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Dying for More

Edited by
Jean Anderson
Carolina Miranda
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Serial Crime Fiction

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Edited by

Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezzotti
Victorian University of Wellington, New Zealand

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Introduction

Jean Anderson, Carolina Miranda and Barbara Pezzotti

Most readers of crime fiction¹ have ‘followed’ a series: many have also at some point abandoned that series, in all likelihood to begin reading another. In print form, public library shelves provide an ever-increasing selection of serial crime novels originally written in a range of languages, made available through what is probably the busiest sector of literary translation. A glance at any television programming guide will quickly reveal that crime series in all their denominations – from private eye fiction to police procedurals,² from whodunit to hardboiled narratives³ – dominate the small screen.

But what makes a series a series? With regard to literature, definitions seem both vague and overgeneralized: ‘a set of books, periodicals, or other documents published in a common format or under a common title’ or ‘a set or sequence of related television or radio programmes’. What makes a ‘set’ or a ‘sequence’, or what ‘related’ might mean appears to be taken for granted. The scientific domain offers more precision: in mathematics, a series is ‘a set of quantities constituting a progression or having the several values determined by a common relation’; in physics and chemistry it is ‘a group of objects related by linearly varying successive differences in form or configuration’.⁴ Importantly, these definitions stress that similar elements are repeated not only as agents of coherence, but also as part of a progression. We would argue that this highlighting of sameness and difference is crucial. In crime fiction, the repetition of a formula is an integral part of the series, and yet, as we will show, it is not simply repetition, but the tension between repetition and development, between imitation and transformation, that builds the narrative chain, making reiteration an essential part of change, and change an essential part of reiteration.

This dual aspect has to date largely been neglected in approaches to the crime fiction series: most have stressed its limitations and rigidity. Much of the critical commentary on twentieth-century crime fiction finds its formulaic nature to be either ideologically suspect or aesthetically unsatisfying. In particular, Todorov's influential essay 'The Typology of Detective Fiction' (1977) highlights the predominance of conventions in crime fiction, thereby disputing its literary value. Cawelti (1976) insists on the conservative nature of crime writing, underlining the idea that 'the pleasure and effectiveness of [...] formulaic work depends on the intensification of a familiar experience': this establishes a 'world with which we become familiar by repetition' (10). Writing specifically about seriality as it applies to the 007 James Bond series, Eco (1966) refers to its limiting 'grammar'. While 'seriality' and 'repetition' do not prevent 'innovation', for Eco this combination constitutes an 'inseparable scheme-variation knot, where variation is no longer more appreciable than the scheme' (1990, 97–8). Criticism such as this is based on a conceptualization of the series as a number of books that feature the same protagonists and a repetitive story, following alleged conventions of the genre, and allowing little room for development or complexity: quantity displaces quality.

Rushing (2007) gives a psychoanalytical reading of crime series, in which repetition remains central, but is re-evaluated more positively. For this scholar, 'our engagement with classic detective fiction is fundamentally an obsessive-compulsive urge to repeat' (91). This urge arises from an impulse to experience some degree of frustration:

The constant repetition of the same scenarios in detective fiction, the relentless insistence on identical situations, structures, gimmicks, characters, even the insistence on serial adventures, the same detective coming back again and again, points not to the satisfaction of a desire, albeit a disavowed one, [but] to the constant return to that which does not give us satisfaction: *enjoyment*. (110, emphasis in original)

For Rushing, this Lacanian concept of a deliberate structure of dissatisfaction is precisely why genre fiction, specifically crime fiction, attracts us in our search for the 'always missed object' (115). In other words, in knowing that our desire will inevitably be frustrated, we find solace in seeking again.

Both approaches, positive and negative, insist on an essential standardization: we maintain, however, that there are a number of aesthetic implications associated with serialization that warrant investigation,

specifically as they relate to the notion of repetition and variation. Far from being fixed and formulaic, crime fiction generally can take on a multitude of forms and functions. This is especially so, as the studies in this volume will demonstrate, for the series.

What do we mean, in fact, by this umbrella term of 'crime fiction series'? Rushing's focus on the recurring detective is echoed by Kayman (2003), for whom the 'principal agent of coherence [is] the figure of the protagonist' (43). Several other critics take it for granted that the detective is the key repeating element, but is this the only way to develop a series? Might not place also provide a base for multiple storylines? According to P.D. James, the setting for crime fiction 'establishes atmosphere, influences plot and character and enhances the horror of murder' (2004). In the case of the series, repetition generates a lasting familiarity with characters and places and contributes to the success of that series. The search for 'whodunit' intertwines with an investigation into the environment of both the victims and the suspected culprits. But arguably, sending the protagonist to different locations may provide the sense of variation just as essential to sustain reader interest. If crime writers can indeed create a 'sense of a place' (Lando 1996), then, as Geherin argues, in crime series 'there is often an intimate connection between crime and its milieu, which thus comes to play a prominent thematic role in such novels' (2008, 8), even, as we would add, in its variations.

Far from merely sketching out stereotypical violent cities relegated to the background, or familiar, peaceful villages troubled by murder, seriality may become a useful tool for a sustained investigation into contemporary society and its problems. How do crime series engage with an increasingly changing world? How do they interact with globalization, the environment, gender and racial issues? If it is true, as Gramsci (1984) states, that serial fiction is 'a powerful factor in the formation of the mentality and morality of the people' (34), then these are compelling questions we need to ask.

There are other important dimensions to the question of development and progression in the crime series. It is capable of crossing borders, transplanting styles and characters into new countries and cultures, changing the protagonist's gender or aiming for readers of a different age group. The genre is also open to hybridization, 'since one of the defining characteristics of crime fiction is its generic (and subgeneric) flexibility and porosity' (Scaggs 2005, 2). In pursuing that essential balance between repetition and innovation, a crime series may 'host' characteristics other than those of a 'typical' crime investigation, mixing in elements of adventure, science fiction, horror or the supernatural. How

(and why) do series transfer between media (for example, print to film or vice versa): are these extensions still part of the original series, and what factors determine the form and timing of this transfer?

Some critics have, admittedly, acknowledged the presence of progression and evolution in series. Collins (1989) and Neale (1990) argue that crime fiction is a genre that does not have enduring norms, but continually reworks or transforms its own conventions. Pyrhöen (1994) points out that as a dynamic process the crime genre is dominated by repetition, but also fundamentally marked by difference and evolution. None of these scholars, however, has highlighted the idea that the mechanism of enjoyment and, in some cases, 'addiction' to the most satisfying crime series may be located in precisely this dynamic. Moreover, to date, very little critical attention has focused on the many different ways in which serial crime fiction, ostensibly bound by its very seriality to repetition, might also rework and transform through, among other things, literary experimentation within series, the domestication of 'foreign' formulae, or marketing and editorial strategies.

As this book will amply demonstrate, not all series, or episodes of an individual series, develop according to the same structural pattern. The centre of the narrative may be the detective, the place, the social setting or timeframe; the medium may be print, film or television; some series transition between these. Form and content are flexible, not limited or limiting: our argument is that what ultimately distinguishes the series is the tension between sameness and difference, familiarity and strangeness, repetition and progression. In crime series that present this tension, the familiarity of situations that create cosiness is challenged by change, surprise and novelty that may come from the evolution of the detective, or the setting, the different historical periods, the protagonist's personal story, or the fact that in each story different social and political issues are tackled; or again, because the genre successfully expands its boundaries to other genres or genders.

This book is divided into three sections. In Part I, 'The Sum of its Parts: What Makes a Series?', contributors look at the origins and some of the developments of serialized crime writing. The concept of the series as created by a single author or as following the investigations of a single, central protagonist is challenged by studies of transgeneric developments and multi-authored series. Marketing and production strategies, including translation choices, which help create the idea of a series as a 'set' are also examined. Chapter 1, Blandford's 'Stephen Burroughs, Serial Offender', offers a prehistory of serial crime fiction, tracing its

origins back to the popular literary milieu of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America, showing how seriality may allow the development of different identities for the same protagonist. In 'The Myth of the Gentleman Burglar: Models of Serialization and Temporality in Early Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction' Pagello compares Leblanc's cycle with two similar non-French 'gentleman burglar' characters, Ernest W. Hornung's A.J. Raffles (1898), and his most explicit imitation, the German pulp hero Lord Lister (1908). In Chapter 3, Miranda shows how the intellectual patronage of two of the best-known writers in Argentina contributed to the establishment of crime fiction, and especially the whodunit, as an artistic endeavour in 'More than the Sum of its Parts: Borges, Bioy Casares and the Phenomenon of the *Séptimo Círculo* Collection'. Sitbon, Vuaille-Barcan and Rolls comment on the way in which the revelation of single authorship can create a sense of collection not present when pseudonym and real name are used, in 'Serializing Sullivan: Vian/Sullivan, the *Série noire* and the *effet de collection*'. In Chapter 5, Higginson examines the ways in which a famous multi-authored French series achieves continuity, in 'Armed and Dangerous: *Le Poulpe* and the Formalization of French Noir'. This is followed by Heffernan's 'Acts of Violence: The World War II Veteran Private-Eye Movie as an Ideological Crime Series' which argues that, in a number of thrillers produced between 1945 and 1949, the persona of a veteran functioned as a unifying historical figure for both audiences and reviewers. These films thus constitute an ideal series exposing social and political fissures of 'home-front' America. Finally, Powell's 'The Structure of the Whole: James Ellroy's *LA Quartet* Series' reveals how the quartet expands beyond the author's intentions. In this instance, far from being contained and clearly delimited, the series overflows into previous and subsequent works.

Part II, 'As Time Goes By: Progressing the Series', is concerned with two principal ways in which a crime series may progress, rather than repeat. First, three chapters focus on changes in the protagonists over an extended period of time, both as they age and in response to social changes in the real world. In Chapter 8, 'The Maturity of Lord Peter Wimsey and Authorial Innovation Within a Series', Bright undertakes an analysis of Sayers's Lord Peter Wimsey as an indicator of the impact of the author's innovations on the whodunit and crime writing generally. Vanacker focuses on evolution and progression in the representation of feminist topics in 'Series Fiction and the Challenge of Ideology: The Feminism of Sara Paretsky'. Bergman's 'From Conflicted Mother to Lone Avenger: Transformations of the Woman Journalist Detective in Liza Marklund's Crime Series' analyses the personal evolution of a woman investigator.

The following four chapters reflect on the importance of setting, both geographical and chronological, and the capacity of the series to evolve in engaging with contemporary socio-political issues. Obradó's 'It's All One Book, It's All One World: George Pelecanos's Washington DC' investigates police procedurals which embody an 'urban reportage' of life in America's capital city over the last 50 years by showing different areas from the viewpoint of different protagonists. In Chapter 12, 'Serializing Evil: David Peace and the Formulae of Crime Fiction', Vallorani, herself a crime writer, examines Peace's sophisticated construct of a web of interlaced stories where the protagonists are different while the always well-documented setting is described over a crucial period of Great Britain's recent history. Pasolini takes us to the gritty and evocative setting of 'The Flavour of the Street: The *Factory* Series by Derek Raymond', which explores the relationship between a nameless detective and various marginalized areas of the city. The past of the protagonist and of the city are pieced together through progressive memories. Finally, Pezzotti reflects on the use of repetition in the world-famous Montalbano series as a way to create familiarity with a fictional environment hosting a wide range of social and political topics in 'Andrea Camilleri's Imaginary *Vigàta*: Between Formula and Innovation'.

Part III, 'Transposition, Imitation, Innovation', looks at some of the ways series cross generic and cultural boundaries. Three chapters analyse the intercultural transposition of crime fiction subgenres to highlight serial adaptability. Jaber looks at the cinematic transformation of one of the world's most famous detectives in 'Sherlock Holmes in Hollywood: Film Series, Genre and Masculinities'. The transposition of both media and setting reflects a political agenda during the troubled years of World War II. In Chapter 16 Franks and Brien discuss gender transposition, revealing the male antecedents of television's Jessica Fletcher in 'Murder, Mayhem and Clever Branding: The Stunning Success of J.B. Fletcher'. In 'From *Flâneur* to *Traceur*?: Léo Malet and Cara Black Construct the PI's Paris', Anderson takes examples from two Paris-based detective series, one French and one an American *homage* to the original, and considers to what extent they serialize investigative movement through the cityscape. Beasley's 'The City Lives in Me: Connectivity and Embeddedness in Australia's Peter Temple and Shane Maloney' examines the transposition of the hardboiled detective into an Australian setting: the sleuth becomes an informed observer in a changing world, leaving behind the hardboiled hero's sense of social isolation. In "'She's pretty hardboiled, huh?": Rewriting the Classic Detective in *Veronica Mars*', Norman analyses hardboiled traditions transferred into female

juvenile crime fiction in the popular young adult television series. The final chapter exemplifies the flexibility of the crime series in its ability to meld with the supernatural: in “‘Exspecta Inexspectata’: The Rise of the Supernatural in Hybrid Detective Series for Young Readers’, Andrews ponders the evolution of young adult detective fiction, an important and largely unexplored category of crime series, and its inclusion of supernatural elements.

As this collection of studies shows, we need to recognize the essential mutability amply demonstrated here. Reflecting as our contributors do on the nature of the crime series makes one thing eminently clear: contrary to what many critics suggest, it is in fact a platform that allows for a great deal of originality and flexibility in both its creative and commercialized aspects. In tackling the questions outlined here, this volume seeks to deepen our understanding of what is meant by the term ‘series’, of the mechanisms whereby series evolve and, over time, the ways in which they may cross formal and cultural boundaries.

Notes

1. Following Priestman (1998) and Knight (1980), ‘crime fiction’ should be understood as a general term covering a wide range of subgenres (for example whodunits, thrillers, police procedurals, detective novels, noir and the like).
2. In this book, detective fiction is considered as a subgenre of crime fiction, where the focus of the story is ‘on the detective and the process he or she uses to solve the crime’ (Wiegand 2006, 148). As variants of detective fiction, the private eye novel refers to a story whose main protagonist is a private detective, while in a police procedural the police detective ‘must function within the rules of the police department; he or she lacks the freedom of the private detective. Although the pattern may vary because of the personality of the detective, most police detectives work as part of a team (as opposed to the private detective, who is often a loner)’ (Wiegand 2006, 150).
3. According to Horsley the categories of detective fiction and the hardboiled are ‘loose groupings of texts’ (2005, 1). Classic detective fiction, also called whodunit or golden age-style detective fiction, usually follows a pattern of death–detection–explanation in which ‘the reader’s attention is focused on the process by which a brilliant or at least uncommonly perceptive detective solves a case so intricate and puzzling that ordinary minds are baffled’ (12). Chandler defined the hardboiled formula as an American variety of detective fiction whose authors ‘wrote or aimed to write realistic mystery fiction’ (1988, 13). Several scholars (for example Knight (2004); Priestman (2003)) have tried to give an account of the fluidity of the genre, identifying more specific terms for the great variety of novels within these two groupings. The terminological debate, although fascinating, is not a focus of this book.
4. Definitions taken from the *American Heritage Dictionary of English Language*.

Part I

The Sum of its Parts: What Makes a Series?

1

Stephen Burroughs, Serial Offender: Formula and Fraud in Early US Crime Literature

Jon Blandford

Much of the criticism on crime fiction – and on serial crime fiction in particular – faults its heavy reliance on formula and convention. To cite two (in)famous examples, Wilson ([1945] 2007) compares readers of detective stories to drug addicts and alcoholics, eager to get their next fix and unconcerned with the quality of the product they consume; and Eco describes Fleming's spy novels as a narrative machine that 'produces redundancy' ([1966] 1983, 113).¹ Crime fiction, then, is either a narcotic or an elaborate yet cheap carnival ride, offering thrills and distraction but little else. This indictment of crime fiction as subliterary is often accompanied by a second charge – that its formulae are ideologically conservative, and that thus, like a drug, crime fiction's repetitive pleasures may have pernicious effects. Along these lines, Porter (1981) argues that crime fiction's apparent redundancy serves the ideological purpose of reassuring readers, managing our anxieties about crime by containing its threat to social order within familiar and predictable structures.² Although more sympathetic to the potential virtues of what he calls 'formula stories', Cawelti (1976) likewise concludes that the cultural work popular crime fiction performs is essentially reactionary.³

If formula and convention are to blame for the genre's crimes against good taste and good politics, then seriality would seem to be a willing accomplice, heightening the repetition and reassurance that are crime fiction's defining aesthetic and ideological features. The following discussion argues instead that crime literature's seemingly endless recycling of characters and tropes can have unpredictable and potentially even disruptive effects. Eschewing the line-up of usual suspects – Doyle and Holmes, Christie and Poirot, Chandler and Marlowe, Fleming and Bond – this essay looks to complicate our understanding of the relationship between form and ideology by offering a prehistory of serial

crime fiction, one that traces its origins to the popular literary milieu of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century US. Although most of the texts about criminals and their crimes written during this period purport to be true accounts, they anticipate in striking ways the serial storytelling of the pulp fictions, detective novels and thrillers that comprise the more familiar popular crime fiction of the twentieth century. They also introduce a tension between repetition and innovation that is characteristic of serial crime literature more generally, spotlighting the ways in which seriality can undercut crime fiction's orderly ideological script.

Crime literature in America begins with the Puritan execution sermon. These sermons, which were written by members of the clergy and which dominated American crime literature through the middle of the eighteenth century, fit the body of the condemned into rigid discursive scaffolding: each typically begins with a passage from scripture, which is then applied both to the life of the criminal about to be executed and to the spiritual welfare of the community as a whole. The sermon itself is often followed by a record of the supposed last words of the condemned. In most cases likely written by the clergy as well, these last words echo the sermon's moral and theological message, aligning the criminal's own interpretation of his or her crime and punishment with the interpretation voiced by the representatives of law and order. As Halttunen has shown, these sermons tend to de-emphasize or omit altogether the details of the particular crimes for which criminals had been sentenced to death, and instead portray each criminal as an 'exemplary sinner', 'a moral representative of all of sinful humanity' (1998, 9).⁴ This is repetition at its most reassuring, with each new reiteration serving to reinforce the authority of the law and of the church.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, the clergy lost its monopoly on the published representation of crime, a shift driven in part by new developments in technology that made print cheaper and more widely available than ever before.⁵ Crime literature became the business of enterprising printers, publishers and booksellers who sought to capitalize on the public's fascination with criminals and their misdeeds by issuing a variety of texts and creating new forms. It is also during this period that US crime literature first began to be serialized. The inaugural issue of the luridly titled *American Bloody Register*, for example, concludes by informing readers that its accounts of the pirate Alexander White and of highway robbers John Sullivan and Richard Barrick will be continued in a forthcoming second instalment. The magazine's

publisher, printer Ezekiel Russell, protests that he would have ‘readily gratified our Readers with [more] interesting particulars [about these three criminals], but it was out of our power, as the copy was handed to us but a few hours before this Publication’; and then promises to make up for this omission, ‘pending suitable encouragement to this infant Work’, by ‘furnish[ing] Number II with an elegant copperplate engraving, executed by an ingenious Artist’ ([1784] 1993, 243). While Elisha Brewer, William Billings and Isaac Bradish – the three amanuenses credited with transcribing the narratives in this early sensational magazine – may have, as Williams asserts, ‘acted as agents of social control’ (1993, 41), the division of the criminals’ stories into serial instalments allows White, Barrick and Sullivan to elude, however temporarily, representational capture in print, suspending the final sentences of their stories ‘pending suitable encouragement’ from readers willing to pay to spend more time in their company.

The introduction of seriality, then, frustrates the ideological closure offered by early US crime literature’s established formulae. For a readership that increasingly turned to popular literature for sensational stories, the execution of the criminal for his or her crimes was less important than the ingenious execution of the ‘Artist’ able to transform the spectacle of the scaffold into mass entertainment. To stand out from the rogues’ gallery of other published enemies, the criminals of this new popular crime literature had to be more individuated than the interchangeable sinners of the Puritan execution sermon. Publishers, faced with an increasingly crowded marketplace, attempted to outdo each other with hyperbolic claims about the content of their texts, ‘replacing an earlier, sympathetic view of the condemned criminal as moral exemplum with a view of the murderer as moral alien’, and ‘play[ing] up [the] monstrosity [of each individual criminal] for the benefit of his reading public’ (Halttunen 1998, 57). Thus, the second issue of *The American Bloody Register* is prefaced by a preview of even bloodier stories that will appear in future issues, including a ‘most surprising and shocking Account of the horrid Massacre of more than Twelve Hundred Men, Women and Children in Twenty-Five Years’, and ‘THE Confession of the barbarous MARGARET STILLWELL, executed in New-York for the Murder of a Child’ ([1784] 1993, 243). And yet, in spite of all of this emphasis on novelty, the criminals in these texts also had to fulfil readers’ generic expectations by being recognizably part of the same series, to be legible not just as criminals, but as certain types of criminals (murderers, highway robbers, confidence men, pirates and so on) whose stories fitted into pre-existing narrative schemas. In sum,

from its very beginning, serial crime literature in the US was animated by a dual and contradictory imperative to create something at once new and familiar, and these competing impulses caused criminals and their stories to mutate in ways that could undermine or even collapse long-standing ideological structures.

The remainder of this essay develops this argument through an investigation of *The Memoirs of Stephen Burroughs*, one of the earliest and most widely read works of autobiography published in the US. A confidence man and counterfeiter, Burroughs was run out of one town early in his criminal career for impersonating a preacher and passing off as his own sermons he stole from his father, and was later sentenced to jail – the first of many incarcerations – for attempting to pass off fake coins as legal tender. Among his other disguises, he posed as the ship-board doctor on a privateer and as a cosmopolitan gentleman forced to flee London because of pro-Irish sympathies, changing his name, adapting his appearance and reinventing his past whenever word of his former crimes caught up with him and forced him to move on to a new community. Like the shape-shifting titular character of Melville's *The Confidence-Man* ([1857] 1991), Burroughs treated identity as he did money, as a productively empty signifier that makes meaning only in and through networks of contingent relations held together by shared beliefs he could manipulate to his advantage. Unlike Melville's novel, however, Burroughs's supposedly true-to-life account of his various fictive selves was a hit with readers, its first volume, appearing in 1798, proving so successful that its author followed with a second volume's worth of adventures in 1804.

On its surface, Burroughs's narrative has two principal purposes. First, like any work of autobiography, his *Memoirs* vouch that they will tell the truth about how their narrator came to be who he is by offering a coherent, unified record of his experiences, re-collecting and re-presenting the significant events of his life in an orderly sequence. Thus, while Burroughs, in the opening paragraph of his text, expresses regret that he did not keep detailed 'minutes of the occurrences of [his] life, [...] when they were fresh in [his] memory, and alive to [his] feelings', he nonetheless assures us that he will 'give as simple an account of them as [he is] able, without any coloring or darkening of circumstances' ([1798] 1988, 3). In the context of criminal recollections in particular, a memoir's promise to provide a full account of an individual life doubles as a promise to account for how that individual came to lead a life of crime. As Fabian argues, the countless life stories authored by criminals during this period 'had epistemological value for people learning to

place trust in printed words', a value that went above and beyond other types of autobiographical texts:

the convicts who appeared in print had been *convicted*: their crimes had been proved at trial. With jury verdicts registered, facts in criminal cases were rarely in dispute, and readers could turn to accounts of crime with confidence that, at least on some level, what they read was true. (2000, 50)

To the extent that Fabian is correct, even the words of a serial liar like Burroughs would have been given the benefit of the doubt once they appeared in print, interpreted by readers as crime fact rather than crime fiction. What is more, Burroughs's *Memoirs* are, among other things, a confession, and, as such, share in that genre's privileged status in legal and theological discourse as the 'queen of proofs'.⁶

A second and related purpose of Burroughs's *Memoirs* is to set the record straight, to wrest control of its author's representation in print from conflicting accounts that were circulating at the time. Burroughs was, to hear him tell it, the victim of numerous and erroneous reports about his life authored by others. He is especially galled, for example, by what he contends is a libellous claim that he stole a watch from a clergyman while he was himself posing as a preacher, an accusation that first appeared in a newspaper in Springfield while Burroughs was in jail awaiting trial for counterfeiting money and that resurfaced whenever he was suspected of some new offence. Burroughs's notoriety as a master criminal, it would seem, eventually took on a proverbial life of its own, becoming a public persona – or, to put it more precisely, a *series* of public personae – over which Burroughs himself had little to no authorial control: 'I do believe,' he laments,

if I had set out with warmth, to prove to the world that I was a man, and not a woman, that a great number, from that circumstance, would have been able at once to look through the deception which I was endeavoring to lay them under, and known for certainty that I was, in reality, a woman. ([1798] 1988, 94)

To counter these misrepresentations, Burroughs positioned his text as the only reliable and complete version of his life story.

His attempts to account for his crimes and to corral and control his unruly representation in print, however, are thwarted by his seriality and multiplicity. Rather than a linear record of a unified self, the

Burroughs who appears in the *Memoirs* is plural, disintegrated and radically inconsistent, a serial offender who cannot be contained within the bounds of any one text. As a confidence man, he saw identity as superficial, relational and subject to perpetual transformations, not fixed, internal and discretely individuated. He has been called 'a model of the performing self amidst the slippery circumstances of the revolutionary age' (Gross 1993, 315) and the embodiment of 'a uniquely American relativism of self' (Williams 1990, 98). His popularity has been attributed to his cultural moment's anxious fascination with 'the ease with which persons could be separated from property in a mobile society in which traditional guides to an individual's worth were unavailable [and] self-representation had to be accepted as the self' (Ziff 1991, 56). As Ruttenberg observes, whereas this epistemological uncertainty created a crisis of representation for many of Burroughs's political and literary contemporaries, his text 'celebrates his own radical mutability, his progressive slide into a series of characters fully released from any governing authorial principle, as his emancipation from social and cultural forms that have no inherent legitimacy' (1998, 271). For the purposes of this essay, what is most significant about Burroughs's inexhaustible capacity for self-reinvention is that he is a 'series of characters', with each new change of costume carefully tailored to meet the needs and expectations of the different communities among which he plies his trade. Upon first arriving in Pelham, Massachusetts – the community in which he poses as a preacher for several weeks – Burroughs gathers the intelligence he needs to transform himself into a credible 'Pelhamite'. Like a census-taker, he 'gain[s] a pretty thorough knowledge of the people whom I was amongst', and he uses that knowledge to integrate himself into the community, 'endeavor[ing] to adapt my conduct to their genius as far as I was capable' ([1798] 1988, 53). Burroughs is always both himself and not himself, and the serial nature of his confidence schemes anticipates the repetition with a difference that is the defining feature of serial crime fiction.

The seriality of Burroughs's identities is paralleled by the episodic, (re)cyclical narrative structure of his text. Just as his various assumed identities are all permutations of one another, so too are his stories. Early on in his *Memoirs*, he repeatedly leaves his father's home: in the space of just the first five chapters he joins the army, boards with a tutor, attends Dartmouth College and sets sail aboard a ship where he works as the crew's physician. Each time, Burroughs is expelled and forced to return home in disgrace, a recursive movement that anticipates the misadventures of his adult life, which, time and time