Prunes and Posses: Individuation and Team Cohesion in *Silent Witness*

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Accepted for publication in Journal of British Cinema and Television.

Abstract

Silent Witness (BBC, 1996-) is a long-running forensic crime drama with ongoing success. Although academic attention to the series has thus far focused on the iconic original protagonist Sam Ryan (memorably portrayed by Amanda Burton), an intriguing period featuring a team of three protagonists followed her departure in 2004. This article analyses this "team era" of *Silent Witness*, suggesting that these later series can use their new team dynamics to dramatise a tension between individualism and communality. Until 2012, *Silent Witness* developed this team's bond, yet also occasionally created tension between an individual protagonist and the team – disrupting the latter's normative cohesion. To demonstrate this, this article provides a close analysis of character interaction in the team era episode 'Body of Work' (2006, season 10, episodes 5&6). Whilst describing the patterns of individuation and team cohesion found therein, it furthermore explores their connection to innovations in aesthetics and cumulative narration and a wider cultural tension in popular neo-liberal thought. The article then indicates how such innovations have affected the series' potential ideological significance and suggests wider applications of this approach for other post-millennial British television crime teams.

Key Words: *Silent Witness*, 2000s, British crime drama, teams, workplace family, individuation, neo-liberalism.

Introduction

Silent Witness (BBC1, 1996-) is a popular, long-running and widely-disseminated forensic crime drama: as is revealed on the programme's website, it 'regularly draws audiences over 7 million in the UK and reaches viewers across the globe including Denmark, Sweden, Australia, the Far East and Latin America' ('About the Show': n.d.). Even those in the UK that have not seen the programme often know of the stubborn, wistfully-gazing pathologist Professor Sam Ryan, memorably portrayed by Amanda Burton – if only from French and Saunders' 'Witless Silence' send-up (BBC 2, 2 May 1999), or from any of the *Dead Ringers* sketches wherein a parody-Sam avers she is 'never wrong', can tell anything 'just from glancing' at the body (or bagel, hamster, cake), and exerts herself to find her 'most flattering camera angle and stare mournfully into middle distance for an improbably long time until the credits roll' (BBC 2, 2002, season 1, episode 3).

In the 2000s, however, *Silent Witness* gradually moved away from this iconic individualistic focus on Sam to become a more team-oriented show, its protagonists consisting, from 2004 to 2012, of senior pathologist Leo Dalton (William Gaminara), and co-pathologists Harry Cunningham (Tom Ward) and Nikki Alexander (Emilia Fox). Unfortunately, this period has not yet received academic attention: *Silent Witness* has mainly been examined for Sam (Kay 2002; Nelson 2002; Nunn and Biressi 2003; Ridgman 2012). This article therefore offers an analysis of the show's 'team era', focusing on its representation of character interaction. It suggests a relation between this and narrative and aesthetic changes, and indicates how these relate to the series' potential ideological significance.

The analysis is grounded in the central observation that team era episodes can enact, and resolve, a tension between individualism and communality. Episodes that follow a pattern of disruption and resolution on the level of the individual (conventional to the earlier,

Sam-centred, *Silent Witness*) in addition depict a pattern of 'cohesion-incohesiveness-cohesion' on the level of the team. In other words, a focus on one individual team member occurs simultaneously to the disruption of the team's normative state of bonding; similarly, resolution arises interdependently. 'Body of Work' (2006, season 10, episodes 5&6) is a typical example of this. To support wider observations on team era *Silent Witness*, this article therefore employs close readings of this two-part episode – of (quoting loosely from the series) its individualistic 'prunes' and bonding-centred 'posse'.

Silent Witness up to and including 'Body of Work'

As the ninth episode in which Leo, Harry and Nikki appear together, and the tenth since Sam's departure, 'Body of Work' is situated soon after a transition from a focus on individual character development to a focus on a familial type of team bonding. This involved the removal of the inveterate individualistic focus on Sam as the series' sole protagonist – complemented by her characterisation as stubbornly independent: as her colleague Trevor (William Armstrong) tells her, 'You know what your problem is? You're no good at being part of a posse' ('Long Days, Short Nights' 1996, season 1, episodes 3&4). In addition, the series' familial element gradually moved from the private to the work space.

The familial element's slow shift commenced early on. Although *Silent Witness* began with Sam moving to Cambridge to be near her senile mother, embittered sister, and teenage nephew, by the third series (mother having died, sister and nephew having left the country) Sam instead introduced Trevor as her 'family' – establishing a wedded-to-work trope ('An Academic Exercise' [1998, season 3, episodes 1&2]; 'Brothers in Arms' [1998, season 3, episodes 7&8]). Sam's private family, however, lingered in her repeatedly-referenced back story, which centred on her father's murder. Until she solved the murder in 'A Time to Heal' – and, in fact, subsequently left the series – private family thus continued to support an

overbearing focus on Sam's characterisation (2004, season 8, episodes 1&2). Hence, Trevor never became a main character on a par with Sam, and, despite series six and seven laying the foundations for a familial team – Sam and Leo jokily wondering 'which one of us do you think Harry will take after?' (Leo in 'Running on Empty' [2003, season 7, episodes 5&6]) – Harry and Leo were, as actor William Gaminara (2009) describes, mere 'sidekicks to Sam'.

In contrast, from series eight to fifteen, team era *Silent Witness* equally develops three protagonists (Leo, Harry, and Nikki) within a cumulative narration based on their interaction in the workplace – thus establishing a workplace family. Contributing to this is a lack of private family – particularly (adjusting this theme from the Sam-centred series), lost fatherhood: Harry's father committed suicide when Harry was twelve, Nikki only has an estranged and imprisoned father left, and Leo's wife and daughter died tragically at the start of series nine. The team, then, compensates for this lack: Leo, as Gaminara (2010) explains, becoming 'a kind of father figure' with Harry and Nikki as 'slightly wayward children'.

This innovative focus on familial team bonding does not mean episodes no longer utilise individualistic foci similar to those on Sam. Rather, the development of several protagonists in a team opens up the possibility of having several cases and narrative strands – of which one can (and occasionally does) create an individualistic focus on one of the protagonists. Contrary to Sam-centred episodes, however, such foci are in tension with the team era series' normative state of bonding: team era episodes that feature an individualistic focus enact tensions between individualism and communality that repeatedly end with the normative reaffirmation of the latter, refocusing attention over and over again on team cohesion.

'Body of Work' is a typical example of a team era episode that utilises this potential individual-communal tension. The episode features two initial central murders, creating three investigative strands, and develops an individualistic focus on Harry. This is preceded by a

scene of familial bonding, offering a comforting and familiar 'welcome back' to regular *Silent Witness* viewers and providing a conventional carefree beginning, a quiet before the storm – like a village fair in *Midsomer Murders* (ITV, 1997-): Harry and Nikki attend part of a conference, then skip the rest in favour of a pub, later reporting back to Leo like two caught-out truant kids. Following this, Leo investigates the death of Jimmy Triangle – an artist who was working on a display of grisly fake corpses in a disused church – whilst another body arrives at the mortuary, which Harry recognises as that of his college ex-girlfriend, Penny Harris. She had refused to ever see Harry again eighteen years ago when he asked her to have an abortion. Whereas Harry had assumed the pregnancy had been terminated, however, Nikki's post-mortem reveals the opposite. Hence, alongside the question of the 'whodunit?', which Nikki tries to solve, Harry embarks upon a quest to find this potential long-lost daughter or son.

Throughout Harry's ensuing state of turmoil the episode utilises traditional *Silent Witness* devices of individuation, with only slight stylistic innovations. Crucially, however, these are employed to different narrative effect due to their tension with cohesive normalcy – a change which affects the series' potential ideological significance. To explore such wider implications, the episode's patterns of individuation and bonding shall be outlined in detail, and connected to other narrative and aesthetic innovations.

Patterns of Individuation and Changes in Centripetality

A traditional *Silent Witness* pattern is 'freedom-responsibility-freedom regained'. After connecting strongly with a central victim during a post-mortem, the pathologist takes responsibility over her/him, and (usually to the annoyance of police) departs from normative behaviour to go on some sort of quest. In 'Body of Work', then, although Harry is reminded

at the beginning to complete a routine toxicology report, after having encountered Penny, he more or less abandons his mortuary work to engross himself in Penny's life-before-death.

This preoccupation with responsibility for the victim befits the association, demonstrated by Jeremy Ridgeman (2012), of pathologists with the socio-medical discourse of care: intermediating between law and order and the victim's (family's) welfare. Indeed, Gill Plain describes the pathologist as a '"hybrid" detective formed by crossing two key symbols of reassurance: the doctor and the private investigator' (2001: 7). The professional transgression of *Silent Witness*' pathologists into police business becomes part of this discourse, as does their blurring of the personal and professional in relation to the victim – often in a way adopting the body, acting as its sole guardian: as Robin Nelson has argued for Sam, '[a]ny "natural" readiness to take on the role of mother and family nurturer appears to have been displaced into her professional devotion' (2000: 69).

The phase of responsibility in the above-mentioned pattern, however, also bears meaning in terms of post-millennial discourses on identity. Indeed, the description of the individualistic patterns found in *Silent Witness* as 'freedom-responsibility-freedom' draws on popular neo-liberal vocabulary on 'self-making'. 'Freedom' refers to the perception of free choice – a buying into the popular neo-liberal illusion of unlimited options: as Nikolas Rose asserts, one is 'not merely "free to choose", but *obliged to be free*' – 'to understand one's life [...] in terms of one's success or failure acquiring the skills and making the choices to actualize oneself' (1999: 87, emphasis in the original). Hence, the pattern's initial and final states are 'free' as they involve only ostensibly freely chosen responsibilities, part of the job applied for (toxicology reports, court appearances, dissecting corpses, admin). Furthermore, in between, a character can fail to be free to choose: when a crime prompts personal identity-defining questions and so causes her/him to perceive her/his options through the lens of an all-absorbing responsibility for self-subjectification or self-justification.

This sense of responsibility generally sets the character on a lone quest of self-(re)assertion: in popular thought, authentic identity is often seen as achieved autonomously – one undertakes solitary meditation or journeys through vast near-uninhabited places to 'find oneself'. As Charles Taylor underlines in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, however, authenticity ultimately relies on winning the recognition of others through exchange (1991: 48). Or, in *Silent Witness* terms, everybody needs a body: before truly achieving authentication by being re-embedded in the normative team, the pathologist tries to re-assert her/his self by the aforementioned adoption of the victim. In *Silent Witness*, the clue to the pathologist's identity crisis is therefore generally closely related to clues regarding the victim's life before death.

The process of the pathologist's self-(re)assertion through the central victim is initiated by the latter's re-subjectification by the former. As Heather Nunn and Anita Biressi's article on the Sam-centred series demonstrates, as well as the conventional Others and abject in crime drama, *Silent Witness* victims have traditionally also become subjects as the pathologists piece together the story of their death (2003: 195-6). Corresponding to popular neo-liberal ideas of self-determination, bodies are central to this re-creation of identity: if, following Anthony Giddens' explanation of these ideas, victims were responsible for the creation of their identity through their body 'against the backdrop of plurality of choice', pathologists can deduce identities from posthumous bodies (1991: 102). By simultaneously fragmenting and re-subjectifying the bodies, then, *Silent Witness*' pathologists are in a way not only 'Dr Frankenstein[s] in reverse', as Sabine Vanacker noted for Patricia Cornwell's fictional pathologist Kay Scarpetta, but also regular 'Frankensteins' (1997: 66). Indeed, the series often brings victims back to life on-screen through narrative flashbacks and video recordings. Its title, then, is an apt evocation of this uncanny resuscitation – an observation Elaine Campbell makes with regard to another BBC police procedural series, *Waking the Dead* (2009: 322).

The connection between the victim's re-subjectification and the pathologist's self-(re)assertion through it is forged during their first encounters: particularly during the post-mortem, which, through its overall visual/aural focus on both pathologist and victim, initiates a centripetal focus on the pathologist throughout (on centripetality, see Mittell: 2003). As Nunn and Biressi established for Sam, the pathologist's gaze in *Silent Witness* characteristically constitutes an intimate, empathetic, one-on-one encounter with the body (2003: 200-2). During post-mortem scenes, the camera often zooms in on the two, to the exclusion of others present. Indeed, these shots are often literally centripetal – the camera moving in, whilst slowly circling the pathologist and/or body. Adding to this, although Nunn and Biressi mention 'melancholic extra-diegetic music', *Silent Witness* post-mortems are in fact generally hushed: aurally focused on the pathologist's voice – music only coming in to mark the end of scenes, frequently to put dramatic emphasis on what is said about the victim (2003: 200).

Two other key centripetal *Silent Witness* visuals similarly draw pathologist and corpse together in a kind of vacuum – yet, in addition, intimate the symbolic 'abject' propensities of their spatial alignment: as liminal figures operating on the borders of life and death (see Kay 2002; Nunn and Biressi 2003; Sydney-Smith 2007; Campbell 2009). What Nunn and Biressi call the 'macabre striptease' – the uncovering of the body, often by opening the body bag – visualises the border-crossing shift in attention from the living to the dead in a grotesque spectacle (2003: 201-2). Similarly, the 'near-kiss' is almost 'vampiric', another sign of life/death liminality (Ibid.: 201). Such intimations of the abject in the near-kiss and the striptease stress the victim's and pathologist's instability of identity, whilst these shots' centripetal intimacy highlights the consequent process of self-(re)assertion.

In 'Body of Work', then, the moment Penny's body bag is unzipped and Harry enacts a near-kiss caress, the episode turns the narrative spotlight on him. This centripetal force is

furthermore re-emphasised later when Harry repeats this with another victim central to his individuation process – Simon, Penny's teenage son, who turns up, turns out not to have been Harry's, then gets murdered – saying he 'could've sworn I could see something of myself in him'. His quest for self-(re)assertion after all follows from the post-mortem discovery that Penny had given birth – giving rise to the possible reinvention of himself as father and the exploration of his past conduct towards Penny.

The initial central post-mortem scene, then, continues to establish a centripetal individualistic focus on Harry through Penny. Despite Nikki doing the post-mortem, and the camera moving in for the traditional close-ups eye-to-eye with the victim, attention is redirected to Harry by a blatant male gaze – the camera for instance meanwhile grazing Penny's nipples – reinforced by a theatrical *mise-en-scène* filled with on-looking men. In addition, the scene continually turns to Harry's emotional reaction in the viewing gallery – at one point, superimposing the reflection of Penny's body upon the glass behind which he stands.

As this inventive split focus between Nikki and Harry reveals, the addition of equally-developed protagonists in a team has enabled some innovative approaches to typical centripetal *Silent Witness* post-mortem visuals. This plurality has also, however, arguably diminished the series' televisual intimacy in terms of the depiction of pathologists' emotive connection with victims – even when the series sticks more closely to traditional one-on-one post-mortem shots. Sam was known for her empathetic response to bodies: for what Nunn and Biressi call 'staging or vogueing as [she] visibly demonstrates her engagement with the dead' through 'slow, precise, and gentle' movements (2003: 202). Close-ups of Sam's middle-distance gazing furthermore emphasised emotive thoughtfulness. In contrast, although occasionally employing it, neither Leo, Harry or Nikki trademarks vogueing like Sam. In team era post-mortems, whilst visual details of the bodies are shown off more, the

pathologist's emotional display is shown off less. In fact, Tom Ward has revealed that the post-mortem scenes are detached performances more to do with demonstrating evidence:

> by definition, they are very plot heavy. They're very much to do with evidence, we need to see certain things. [...] They're very bitty to film, so actually kind of emotional reactions in all kinds of ways slightly vanish. You kind of lose track of the sight whether this is a burnt victim or whatever it might be because you've got to concentrate on making sure that the nails are held up in the exactly right way that the camera sees that there's a scar there that will become important in seventeen minutes time or whatever it is. ('Body Models': 2010)

This change in centripetal intimacy from an attention to emotive empathy to forensic detail has occurred in tandem with technological advances: prosthetics supervisor Pauline Fowler suggesting in a 2010 interview that the rise of high-definition television 'give[s] people a kick up the backside', and explaining that whereas earlier bodies consisted of 'a skin with a filler', newly available materials allow the creation of more realistic full solid silicon bodies. However, it is moreover linked to the team era's increase in protagonists. This, for one, means that episodes are able to, and do, feature many more victims: 'Terminus' (2006, season 10, episodes 3&4), for example, features more or less two per pathologist. Thus, there is less screen-time per victim – meaning that elaborate questions of identity that engender centripetal foci are typically only able to occur for one. The change in centripetal intimacy can therefore be said to tie into an overall prioritisation of innovative plurality and familial communality over individualistic foci in the team era.

Patterns of Cohesion & Changes in Cumulative Narration

In addition to the typical individualistic pattern of "freedom-responsibility-freedom regained", the development of a familial team engendered a second pattern: 'cohesion-incohesiveness-cohesion restored'. This is intertwined with the first, and, notably, does not feature in the Sam-centred series, as the focus in those episodes is on posse-incompatible Sam throughout: a cumulative narration based on character back story sustaining this. In the team era, however, a return to freedom also typically means the end of individualistic foci and a return to cohesion on the level of the team, as the overarching narration in these series is based on character interaction within the team. Cohesion, then, refers to a normative state of character bonding – a team communality in identity-creation. This is not necessarily affected by the team era's innovative tendency towards narrative plurality – team members working on different cases in different places – it *is* affected by a focus on one member's individuation process. In all, it consists of varying elements that comprise the team era series' cumulative narration, utilising tensions with and within the abovementioned pattern of cohesion, and contributing to an interesting idealisation of communality.

As mentioned, the team re-enacts family dynamics in the workplace. In 'Body of Work', Harry and Nikki's behaviour in the post-conference office scene illustrates their child-like position in the team. Similarly, Leo's avuncular concern confirms his role as father-figure: for example asking Nikki about her discord with Harry in the episode, adding 'look, I don't want to interfere. You're both adults. Technically at least'.

As a familial unit, then, the team can be idealised in comparison to the team era characters' (generally absent and troubling) private biological family: as self-chosen and thus carrying a positive neo-liberal inflection. Hence, in contrast to Sam being 'wedded to her work' – which pertains to her characterisation as autonomous, portrayed both in terms of empowering choice and in relation to private family back story – when Harry responds

'married to my work' to Penny's mother's 'You ever think of settling down, starting a family?', the trope has come to speak of a sense of preferred workplace communality.

Such workplace families are furthermore idealised in the sense that in them, as Ella Taylor observed about the 'wave of series with occupational settings' in 70s America, the 'most fulfilling attributes are vested not in work activity but in close emotional ties between co-workers' (1989, 110-111).The most prominent example of such ties in team era *Silent Witness* is the cumulative romantic sub-narrative established between Harry and Nikki – this will-they-won't-they scenario thus utilising the incest taboo, a narrative device that, as Ella Taylor explains, sustains desire in 'uneasy but tantalizing contradiction' with relationships mirroring that of 'sibling ties and bonds between parents and children' (Ibid.: 138). It furthermore features a 'two-sides-of-a-coin' device (insensitive, strictly-empirical Harry versus sensitive, openly-inquisitive Nikki), and familiarised banter – often about Nikki sitting at Harry's desk: Harry saying in 'Body of Work', 'for the fiftieth time, you're sitting at my desk. [...] Stand up. Stand here. Take five paces back. Take two steps to your left. Sit down. Familiarise yourself with the foul detritus of your workspace'.

Such banter moreover extends beyond Harry/Nikki. In fact, from the beginning of *Silent Witness*, humour has provided occasional relief from all the killings and corpses. What critics such as Nunn and Biressi, engrossed by Sam's vogueing, have overlooked in their accounts of *Silent Witness* post-mortems is that Trevor regularly lightened the mortuary-mood by singing or making inappropriate jokes – often in a double act with Fred (Sam Parks), a tall assistant with otherwise no lines to speak of, reminiscent of *The Addams Family*'s Lurch (1964-1966). In 'Divided Loyalties' (1998, season 3, episodes 5&6), for example, Trevor cheerfully enters the cutting room, telling an astonished DI Michael Connor that 'A man should always enjoy his work, Inspector, otherwise what's the point'. He then congratulates Fred on his birthday – 'Doing anything special?' 'Yeah, I'm wearing silk

underwear' – and sounds a playfully approving 'Hm' before turning his attention to the victim on the slab.

Harry takes over Trevor's role of jester with irony-tinged reflexive wit (attributed to the actor behind him, Tom Ward): for example introducing Nikki, in 'Suffer the Children' (2007, season 11, episodes 3&4), as 'pathologist, forensic anthropologist. Trombonist probably' to poke fun at her unrealistic accumulation of job titles. The crucial difference to Trevor's humour, however, is that Harry's came to contribute to patterns of cohesion. Generally taking place in team contexts, Harry's jokes are arguably often inserted to maintain some sense of familial team cohesion throughout: as Ella Taylor has observed from the inter-relatedness between the introduction of personal workplace relations and comedy in 70s crime drama, 'as the boundaries between comedy and dramatic series grow more blurred, the family metaphor comes more and more to shape the workplace dramatic series' (1989: 133-4). She thus posits comedic hybridisation as a significant contributor to the workplace family in crime series: comedy in a way eases the genre into the appropriation of such sitcom conventions (Ibid.: 133-5).

The placement of romance within a team of recurring protagonists in team era *Silent Witness* indicates a similar shift in narrative attention to communality. The two instances of cumulative romantic sub-plots for Sam featured policemen (Superintendent Peter Ross in series two and DI Michael Connor in series three) who were emphatically polarised to the series' pathologists: the relationship with Peter actually ending when, not long after Sam says, 'if I weren't a pathologist and you weren't a policeman, I think we'd get on really well', he requests her suspension for interfering with police work ('Friends Like These' 1997, season 2, episodes 7&8). Not only were these romances not situated in a team – they were never really about communal interaction: as the ultimate focus of the series' overarching narration at that time was Sam, the men essentially only served to bring out her character

traits and back story. Indeed, Sam's later romances never lasted longer than an episode – an appearance by Jack Dee as a criminal with whom Sam falls in love for example soon ending with his death ('A Good Body' 1999, season 4, episodes 5&6).

In contrast to the Sam-centred series, then, the team era employs both romance and humour to contribute to a cumulative narration focussed on team communality. Set design reflects this emphasis on communal interaction: the main recurring set(s), the office, is divided mainly by glass rather than solid walls, enabling regular visual contact. Allowing for added intimacy, moreover, Harry and Nikki share one space in it. Adding this heightened visibility to the narrative emphasis on, and idealisation of, character interaction in the team era series, the tension between individualism and communality in various episodes' patterns of cohesion can easily be made palpable.

In 'Body of Work', both romantic tension and humour feature heavily at the beginning. Having fled the dreary conference they were attending for a homely, fire-lit pub, Harry and Nikki joke about Nikki's future as a prune:

> Nikki: 'I'm thirty. I'm single. I'm boringly diligent, off-puttingly committed to my work. I am going to be a prune.'
>
> Harry: 'Shut up.'
>
> Nikki: 'It's true, I'm going to wither on the vine.'
>
> Harry: 'I think that would make you a raisin, wouldn't it?'
>
> Nikki: 'Raisin or prune, it's not exactly what a girl dreams of when she's growing up.'
>
> Harry: 'I'm sure you'll be snapped up by some rich and handsome dried fruit seller.'

> Nikki: 'Exactly, the only man I'll ever find is some loner with a fetish for shrivelled produce.'
>
> Harry: 'Oh shut up.'
>
> Nikki: 'I'll end up stiff and cold like some badly wigged mannequin in a scary local museum.'
>
> Harry: 'Shut up!'
>
> Nikki: 'Someone will show me as an exhibit, "this is Doctor Alexander, our ninety-two year old pathologist. Remarkably Doctor Alexander is now completely desiccated apart from the tiny muscles which operate her rusty scalpel."'

When Harry then kisses her (adding a comical 'Now she shuts up!'), the episode has reached a peak in cohesion.

However, an indication that this initial cohesion is not to last follows immediately: a shot of a bloody hand – corpse number one – and the opening credits, with its haunting 'Testator Silens' opening theme. Slightly later, then, after Harry, having been called to work, humorously tells Nikki with a quizzical look, 'apparently someone has died', his jolliness is soon quenched by the sight of his dead ex-girlfriend. Humour and romance make way for an individualistic focus and lack of team cohesion.

What enables the story to be anchored in some sense of *Silent Witness* routine, almost awaiting the return to cohesive normalcy, is the possibility of several narrative strands: as only one protagonist per episode goes through the pattern of 'freedom-responsibility-freedom', the other two continue to demonstrate professional routine. In this episode, in particular Leo remains, beacon-like, at some distance from the ensuing turmoil. His case is related to Harry's only in that it stresses a theme of authenticity (fake bodies, faked evidence,

Triangle's artistry versus artifice, his assistant Eggy as the actual artist) and touches upon father-son dissimilarities (the 'genuine' artist versus the less acknowledged conceptual artist). Hence, calmly continuing to carry out his job, he is at leisure to occasionally reflect on the team's lack of cohesion – expressing his worry about Harry and Nikki to them.

Counteracting such stable factors in *Silent Witness* narratives is the central pathologist's adoption of the victim, and her/his subsequent involvement in the 'crime family' – the family surrounding/implicated in the crime (usually the victim's or the murderer's). As another potential source of communality, this crime family can temporarily destabilise the team's position as an idealised communal alternative to the troublesome unelected biological family. As a result of his adoption of Penny, for example, Harry soon neglects his mortuary work to spend more and more time with her family. Indeed, he starts considering the appeal of having his own private family through Penny's family – admitting his disappointment when he finds out Simon is not his son.

The episode alludes to Harry's (over-)involvement with the crime family in several ways. Penny's surname, Harris, nearly indicates a possessive. Harry's emotional embroilment as her ex-lover is hinted at during the post-mortem of Penny by him leaving abruptly – and the scene suggestively ending just as suddenly – after Nikki declares that 'externally, the heart looks normal'. That he progressively comes to parallel Penny's stepfather – who turns out to be Simon's real father – reinforces this: both are scathingly told to just walk away again (by Penny's husband and her son respectively, in reference to their past negligence of her) – establishing a strong analogous characterisation. Furthermore, soon after the revelation of Penny and her stepfather's affair, Harry, in a *The Graduate*-style partner-swap, is seduced by Penny's mother.

That this increasing involvement with the crime family relates to team's progressive fragmentation becomes poignantly clear one-third of the way into the episode's second part

when, after an intense falling-out, Harry finds Nikki watching CCTV footage of Penny and Simon, who, at that time, is still thought to be Penny's lover. Previous to it, Harry – in denial about Penny having given birth – had forced Nikki to double-check the physical signs of childbirth unnecessarily. As Harry now apologises for this misconduct, Nikki responds by launching into an analysis of the footage, full of subtext about their own relationship: 'sometimes,' she says, 'you need to be angry to see things as they really are. It made me realise something. [...] They're not having an affair. That's not passion. [...] It's more like affection.' – and here a sudden rear medium shot points at Nikki – 'Especially from her'. Hence, the episode presents the realisation that Simon is Penny's son, and therefore, at that point, potentially Harry's, in parallel with an intimation of a lack of team cohesion – Nikki's post-altercation speech hinting at the dissolution of a possible romantic union with Harry.

Crucially, however, 'Body of Work' returns to a state of group cohesion by the end of the episode. The individualistic focus on Harry wanes when it transpires that he was not responsible for Penny's pregnancy – absolving him from self-justification on account of his past behaviour towards her. Indeed, after that, he can do no more for her than scold and lock away her murderous mother, who turns out to have killed Penny and Simon because of having been confronted again with the fact that 'my husband and my daughter had made me a grandmother'. As Harry's individualistic focus, then, dissolves, the team bonding devices of humour and romance re-emerge. Harry returns to his duties as pathologist and team-member – finally completing the toxicology report mentioned at the start of the episode – and is shown to gaze romantically at Nikki under the accompaniment of heartening piano music. When Leo asks whether the report constituted a happy ending, furthermore, Harry, with a touch of his usual reflexive humour, responds 'happy as endings get here at the morgue'.

With this final return of attention to team bonding, 'Body of Work' ties into the team era series' cumulative communal narration. Although this provides an enjoyable viewing

experience, the shift in cumulative narration from individual character detail to communal interaction has a significant impact on the series' portrayal of individual character: team era episodes are affected by selective amnesia on the level of character detail – retaining details depending on whether they tie into protagonist interaction that is part of the over-arching bonding narrative. Hence, individual character development in the team era that occurs during centripetal foci is also temporary. In fact, since Sam's departure, this selective forgetfulness has even manifested itself in the reoccurrence of actors in various roles: most notably, Ruth Gemmell comes back as DI Ashdown in 'Terminus' and as part-perpetrator in 'Undertone' (2014, season 17, episodes 7&8), after dying tragically as Detective Constable Cox – who appeared throughout series one – in *Silent Witness*' first finale.

After 'Body of Work', then, Harry is 'reset'. Whereas the series remembers where Harry and Nikki had left off in relation to each other (still not together) and develops the tension between them in subsequent episodes, any character nuance developed in this episode – Harry's sense of guilt and remorse over his treatment of a girlfriend, feelings of potential fatherhood and settling down – evaporate. Even when a later episode's individuation process crops up with similar themes, it does not draw on Harry's experience in 'Body of Work'. The memorable episode 'Bloodlines' (2011, season 14, episodes 7&8), for example, shows Harry visiting a Hungarian lawyer, Anna, who he fell in love with two months previously at a conference, and who is then murdered – carrying, it later turns out, his child. As Harry again runs around trying to find out about his late girlfriend's recent activities, the episode bypasses the potential to tie into the character detail explored in 'Body of Work' – only referring to the larger overarching communal narration that encompasses the episode's romantic tension: when Harry appears to have been shot, a grief-stricken Nikki tells Leo, 'You always thought we'd be together, didn't you? Me and Harry. That's what everyone thought. That one day we'd come to our senses'.

Further Implications: Wider Contexts and Ideological Ambiguity

Observing the relation between patterns of individuation and communality as this article has done above for 'Body of Work' can benefit, and contribute to, wider analysis of post-millennial British crime drama, including *Silent Witness* itself. It can provide a new outlook on identity constitution in British crime drama by drawing out individual-communal tensions, and, so, inter-character dynamics. As the patterns can be connected to wider cultural phenomena, moreover, this approach can give indications as to crime series' potential ideological significance.

Its wider use is facilitated by the patterns' congruence with traditional crime narrative formulae – the disruptive crime being at the centre of all of these. Critics have widely adapted the basic 'whodunit' structure, or 'magic formula' – generally restated as the tripartite "'innocence'-guilt-innocence restored" – set out in W.H. Auden's seminal 'The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, by an Addict' (1948). Neil McCaw, for example, re-interprets this as an "order-disorder-order reinstated" plot arc with more overt socio-political bearings: enacting a 'process of confronting and then suppressing threats to the presumed/assumed homogeneity of social life' (2011: 108). The patterns observed for team era *Silent Witness* can similarly suggest a modification: potentially providing two formulae to explore individual-communal tensions –'freedom-responsibility-freedom' (for the individual) and 'cohesion-incohesiveness-cohesion' (for the team).

The observational relational approach here proposed can, thus, be relatively easily tested on other team-based crime series for comparative purposes. Such comparisons are especially germane for the 2000s as, in that decade, team contexts have been prominent, featuring centrally in some of the most successful British crime dramas – think of *Waking the*

Dead (2000-2011), *Spooks* (2002-2011), *New Tricks* (2003-), *Life on Mars* and *Ashes to Ashes* (2006-7, 2008-2010), and a renewed *Taggart* (1983-2010). Teams, then, are a noticeable trend in popular early twenty-first century British crime drama – potentially suggestive of broader cultural tendencies of the time. As such, they deserve wider academic attention.

Analysis based on the observation of communal-individual patterns can contribute to such a broadening of the scope of analysis, as this article has demonstrated for *Silent Witness*: this approach facilitating close attention to a popular and successful era of the series that had been overlooked. As noted above, academic attention to *Silent Witness* was previously limited to the 1996-2004, Sam-centred, series (Kay 2002; Nelson 2002; Nunn and Biressi 2003; Ridgman 2012). Unlike the team era series, *Silent Witness*' origin as 'lone female detective' show – a deliberate counterpart to ITV's *Inspector Morse* (1987-2000) according to Nunn and Biressi (2003: 204) – simply fits in with a context of writing on British crime drama that continues to gravitate towards femininities: centrally, the arresting Jane Tennison from *Prime Suspect* (1991-2006) (Brunsdon 1998, 2012; Mizejewski 2004; Hallam 2005; Sydney-Smith 2007; Jermyn 2003, 2010, 2013).

Yet, the proposed relational approach can also extend these prevalent female-focussed readings to examinations of more general ideological stances towards gender: by focussing in on the relational dimensions of individuation – for, as R.W. Connell and Messerschmidt put simply, '[g]ender is always relational' (2005: 848). For team era *Silent Witness*, for example, an overall ideological ambiguity can be ascertained following the analysis of communal-individual patterns in team era episodes such as 'Body of Work' – the series, in particular, regularly glossing over gender inequality. The team era's amnesia on the level of character detail, as a result of a shift to communal cumulative narration, often problematically subordinates individual experience (of, for example, inequality), opinion, and development to

over-arching stories such as the hetero-normative 'will-they-won't-they' between Harry and Nikki. In addition, the focus on an idealised team as workplace family consisting of several equally-developed protagonists gives a false impression of equality.

In the meantime, gender bias abounds in team era *Silent Witness*. Whilst the men are shown to attain professorships, Nikki never gets promoted and is instead assigned the typically-feminine role of team nurturer: as Gaminara explains, his character (and indeed Ward's Harry) talks through tough emotional issues with her as 'in a typical kind of gender way, she was the one who was able to have those conversations' (2010). Conforming to typical feminine victimisation, furthermore, Nikki is also the most threatened character: she is nearly killed at the end of 'Peripheral Vision' (2007, season 11, episodes 9&10), for example, and has a gun put to her head in 'Terror' (2008, season 12, episodes 5&6). The Harry/Nikki romance builds upon and trivialises such simplifying backlash gender dichotomies and hierarchies. Its two-sides-of-the-coin device ultimately contrasts as superior 'masculine' rational detachment with 'feminine' oversensitivity – dynamics for example evoked when Harry saves Nikki from peril. Episodes can easily ignore inconsistencies of any such simplifications (with, for instance, Harry taking on feminine qualities in 'Body of Work') in light of the series' aforementioned selective forgetfulness.

As indicated, the patterns observed in *Silent Witness*' team era series can moreover give indications as to how the series relate to a wider context of cultural tensions between the individual and the communal. Drawing on popular neo-liberal vocabulary, they can extend Jeremy Butler's argument regarding the police procedural – that, with its often-intractable investigators, it 'brings into sharp relief the conflicts between individual freedom and social responsibility in a democratic society' – to conflicts between autonomy and communality in popular neo-liberal ideas of identity-constitution (1997: 1264). This can for example then lead into analysis of post-feminist discourses in episodes: for, as Rosalind Gill and Christina

Scharff assert, 'the autonomous, calculating, self-regulating subject of neoliberalism bears a strong resemblance to the active, freely choosing, self-reinventing subject of postfeminism' (2011: 7).

The underlying neo-liberal implication of 'Body of Work' can be surmised by linking the pattern of cohesion observed in the episode to that of individuation. Ultimately, neither Harry's bond with Penny, or her relatives, provides adequate authentication to resolve his identity crisis – they merely assist in the enactment of the popular idea of a lone journey to find oneself. Harry's return to a state of freedom depends on his re-embedment in the team. It is, thus, intertwined with the team's return to a state of cohesion. Hence, the following observation by Ella Taylor rings true: 'If the television narrative is again having it both ways, celebrating both individual freedom and group solidarity, its underlying meanings suggest that only in the group, specifically the professional group, can the individual clarify his or her identity' (1989: 126).

The fact that this inter-dependence of freedom and cohesion seems paradoxical indicates the tension between the individual and the communal in popular neo-liberal thought. Although 'Body of Work' plays with this tension, its resolution points to an ultimate preference for communality. Unlike the Sam-centred series, with its continuous focus on one headstrong 'posse'-unfriendly star-protagonist, team era *Silent Witness* repeatedly emphasises the limits to the neo-liberal ideal of autonomous self-assertion. 'Body of Work' suggests the workplace family as an alternative to such self-sufficiency that does not jar wholly with popular neo-liberal thought in terms of choice: as a self-chosen unit providing communal authentication. Leo, Harry, and Nikki might occasionally worry about becoming lonesome 'prunes', devoid of private families, but – so the episode ultimately seems to suggest – at least they have chosen to 'wither on a vine' together.

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