supplying an abundance of villains, psychopaths and anti-heroes. Similarly, hard-boiled detective fiction and the occasional police procedural have taken advantage of motorcycle outlaws as both protagonists and antagonists. The characters resonate with our natural fear of lawlessness and senseless violence. On the other hand, their independence, self-reliance and brutality are a tonic for a bureaucratic society gone soft on crime.

An examination of how bikers have been employed within a genre can reveal much about that genre's codes and conventions, its relationship to societal boundaries, and its assumptions concerning deviance and legitimate authority. For example, how do creative representations of outlaw motorcycle clubs construct particular "ways of knowing" and understanding the world around us? Genres can and do vary in their acceptance, denial and criticism of those boundaries, providing alternate visions of how life "ought to be." Sampling genres and genre fiction which embrace the biker myth likewise presents an opportunity to analyze the stories we tell ourselves and the insecurities we reveal, and to examine larger aspects of our society's perceptions of and response to the motorcycle outlaw.

Cultural Studies

All media, G. Stuart Adam believes, include criticism and a "conferral of judgments" on events and ideas (12). The media are our alternative to directly experiencing the present, and imagination comprises the chewy center of the consciousness-forming process. All individuals spontaneously form images of events in order to recognize and place them in a meaningful context. The narrative, no matter what medium it is communicated through, is little more than a method of imparting knowledge and creating awareness of the seen and unseen world.

Culture, to borrow a phrase, is all those things that lend meaning to existence. This research takes a cultural studies approach to communication. The critical element, what guides its assumptions about what the mass media do, is that communication is “not the act of imparting information or influence, but the creation, representation, and celebration of shared beliefs” (Carey 412). Moreover, what John Carey called a “ritual view” of communication “centers on the sacred ceremony which draws persons together in fellowship and commonality” (412). Interacting with the media — reading, watching, listening, playing — is a meaning-making activity. It is through sharing stories, ideas and images that we come to understand the world around us.

Like Carey, John Storey stresses the interactivity of the communication process. Culture, he writes, is the “practices and processes of making meanings with and from the ‘texts’ we encounter in our everyday lives. In this way, then, cultures are made from the production, circulation, and consumption of meanings. To share a culture, therefore, is to interpret the world — make it meaningful — in recognizably similar ways” (3). Storey stresses, however, that the production of culture, and of meaning, is far from passive. It is instead “an arena of struggle and negotiation between the interests of dominant groups and the interests of subordinate groups” (4).

Storey’s introduction of the concept of hegemony focuses attention on that arena of ideological struggle. Texts are “multi-accentual,” he writes, meaning they, and the world they claim to represent, “can be articulated with different ‘accents’ by different people in different contexts for different politics”(4). And differences in representation, how something is described, utilized and characterized, become key to understanding the dominant way of knowing and what meanings we are meant to construct. A cultural studies analysis allows us

to shed light on the people and politics who have a vested interest in the meaning-making process, as well as the possibility of resistance and alternative meanings.

Genre Fiction

Though he prefers the term junk fiction, Thomas Roberts champions critical favor for genre fiction. In considering why readers would invest time in genre literature, Roberts is not satisfied with the simple explanation that it is escapism. All books, he argues, offer escape and fun. That 10 to 20 percent of most genre texts are description and explanation suggests readers learn from them (211). That they offer the potential for daydreaming holds even more interest, especially for the study of men's adventure novels and hard-boiled detective fiction: "If our wounds are deep enough, our capacity for inventing our own daydreams dim enough, we turn to popular fiction, whose stories, like so many daydreams, serve as psychic bandages" (211).

A genre is a body of texts that provides a consistent view of the way things are. Genres use their own vocabulary, myth and image to speak to a like-minded audience. Jane Feuer says genres bypass the "interpretive community" by restricting the use of signs and controlling those "ideological constructs that provide and enforce a prereading" (118). Consequently, genre study brings together ideas of structuralism, semiotics and communication as ritual. Feuer describes three approaches to genre study: aesthetic, ideological and ritual. The aesthetic approach identifies and labels those conventions which define a particular genre. The ideological approach views genre as a means of maintaining the status quo. The ritual approach, however, provides a deeper understanding of the meaning-making potential of genre. The ritual approach, Feuer believes, "sees genre as an

exchange between industry and audience, an exchange through which a culture speaks to itself” (119).

The communicative utility of genres is clear. Part of the attraction of genre fiction is the literary shorthand that allows readers, authors and texts to connect immediately and intensely. Heather DuBrow believes genres serve as a “code of behavior between the author and his reader” (2). Similarly, Eugenio Bolongaro describes genre literature as employing organized sets of “communicative conventions” in order to provide a message “accessible to the parties involved in the communication, so that process of cognition can take place” (304). John Cawelti, in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance*, writes that genres fulfill the reader’s desire for enjoyment and escape. However, “in order for these patterns to work, they must be embodied in figures, settings and situations that have appropriate meanings for the culture which produces them” (6).

Like Roberts’ text, Cawelti’s is an argument for the importance of literary formulas and genres.¹ Their two most recognizable characteristics, standardized plots and characters and escapism, are the main sources of audience satisfaction and enjoyment. They offer escape to proficient individuals who understand the codes and conventions, a certain assurance that the journey will be worthwhile, and satisfaction that in the end everything will work out to the audience’s demands. *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* was published in 1976, and whether or not he knew it at the time, Cawelti makes the connection between cultural studies and the study of genre fiction:

The work of art consists of a complex of symbols or myths that are imaginative orderings of experience. These symbols or myths are defined

¹ For Cawelti literary formulas and genres are “two phases or aspects of a complex process.” The formula comes first and over time its conventions are cemented into what we treat as a genre (7).

as images or patterns of images charged with a complex of feeling and meaning and they become, therefore, modes of perception as well as simple reflections of reality. According to this approach symbols and myths are means by which a culture expresses the complex of feelings, values, and ideas it attaches to a thing or idea (27).

For Cawelti the experience of genres has to be about more than just escape. It isn't *just* that we read stories which appeal to us, but that the stories appeal to us because they resonate with our experience and perceptions of the world and with our own "imaginative orderings of experience." In his attempt to describe the as yet unnamed method of studying genre, he concludes, "The basic assumption of this theory is that conventional story patterns work because they bring into an effective conventional order a large variety of existing cultural and artistic interests and concerns" (30).

Adventurers, Tough Guys and Detectives

Cawelti's definition of the adventure genre holds few surprises. A heroic individual or group — and in most novels utilizing biker outlaws those heroes are male, often hyper-masculine, sometimes with females as accessories — overcomes danger and adversity to accomplish a moral mission. The hero is more akin to the flawed, average-man (rather than super man) in extraordinary circumstances character described in *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* (40). And while he notes that villains are optional, in most of the novels of interest here, outlaw motorcycle clubs fill the role quite nicely. It should be noted, however, that bikers can and do play the hero in those occasional stories that resist the stereotype and play with the genre's conventions.

Cawelti does not include in his description of the adventure novel one common element discussed at length here: dissatisfaction with a weak-willed and occasionally corrupt

society. As he describes it, that is more an aspect of the hard-boiled detective genre. But cynicism towards society, especially of a “real man’s” place in that society, comes natural to adventure stories. Outlaw biker clubs are a fine symbol of what happens when law enforcement’s options are limited and when deviants are allowed to run free. For their part, bikers are not handcuffed by rules and regulations and they are the ultimate non-conformists, often to the point of being misfits in a world that doesn’t value strength, self-determination, or self-reliance. In men’s adventure novels it is often the hero’s responsibility to reel in the criminally-inclined and act as judge, jury and executioner. Consequently, vigilantism abounds in men’s fiction as moral heroes battle outlaws who mock heroism.

Vigilantism, masculine adventure and the detective story come together in hard-boiled detective novels. Contemporary men’s adventure fiction is at least a spiritual descendant of Mickey Spillane’s Mike Hammer. Between 1947 and 1952 the first six Hammer novels sold over 17 million copies. In his history of paperback publishing, Kenneth Davis describes the attraction of *I, The Jury*, Spillane’s first Hammer novel: “[It] was typical of the series; it contained the rage that was seething beneath the supposed civility of American life in the early 1950s” (182). Like the detective film and pulp fiction genres that came before, and the more stylized and masculine adventure stories that came after, Spillane incorporated elements of sex, violence and personal morality to appeal to an audience of men unable to act on their frustrations.

The hard-boiled detective novel, as Cawelti describes it, added aspects of frustration and anger to the classic detective story. An important difference between the two genres is how the central mystery is solved. In the hard-boiled detective story, the mystery takes a back seat to the “accomplishment of justice,” and the hero is faced with a pattern of

intimidation and temptation rather than a cat and mouse battle of wits and intelligence with a worthy opponent (142). The villain has a higher profile, “often characterized as particularly vicious, perverse, or depraved.... Facing such a criminal, the detective’s role changes from classical ratiocination to self–protection against the various threats, temptations, and betrayals posed by the criminal” (148).

The hard–boiled hero, unlike classic detectives, is a tough guy, emotionally involved and driven to solve a crime that offends his personal moral code (Cawelti 149). He also seems more “common,” but only as a mask for uncommon abilities that make it possible for him to function in the face of threats and intimidation. Though Cawelti describes him as chivalrous and moral, he is also jaded. He recognizes the corruption in the judicial system, and its inability to effectively deal with evil. “The police as an institution are presented as incapable of dealing with the pervasive evil, because the law is too decadent to mete out true justice” (153). Finally, though he can be more vigilante than police officer, the hard–boiled hero generally works within the law, bending it to his advantage and to his own moral code.

A further variation on the detective genre is the police procedural, the *Dragnet* kind of story as George Dove describes it. The genre is somewhat more realistic, Dove believes, because it is the one genre based on real life characters: law enforcement professionals, often working in teams, employing actual police procedures to solve crimes (3–4). This definition, with its focus on teamwork, suggests an important difference between it and hard–boiled detective fiction. The resolution of the mystery, usually the capture or defeat of a criminal, is the product of the work of a number of people instead of the achievement of a single protagonist.

Dove includes discussion of forensic investigation, but mainly as an adjunct of the

detective unit and an additional element of the crime-solving team. The recent popularity of television shows like *CSI* and *Cold Case*, however, has led to a new style of detection, and to a new genre that Thomas Doherty calls “forensic noir.” The focus of these stories is on the scientific method. It brings crime detection into the 21st century, providing a “crash course in the genetic ingenuity of real-life crime fighting, a vocation that is increasingly a matter of fibers, microbes and DNA” (np). Mystery and detective genre plots emphasize the identification and capture of criminals. In forensic noir, Doherty believes, the solution is more calculated: “Unable to prevent crime, or to understand the criminal, the heroes of forensic noir settle for matching up DNA. They seek closure more than justice; catching the killer is a bonus” (np).

The Adventure Begins

William Murray’s profile of the Hells Angels Motorcycle Club in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1965 offered a fairly even-handed description of the club. He used many of the same biker types in his 1967 novel *The Sweet Ride*, a murder mystery involving middle-class California kids wrapped up in beach and biker culture. Jimmy the Head and Jawbone, members of the 69ers club, and biker mama Big Jane, would have been recognizable to anyone who had read the *Post* article. But Murray’s bikers, aside from outlandish dress, are little different from their middle-class counterparts. What sets them apart, and makes them immediate suspects in the murder investigation, is their desire to be outsiders. Choo-Choo, a club prospect, applauds the bikers. “They’re anti-everyone and everything,” he tells his friends, adding that they “have it in for the whole crazy American scene. That part of it I could identify with. You know, it’s like being able to say nuts to this whole phony Great Society crap. That part I

could dig” (Murray 93).

Any hint of acceptance of the biker lifestyle is absent from Max Ehrlich’s ugly 1970 novel *The High Side*. Bikers, flower children and corrupt police all have to be exterminated in order to protect citizens and the “Establishment” from the deviance they represent. Beautiful Brad, leader of the Satan’s Outlaws, explains to his buddy Cal that the club is the home for society’s losers and outcasts, and that their purpose is to challenge the status quo. “You’re the one–percenter who won’t conform to the whole lousy, money–grubbing, ulcer–producing routine because you value other things like freedom, like being a man. With them, you’re nobody. The only place you fit is right here with us” (Ehrlich 41). For most of the novel Cal delights in the biker lifestyle, the sex, drugs and violence, and Ehrlich delights in describing it.

The battle for Cal’s soul is at the center of the story. Pitted against Brad and the Satan’s Outlaws is Marcy, a free spirit who has run away from her uptight, middle–class parents. Ehrlich even throws in an element of homoeroticism in order to push bikers even further to the margins. But *The High Side* has no true, adventure genre hero, preferring instead to use bikers to illustrate the self–destructive nature of aberrant behavior, alternately arousing and outraging readers. *Gannon’s Vendetta* follows a more generic formula and makes for a more conventional story. The unsuspecting hero, John Gannon, is drawn into a conflict against overwhelming odds when bikers break into his home, then rape and kill his wife. The guilty go free not so much because there is a lack of evidence, but because they hire a high–powered attorney and the “DA just won’t go with a probable loser; not in an election year” (Whitlatch 31).

The bikers are not included solely as the object’s of Gannon’s revenge, though their

defeat is a foregone conclusion, as using motorcycle outlaws as physical, emotional and psychic punching bags becomes an early addition to the genre's conventions. Most of the story takes place in a small Mexican village and the townspeople leave the bikers alone as long as they keep the peace. When an old man is killed in cold blood and a little girl terrorized the villagers wake up to the realization that evil cannot go unchallenged. And when Gannon discovers the bikers have conspired with their lawyer and a prominent Mexican landowner to traffic drugs into the United States, he is that much more justified in wiping out the bikers.

In the 1980s, in an increasingly conservative society fearful of crime, motorcycle clubs were symbolic of the too-liberal atmosphere of the 1960s. Similarly, the clubs' ability to move smoothly and successfully into drug trafficking and racketeering was an affront to law-abiding citizens and was perceived by many as the result of lenient justice. It was also an affront to working stiffs that bikers could maintain their decadent lifestyles with so little effort. The collision of outlaw motorcycle clubs with middle-class values, in a variety of media, provided an opportunity to reassure good citizens that all would be set right and to reaffirm the status quo. Toss in the frustrations of Vietnam veterans still nursing the wounds of war and returning to an ungrateful America and you have the first novel in Dan Killerman's Hellrider series,

Jesse Heller is a remorseless bounty hunter who over 13 years amassed the necessary evidence to convict and punish the Satan's Avengers for the death of his family and fiancée. The first book is a straightforward story of his revenge on the bikers. To one biker he says, "I was serving this country while you were squirreled away up in Canada, smoking pot and jacking off," voicing the pent up anger of veterans (Killerman 15). Citizens applaud his war

on bikers; law enforcement, embarrassed by his effectiveness, are bent on stopping him. He is told that what he is doing, his fight for justice, is against the law and that he “can’t just kill them” to exact his revenge. But when the killing is done and Heller rides into the sunset, Killerman offers this final observation: “Some would say he done wrong, taking vengeance into his own hands. Others would call him hero. It didn’t matter to Jesse Heller. He had done what needed to be done” (185).

A slightly different twist on the Vietnam veteran theme is featured in Bob Ham’s *The Wrath*. In this case the bikers are hired muscle for a crime family trying to take over Leeco Trucking Co., owned and operated by Marc Lee and Carl Browne, Delta Force veterans. They face the challenge as professionals, which means using all the military training and material at their disposal to protect the “Leeco family” from an immoral alliance. Carl explains to an employee that force is not always the answer, but when it is necessary he and his partner do not hold back: “Marc and I are trained to react. And that’s what we do, we fight fire with fire, force with force. I suppose what I’m trying to say is we’ve never killed anybody who didn’t deserve killing. We’re not murderers, we’re soldiers” (Ham 60).

The gang’s leader, Barry Dillon, is a highly-trained veteran as well, but he’s also a cold-blooded killer, a handy foil to the heroes’ many virtues. Dillon, “the Wrath,” is described as “a diseased, crazed wood tick” and “the most dangerous kind of killer — the kind who killed because he liked it” (Ham 79). He and the other Lobo bikers are interested solely in violence and self-gratification, and Dillon recognizes that is what upsets so many citizens: “Overroad truckers also hated outlaw gangs — for their own reasons. Most truckers were hardworking, decent people trying to make a living. They regarded one-percenters as leeches on society, dedicated to taking all that could be had, while giving nothing but violent

retribution in return” (Ham 49).

The Wrath, like nearly every novel featuring outlaw bikers, no matter the genre or whether they’re the villain or the hero, raises the question, what constitutes legitimate authority? Post–apocalyptic novels, however, have the advantage of placing heroes in lawless worlds where strength, determination and martial skills are often the highest authority. The genre is also a convenient reminder that our trappings of civility and of civilization are fragile at best, easily replaced. In Craig Sargent’s *The Savage Stronghold*, cannibals and criminals are the norm, and Martin Stone traverses an alien, burned out America: “Man’s greatest structures, the monuments of his civilization, were a joke to the long arms of time. A blink of an eye and all would be gone” (20).

The Guardians of Hell are the biker army in league with the priests of The Church of the New Darkness in *The Savage Stronghold*, a less than subtle hint that religion and law enforcement, like skyscrapers, are fragile institutions. Together they reign over Pueblo, Colorado. Sargent presents the bikers solely as debauched killers complicit in the Church’s demented plans, so long as they are compensated with whatever sadistic pleasures they desire. And again they suggest what happens when good people do not act. Stone pits himself against them in order to save his sister from the clutches of Guardian leader Straight Razor. Stone does most of the killing as he brings down the church and the Guardians, but he can’t do it alone. The Pueblo Committee for Freedom, an ineffectual underground group that can’t seem to agree on a plan of action, is inspired by Stone’s bravery and finally finds the will to stand with him against its enemies. At the end, aware of the possibility that the people might lose their newly discovered moral fiber, Stone gives them one last speech. “These are cancers in cloaks, diseases that don’t just kill but rot the mind and soul — as they’ve done to most of

the cowlike citizens of your town” (Sargent 215).

The apocalypse is actually a positive occurrence for the bikers in Robert Baron’s Storm Rider series, which is unique in its praise of biker philosophy. In his shattered world the United States has formed itself into regulated, prison-like city states where Citizens dwell. Outside of the Cities are the Plains where nomadic biker tribes, the High Free Folk, fashion a biker utopia of sorts, composed of equal parts medieval heraldry, Native American lore, and biker law that focuses on individual freedom and survival of the fittest. Captured and raised in an Orwellian Homeland which is at constant war with what the populace is led to believe is an army of heathen biker trash, Tristan Hardrider escapes and leads the folk in its battles against the forces of corrupt civilization.

In Baron’s novels the most repugnant aspect of the cities is their regulations. The Folk have their laws, the difference is they can choose whether or not to abide by them. An important moment in the first novel is Tristan’s discovery of U. S. history and the Declaration of Independence, the basis of High Free Folk law: “Being free means you have the freedom to make wrong choices, to hurt yourself and others” (Baron 30). Those ideas are blasphemy in the City and only a few realize the true American heritage they have been denied by their government. In the second novel, *River of Fire*, the threat to the Folk’s freedom is the Fusion, a religious cult. It means to enslave High Free Folk and Citizens alike, forcing them to surrender their individuality. That would be anathema to the Folk, “a wild, individualistic race, who painted their machines in all the colors of their souls” (Baron 132).

For a number of reasons the Storm Rider novels do not fit the standard men’s adventure genre mold. The novels come closer to the fantasy genre, taking themselves less seriously than the straight-ahead action of other novels. Neither does it have to pretend to be

relevant, escaping many of the men's genre's more egregious plot conventions. But there is no denying the trappings of masculine adventure, and it is interesting to look at Baron's novels as a response to the stereotypical biker outlaw used by other authors. Baron's bikers remain fundamentally the same — dirty, ill-mannered, anti-social — but he exaggerates other characteristics, such as individuality, brotherhood and physicality, which are virtually ignored by other writers. Baron takes “biker law,” mentioned in passing by Killerman in his Hellrider series, and provides it a broader definition which could actually be considered appealing.

The question of legitimate authority is treated differently in a handful of novels that focus on shadowy, sometimes pseudo-governmental organizations that don't operate under the same legal strictures as the police or FBI. CURE, the organization that employs Remo Williams in The Destroyer novels, is such an organization. Remo dedicates himself to physical and martial perfection. It's no surprise that in two novels, *Brain Drain* and *Acid Rock*, bikers are used to communicate animal brutality and base intelligence as a contrast of to Remo's cool efficiency. The scenario is similar in *Cloud of Death*, an Executioner novel, which establishes early that “enforcing laws, holding the line against a world of savages that preyed on helpless citizens” is a hard job for a hard man, and one that can't be constrained by law (Pendleton 25).

In *Hell's March* Dan Schmidt pits Eagle Force, hardened Vietnam “warriors” working as mercenaries, against a corrupt DEA agent, a Bolivian cocaine trafficker and drug dealing bikers. American appetites are to blame for the influx of drugs into the country: “The Americans, they are rich and they have plenty of money for our cocaine.... They are fat and they are happy, and so they choose to be more fat and more happy. We're only giving them

what they want” (Schmidt 210). Eagle Force’s job is made more difficult by the “Georgia peanut farmer” and a government too weak and too naive to realize the dangers of cocaine. Eagle Force is led by Vic Gabriel, who at first allows the Predators a grudging respect and notes similarities between the bikers and his paramilitary team:

The biker mentality was of a savage predatory nature, they lived by their own codes, obeyed no laws but their own. It was the ultimate criminal mind-set, but Gabriel supposed he could at least respect them for gripping onto some ironclad individuality that separated them from the rest of the world and gave them some feeling of freedom and unique identity (Schmidt 99).

Bikers again represent immoral and inferior strength set against clean living and morally upright heroes. Smith and Gabriel square off in order to gauge each other’s ability. Gabriel proves himself the better man on the bikers’ terms — he pounds him to the ground with his fists. Though Smith has the skills he is weakened by excess; “mindless animalistic self-indulgence” is revealed as the mercenaries walk through the bikers’ clubhouse, an orgy of naked bodies, drugs and violence which is testament to the “somasochistic culture of the Predators” and its “base animal degradation” (Schmidt 111).

Gabriel and Eagle Force are elite heroes acting as the instrument of a government agency which hands them a license to kill without fear of sanction. Of course, to be deserving of agency notice the antagonist must be evil incarnate, and biker gangs were made to fit the bill. Consequently, the level and amount of violence, by heroes and villains alike, ratchets up fairly quickly. In *Hell on Wheels*, Dennison’s Warriors are professional fighters who “handle the jobs conventional agencies could not, warriors concerned with ends not means, with results not rules” (Lassiter 33). Dennison tracks the “scumbags of the world,” but the biker gangs featured here are too well-armed, too vicious and too sophisticated for regular law enforcement. The success of the Satan’s Sons and the Mad Dogs can be blamed in part on

corrupt police officers, “the holes in the fabric of justice through which ruthless hoodlums like the bikers were able to wriggle” (Lassiter 55). The answer is to send a woman, Chris Amado, to infiltrate one of the gangs and get them to wipe each other out. The prospect of a gang accepting a woman as an equal member is ridiculous, but she succeeds in bringing down the bikers, at least “until some other Apeman Crenshaw comes along and bullies them back into power” (Lassiter 191).

Carmelita Morales and Harry Wolfe have a similar duty in *Deathride*, but they are tasked with revenge for the death of an undercover DEA field agent. The President literally declares war on the drug dealers, giving the Code Zero team authority to exterminate with extreme prejudice. The agents insinuate themselves into the Princes of Hell, partly because they are skilled fighters, but mostly because the bikers are exceptionally greedy and not very bright. Sexual deviance gets the ratchet in this novel as the Princes of Hell attract psychopaths like “an atom in search of a molecule” (Hodgman 82). Rape and sexual battery are not only used as punishment, but as a method for weeding out potential narcs and for creating a “bond nobody can cut.”

Code Name: Survival is a weird concoction of action adventure, slapstick, one-liners and brutal violence. “The team,” we are told, is composed of veterans of a variety of government agencies “working for the law, but operating outside the law” (Johnstone 8). “Control” sends the team on its missions, which in this novel is to break up a drug ring financed by “prominent businesspeople” and operated by bikers. Author William Johnstone emphasizes that bikers are animals, “domestic terrorists,” at best “subhuman,” which seemingly makes killing them permissible and at times downright entertaining. After killing two of the outlaws, one member of the team confesses, “I did experience a rather enjoyable

sensation from it” (Johnstone 97).

And that is pretty much it. The pointless and plotless story racks up a substantial body count of bikers, lawyers and Las Vegas gangsters, most dispatched with a jibe and a smile. Only one member of the team has doubts about the rightness team’s activities; he leaves the team and is killed almost immediately. Local law enforcement is complicit in their actions, as long as it has deniability, and the rest of the team goes about its business, following orders and reveling in their ability to kill with impunity. By the end, it seems the bikers’ lack of intelligence is reason enough for them to die. “If these halfwits weren’t so damn vicious I could almost feel sorry for them,” one of the “good guys” says (Johnstone 218). In the closing pages, on the way to their next assignment, two members congratulate themselves for being on the “right side” of the fight.

The hard-boiled detective presents a more legitimate authority in conflicts with bikers, and also brings it down to a more personal level. *Shotgun Alley* hews closely to Cawelti’s definition of the genre as Jim Bishop and his boss Scott Weiss are hired to liberate an influential senator’s rebellious daughter, Honey, from the influence of the Outriders and their leader, Cobra. Bishop is ex-military and a former criminal trying to prove his worth to Weiss, the cop who set him straight. Cobra has pretensions to sophistication, offering up long diatribes about biker freedom, but in the end he’s a killer trying to rationalize that fact: “A cop pushes me around, gives me shit, cracks my head. How come I’m the one gotta be peaceable? See what I’m saying? ... You gotta take all that shit apart until it doesn’t mean anything. It’s just words, that’s all. Somebody else’s words. Once you know that, then you’re free, see? (Klavan 72).

Other than Cobra’s speeches, author Andrew Klavan doesn’t attempt to present the

bikers as outlaws, just as criminals who ride motorcycles and exploit the intimidation and fear associated with the image. As Bishop insinuates himself into the gang, Weiss warns him, “Don’t cross the line. You know what I mean” (90). Weiss knows the temptations of Honey, money and violence and, of course, Bishop falls into all of them. Honey plays him, forcing a showdown between Bishop and Cobra so that she can escape both men, and her father, with enough drug money to make her comfortable. Weiss puts all the pieces together, but by the time he reaches his partner Cobra is dead and Bishop realizes he did cross the line. Confused by his desire for Honey, he allowed himself to be convinced that killing the “useless piece of biker trash” would be justified (208).

Dead in 5 Heartbeats plays with the hard-boiled conventions by making Patch Kinkade, president of the Infidelz Motorcycle Club, the novel’s hero. Co-written by Sonny Barger, former president of the Hells Angels Oakland chapter, the novel, like his autobiography, presents bikers not so much as criminals but as men of honor, as tough guys leading tough lives and enforcing tough justice on those who transgress their code. Tired of California’s sedate lifestyle, Patch is relocating to Arizona, but he’s pulled back into club activities to unravel the murder of one of his brother Infidelz. Rival clubs are the obvious suspects but the plot is more convoluted as an Infidelz informant and an FBI agent manipulate rival clubs into a war. The club is Patch’s life, his family, and the various threats provide the novel’s adventure undercurrent. When Patch puts all the facts together, he kills the informant but let’s everyone believe he was killed by the FBI agent. He saves his former friend — and the club — the embarrassing knowledge that he was a “piece of low-life police-informant scum” (Barger 273).

The self-assured hero of *Bluetick Revenge*, Pepper Keane, is witty and smart, a

former Marine and former federal prosecutor who established and then left his own law firm in order to pursue “special projects.” He definitely falls into the chivalrous role described by Cawelti, taking the assignment to protect a potential witness against Thad Bugg, president of the Sons of Satan. Keane is presented with sexual temptation a number of times, but stays true to his girlfriend. He also lets others take credit for his own accomplishments, including busting the outlaw club. He approaches the assignment as an intellectual challenge rather than as a physical challenge, which is quite a change from the other action-oriented novels. More in character, however, is Keane’s delight in stealing Bugg’s dog. From Keane’s perspective, mistreating the hound may have been Bugg’s worst crime.

Bugg and the club, less violent than bikers in other texts but still bullies mired in drug trafficking, are secondary characters as they put Keane on the trail of the Aryan Resistance and the man who may have killed Pepper’s cousin. Keane’s activities as he investigates the murder stay pretty much inside the law. “I had been taught that the end never justifies the means, but when I analyzed that statement, I began to question it,” the investigator says, preferring instead an ethical perspective that is more situational (Cohen 318). He sets out to kidnap Skull, the Brotherhood member who killed a federal agent for the Sons of Satan, and who might also have killed his cousin. He doesn’t kill Skull, though he feels justified. Instead he satisfies his sense of justice by leaving him in a “bad part” of Boise: “Skull certainly looked handsome in his Aryan Resistance jacket, but I think what really impressed the crowd was the WHITE POWER he had tattooed across his knuckles” (Cohen 326).

Procedurals offer the most legitimate of authority as characters are expected to not only stay within the bounds of law, but to follow rules, regulations and procedures. Those strictures are even more difficult for Marshall Tim Rackley in *Troubleshooter* as he and his

team have to track down and arrest the bikers who shot and almost killed his pregnant wife. Sinners president Uncle Pete spouts the usual anti-establishment rationale for the club's existence, but author Gregg Hurwitz imagines his bikers with global influence. Their plan is to smuggle condensed liquid heroin from Mexico into the United States for a Sunni extremist group, al-Fath, in exchange for a cut of the proceeds. When the FBI's investigation of the Sinners is revealed, the two law enforcement agencies are initially at odds, but they eventually work together in Operation Cleansweep. The lawmen aren't surprised by the Sinners' role in the plot: "The bikers were a terrorist-affiliated group as dangerous as any other. Just because they didn't cleave to a particular ideology hardly made them less menacing. Or easier to fight" (Hurwitz 207).

Outlaw motorcycle clubs are probably hard villains to write into a procedural novel because the plots have to be realistic and be solved in a credible manner. In *Troubleshooter* the FBI has an agent undercover with the group, which in reality has proven hard to do. Law enforcement agencies actually have to rely on laws, like the RICO Act, to catch criminals. Hurwitz' characters do use RICO in the novel, but scenes of action-oriented police officers shuffling through papers, like long hours spent on stakeouts, does not make for an exciting story. Another aspect of the novel that does have a whiff of reality is the officers' run-ins with the Sinners' high-powered attorney, Dana Lake. It is through Rackley's back and forth with Lake that the reader gets some sense of the frustration that arises when smart criminals know how to work the system.

The four bikers accused of murder in *Against the Wind* don't bare much resemblance to those in other novels, possibly because J. F. Freedman tries to make them into fully realized characters. As bikers they have to be tough and mean, and Freedman does present

them honestly as rapists. But when they are found guilty and sentenced to life they show fear, and when their lawyer, Will Alexander, proves their innocence they show gratitude and happiness. Their larger purpose in the novel, however, is to be losers. That's pretty much their role in society as well, one biker tells Alexander. "The winners got to get the long end of the stick, right?, so people like us, designated losers, we get the short end," he says. But when Alexander calls him a loser, the biker tells him it's just a matter of perspective. "Far as we're concerned we're the biggest winners of all time" (Freedman 93–94).

The bikers are also a political opportunity, which makes for the legal conflict at the novel's core. Alexander is plumbing the depths: divorced, separated from his daughter, borderline alcoholic and fired from his own firm by his best friends. The district attorney frames the bikers for the crime for his own gain, knowing that no one will care about a pack of biker losers. Alexander also wants to use them for personal gain, but also for redemption. As a novel about the law, proving the bikers' innocence suggests to readers the skills a dedicated legal team can bring to a difficult case. It reminds us as well that the system, though flawed, can be made to work. For everyone.

Faye Kellerman's *Prayers for the Dead* has one of the best biker lines in all of the novels discussed here. As a team of detectives led by Peter Decker investigates the murder of an eminent physician, they learn that he associated with outlaw bikers. As they discuss suspects and motives, suspicion obviously falls on dimwitted bikers Greasepit and Sidewinder. Just being outlaws makes them suspects, and Decker finally says what everyone on his team is thinking: "We all like the bikers as bad guys because they fit our notions of villains" (Kellerman 125). Oddly enough the bikers do end up being the killers, which seems too easy an answer for a detective novel. But the case is much more complicated, and one

that might not have been solved if the detectives had simply gone with the easy answer.

Dead bikers figure prominently in two forensic novels, Kathy Reichs' *Deadly Decision* and Max Collins' CSI effort, *Snake Eyes*. The other similar aspect to the books is, as one would expect, the clinical use of science in ascertaining guilt. Set in Nevada, the bikers of *Snake Eyes* are more like Wild West gunfighters, icons of frontier justice, right down to the shoot-out between the Predators and Rusty Spokes in a casino. Collins does not go out of his way to describe outlaw bikers or create scenes of outrage for readers. Instead, they're dangerous only by hearsay and reputation; the local police chief doesn't like them because they're bad for business. But for the most part the biker clubs seem to be present solely for the danger and intrigue they can bring to any story, though killers in this genre rarely seem as interesting as the search for their identity.

As a forensics expert, Temperance Brennan, hero of *Deadly Decisions*, has a different interest than the CSIs of *Snake Eyes*. She seems more interested in reconstructing the victims rather than the crime scene. Bikers and their crimes, especially their abuse of women, arouse dread and anger in the reader so that we can feel what Brennan does as she investigates a variety of murders, including the violent deaths of two young girls. The bikers also seem to exploit the chink in Brennan's scientific armor, making it impossible to investigate heinous crimes with the same sort of objectivity as the CSIs. In her search for answers, Brennan interrogates a dead girl's skull: "When did she realize she was going to die? Did she scream in terror, knowing no one would hear her cries? Had she died in her own home, to be hauled off and dumped? As her eyes closed for the last time did she feel terror or resignation or hatred or numbness, or merely bewilderment. Had she felt pain?" (Reichs 148).

Discussion/Conclusion

The commander of the Purity Forces aims his pistol at Tristan Hardrider, intent on taking the life of the Lord of the High Free Folk. His features twisted with hate, Brigadier General Sir Lane Selfridge bellows, “Die, barbarian scum!” (Baron, *Lord* 197). A variation on that line seemed an apt title for an analysis of outlaw bikers in genre fiction. Any organization or individual guilty of such monstrous behavior *at least* merits the label “scum.” Examination of how bikers have been employed within select literary genres reveals much about their literary codes and conventions, their relationship to societal boundaries, and their assumptions concerning deviance and legitimate authority.

One-percenters and outlaw clubs have from their inception stood as effective examples of what is wrong — and only occasionally right — with society. Outlaw bikers use the term “citizen” to disparage the law-abiding majority, the good people who do what they’re told, who live their lives inside the comfortable bubble of society. The outlaws who populate men’s adventure and hard-boiled detective fiction signify the not-a-citizen, the symbolic representative of sexual, social and criminal deviance. “We all like the bikers as bad guys because they fit our notions of villains,” a detective says in *Prayers for the Dead* (Kellerman 125). Those villains exist, we are led to believe, because society lacks the will to stand up to them. In the dystopian future they are the cockroaches that survive nuclear annihilation and flourish in the absence of authority.

A DEA agent in *Hell’s March* says law enforcement represents “the flip side of the creeps we bust, only there’s a real thin line separating the sides. We’re all the same underneath. It’s what we do with that sameness that counts” (Schmidt 10). The blurry line between evil and good, between legitimate and illegitimate, between citizen and non-citizen

is a common arena of conflict in these novels. For the most part, outlaw bikers represent everything good people fear and despise, and punishing them encourages us to believe that bad things should happen to bad people. Readers are reminded as well that the critical institutions that keep our society operational require constant observation and monitoring.

The heroes who administer justice generally represent legitimate authority in the guise of law enforcement. But vigilantes and anti-heroes, even the occasional shadowy but well-armed pseudo-governmental mercenaries, are justified if they adhere to a code of personal righteousness. Some authors provide more definition of the code than others, but if nothing else it includes a dedication to hard work, honesty, individual commitment and the admonition to always do what is right. For hero and anti-hero alike courage depends on conviction and the ability to enforce their moral code through individual strength and intelligence rather than through fear and intimidation, because outlaws are quick to bow before real men and real authority.

Conclusions for what this analysis might mean are based on a small sample of texts which may or may not fairly represent a particular genre. One obvious observation, however, is that positive representations of outlaw clubs are rare. The fantasy genre seems to be the one arena where the not-a-citizen is free to be truly heroic. Narratives set in the “real world” allow outlaw clubs minimal opportunity for negotiation because, by definition, they will always be deviant, outside the lines of acceptability. More often, bikers are losers in all senses of the word. The best they can hope for, it seems, is to be measured against an array of corrupt lawyers, police officers and politicians who transgress the standards of their institutions. In the end, all will face some form of justice in order to bring the system, the “establishment,” back into balance and restore the status quo.

A scene from Gregg Hurwitz' *Troubleshooter*, intentionally or not, provides a final illustration of the use of symbolism as a means to restoring public confidence in the system. A police officer is killed by an outlaw motorcycle club and the department pulls out all the stops in giving him a hero's funeral. As the ceremony plays out on television screens, Marshall Tim Rackley observes that the funeral is an important signifier of social cohesion: "The void opened up by the slaying of a police officer could be compensated for only by symbolism, an overwhelming show of force and tradition to reassure citizens that they weren't under attack, that the bedrock wasn't fractured, that the moorings still held" (Hurwitz 55). The not-a-citizens, who ever they may be, will just have to try harder if they want to exploit the cracks in society's "bedrock" institutions.

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