In the Midst of the City: An Exploration of Conflict and Identity in the *Rivers of London* novels of Ben Aaronovitch

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Contents

Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* urban fantasy crime novels, with a focus on how the representation of the city reflects socio-political currents in contemporary Britain. Set-in present-day London, the books discuss conflict, identity and the role of the police whilst also exploring how social justice manifests in the twenty first century. Specific themes include friction between urban and rural communities, changing demographics and ethnic tensions, the role of London versus the provinces, class divisions, marginalisation of the poor and insecurely housed and what it means to be a 'good' citizen in contemporary Britian. Eco-critical elements examine degradation of the built environment, architectural responses to community need, and the intersection of the city with the natural world including flood mitigation and the plight of urban wildlife. The police response to security threats is contextualised by underlying tensions engendered by past trauma and terrorist events, and the role of the mob in protesting social inequalities. The impact of austerity policies on eroding the effectiveness of the police, and media commentary on geopolitical changes within the British state are also examined. There has hitherto been limited scholarly attention on how post-Global Financial Crisis (GFC) political and social policy in Britain have manifested in contemporary fantasy literature, and in the work of Aaronovitch in particular, and this thesis goes some way towards filling that gap.

The major mythological strand running through the series is embodied in the image of the divided river Thames. Jungian myth criticism provides a tool to interpret the mythopoeic and allegorical elements in the corpus as Aaronovitch expands the tutelary gods of the Thames to incorporate an African river goddess alongside traditional guardian Father Thames. This reimagining of the Thames origin myth more accurately reflects London's history as a port, a hub for trade and immigration, and how these have changed the complexion of British society. Aaronovitch's vision of tolerance and plurality provides a contrast to dystopian imaginations of the city which are common in urban fantasy. His diverse pantheon of river gods and goddesses, and other mythical characters such as Mr Punch provide the opportunity for a Jungian synthesis of disparate elements representing the strengths of traditional and contemporary Britain.

Opposing forces are mediated by the central figure of Constable Peter Grant who undergoes his own process of synthesis as the series progresses. The books are a celebration of diversity, tolerance and psychological growth as well as a warning against social dysfunction, economic disparities and the perils of failing to adapt to change.

Key words

Urban fantasy, Ben Aaronovitch, London, the Thames, mythology, Jung, identity, austerity Britain, eco-criticism, trauma.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature	1 April 2025 Date

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Thank you King for the tea, the meals and your patience.

Thank you Ben Aaronovitch, Charles Stross, Sir Terry Pratchett, Douglas Adams, and all the brave and creative geniuses who write the books that bring joy and help make sense of it all.

Ethics Approval

No ethics permission was required for this work.

List of works in the corpus with abbreviated names

RL *Rivers of London* (2011): Del Rey. (The edition used as source text in this thesis was published in the USA under the name *Midnight Riot*).

MoS *Moon Over Soho*. (2011): Gollancz.

WUG *Whispers Underground* (2012): Del Rey.

BH *Broken Homes*. (2013): DAW Books.

FS *Foxglove Summer* (2014): DAW Books.

THT *The Hanging Tree*. (2016): Gollancz

TFS *The Furthest Station* (2017): Gollancz.

LS *Lies Sleeping* (2018): Gollancz.

FV *False Value*. (2020): Gollancz.

WADTS *What Abigail Did That Summer* (2021): Gollancz.

AOW Amongst Our weapons (2022): Gollancz.

An additional note: Following the convention of Jung scholars, where Jung is cited as primary source his Collected Works is abbreviated to CW with the volume following in numerical form.

HUMANS NEED FANTASY TO BE HUMAN. TO BE THE PLACE WHERE THE FALLING ANGEL MEETS THE RISING APE.

—Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather,* 1996

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis aims to examine the representation of the city in the *Rivers of London* novels and discuss how reflective they are of socio-political currents in contemporary Britain. The period since the first novel was published in 2011 has seen the country navigate a series of social and political upheavals which has asked fundamental questions about the nature of British identity and society. The core thrust of the thesis' argument is that the many fractures within the real-life body politic are reflected in the distributed identity of London as portrayed in the corpus through living deities and other magical creatures. The thesis also argues that urban police fantasy is uniquely placed to explore such questions through the sustained use of metaphor. In particular, by virtue of his insightful observations Ben Aaronovitch performs important cultural work by dissecting contemporary issues such as homelessness, difference, monstrous architecture, historical trauma, terrorism, policing, flooding and slavery. Part of his unique style is an optimistic approach to painful issues which are tackled in an accessible and deceptively simple manner through the homodiegetic narrator Constable Peter Grant. Through him Aaronovitch employs humour as both a form of protest and a source of healing.

1.2 Position statement

Identity is complicated, and national identity is only a part of the puzzle that makes up a sense of self. In Aaronovitch's work there are numerous characters with diverse backgrounds, and this pluralist vision is one of the many features that drew me to the *Rivers of London*. Ben Aaronovitch is a white man married to a black woman with a mixed-race son, bare facts which must inevitably shape his response to the world. In 2019 he helped found the *Future Worlds* prize for fantasy and science fiction writers of colour, so he is actively concerned with bringing multiethnicity to the mainstream and normalising otherness. Aaronovitch's social concern for the other is reflected in the sexual, socioeconomic and species diversity of his characters. Race and ethnicity are themes which run through his books, as are class and social justice, but as my supervisor so succinctly put it, his vision "isn't one of Utopia, but of the possibility of

continuing to make things better through integrity and hard work". Peter Grant, the main character and narrator of the series is the mixed-race, working-class son of a black woman and a white father and the reader sees the world through his eyes. It is tempting to attribute his views to Aaronovitch, but Peter is a work of fiction. To what extent Peter's beliefs, background and personality echo his creator and/or his son are, I suspect quite close, but short of subjecting Ben to a lengthy interrogation I have no way of knowing. In my mind Peter stands for decency, bravery, down to earth kindness and humour, qualities which are rarely celebrated but which make the world a better place. He is an English, gentle man, not to be confused with Nightingale, his police superior officer and magical tutor who is an English gentleman.

Required by the conventions of the thesis to present my ontological position, in the shifting sands of identity I tentatively pitch my deckchair on the place reserved for inside outsiders. An insider because I am a white British cisgender woman with strong family and cultural ties to London. Like many I was raised on childhood rhymes *London Bridge is falling down*, *London's burning, Dick Whittington* and *Pussy cat pussy cat* where the capital was firmly ensconced in my own personal mythology as a place of wonder and danger at once familiar and distant. My formative years were spent visiting London relatives, I recall aged four staring with fascination at Henry the Eighth's gilded iron codpiece in the armoury of the White Tower, sensing even then the potent symbolism of royalty and male privilege. I was read to, and read about London in *Mary Poppins*, the *Hundred and One Dalmatians*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *1984* and the sublime works of Dickens and Doris Lessing. I listened to *The Who* and *The Clash* embody its edgy coolness and absorbed it as the backdrop to entertainments such as *Doctor Who*, *The Avengers* and *The Sweeney* (my taste in popular entertainment ever leaning towards crime and fantasy). National events were punctuated by Big Ben heralding the news and ringing in the New Year.

My attitude towards London has shifted between childhood wonder, teenage love and longing to live there, to early adulthood disgust at its venality and resentment at its insularity as I participated in anti-poll tax and other demonstrations marching angrily to Downing Street in a futile attempt to resist economic tidal forces. Now in my maturity I experience a renewed sense of love and wonder at its magnificent cultural heritage. London is inescapably the cultural and political centre of the British Isles and

a source of pride to many Britons, and yet, its critical mass acts as a type of black hole, sucking in resources and people from the rest of the country and the world. London can be myopic and outside London this privileged position can breed resentment particularly in areas with strong regional identities such as Yorkshire where I was raised. I remember with shock the national news broadcasting the tenth murder by the 'Yorkshire Ripper' in 1979, those ominous chimes followed by the announcement of the mutilation and slaying of fellow-Bradfordian Josephine Whitaker. Before that it had been only a local nightmare confining women and girls in my hometown to a fear-imposed purdah. Gosh it must be really serious, I thought, if they are paying attention in London. As northerners we simply expected to be neglected by Westminster and when its gaze was drawn towards us, we felt self-conscious. Incidentally it transpired that Peter Sutcliffe was a close neighbour living only one street away when he was finally caught, the official body count at 13 but thousands more lives blighted. This regional identity makes me an outsider, compounded by the fact that for the past 25 years I have called Aotearoa New Zealand home, although I have visited the old country frequently and closely followed events through the media and friends and family.

I could also mention my Scottish heritage and the fact that I wear my clan tartan with a sense of quiet pride, the bagpipes never fail to provoke tears, so too the haka and my daughter's primary school bilingual rendition of *God Defend New Zealand* reduced me to a boggy mess of gratitude, pride and homesickness. Identity cannot be defined by accident of birth or length of stay or ancestral heritage although these are certainly strong factors. Norman Tebbit, a cabinet minister in Margaret Thatcher's government opined that British Asian loyalty could be assayed by who they support at cricket. This crass assessment provides no room for hybridity and nuance and as I support India at cricket and have spent more time in New Delhi than I have in London, what does this say about me? I am profoundly grateful for Ben Aaronovitch who understands the complexities of belonging and otherness and is able to articulate these messy concepts in a wise and entertaining way.

1.3 Research rationale

According to Webb's (2014) analysis of the British fantasy writers including the problematic J. K. Rowling, as well as Terry Pratchett and Dianne Wynne Jones, their narrative strategies help educate readers about the complex challenges of the real-world whilst offering potential solutions. It is the contention of this thesis that Ben Aaronovitch deserves to be mentioned in the company of these literary greats for much the same reason. Despite his popular success Aaronovitch's work has received only limited critical attention, most notably from Lethbridge (2017), Kędzierska, (2019), Borowska-Szerszun (2019) and Ekman (2024). Many writers mention him in a more peripheral manner, positioning his work within a trend, whilst comparing him to similar writers (Ekman, 2018; Łozińska, 2023). Elber-Aviram, for example discusses Aaronovitch's place within the urban fantasy tradition opposed to rural pastoralism, and Coates (2018) places Aaronovitch within an ecocritical mytho-historical literary tradition focussing on his use of *genii locorum.* Critics almost universally avoid discussing Aaronovitch's comic approach (excepting Kędzierska's analysis of his happy Gothic). Likewise, they avoid exploring his depictions of the fragmented nature of the nation state and the centrality of London and the Thames within the wider context of the British Isles. Instead, commentators tend to focus on more obvious issues within the novels such as race (Borowska-Szerszun, 2019), urban buildings and ecology (Lethbridge, 2017) or modernity (Ekman, 2024). There is also a large gap in the literature regarding Aaronovitch's exploration of monstrosity, trauma, terrorism, the concept of good citizenship and the role of the police in the age of austerity depicted in the texts.

1.4 Research questions

In order to guide the study and address areas within the existing scholarship which require further investigation, a primary research question was formulated: 'In what ways does the representation of the city in the *Rivers of London* novels reflect socio-political currents in contemporary Britain?' To further investigate the data three sub-questions were devised: 1) 'How does Aaronovitch employ myth and allegory to interrogate sources of division in Britain?'; 2) 'How does the representation of the city reflect the identity of its inhabitants?' and 3) 'How is the hybrid genre of fantasy police procedural used to explore contemporary concerns related to social justice and

policing? ’The primary research question provides focus to the overall thesis, whilst the three sub-questions break the themes down into discrete areas discussed in the three content chapters five, six and seven. There is inevitably some overlap between chapters, for example the centrality of Peter Grant to the narratives mean he features within all three, but the researcher has tried to minimise any repetition.

1.5 Thesis structure

This work follows a traditional structure beginning with a general introduction followed by a context chapter situating the novels in the socio-political milieu of post-Global Financial Crisis (GFC) Britain. The literature review explores myth criticism whilst providing a rationale for it as an analytical tool for this project. It then goes on to discuss an ambivalence in depictions of the city in literature, and in fantastic literature in particular. Urban fantasy and the place of London within the genre and the tradition of living cities segues into a brief discussion of British identity and speculative fiction, monsters, damaged faces and identity whilst ending on a discussion of the crime novel and the sub-sub-genre of humorous crime fantasy. Throughout this chapter gaps in the literature are identified as potential areas for study. Chapter 4 discusses methodology outlining research methods and design and providing an overview of results. Chapters five, six and seven analyse the representation of the city as a divided entity and the role of the police in the novel series. Chapter eight concludes with limitations, key contributions and areas for further research.

Chapter 2 Context

2.1 Introduction

The first three decades of the third millennium have been tumultuous ones for Britain. Since *The Rivers of London* was published in 2011 Britian has seen six Prime Ministers, and experienced two divisive referenda, one on Scottish independence in 2014, and one on leaving the European Union (EU) in 2016. The period in which the novels are written are bookended by two economic depressions, the GFC of 2007-2008 which sparked a worldwide recession, in which Britian experienced negative growth for 15 months, and the post-Covid cost-of-living crisis which again tipped Britain into recession in the last quarter of 2023 (BBC, 2023). Britain was also in recession for six months during the Covid lockdown of 2020. The Coalition and Conservative government's austerity policies in response to the GFC reverberated throughout the next two decades as budgets were severely reduced for the justice system, education, healthcare and other social services. In politics and the media immigration became a key issue as right-wing groups such as the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) campaigned for an exit vote from the EU and anti-migrant rhetoric became commonplace in public discourse (Grinan-Moutinho, 2022). Other events highlighted race-based inequalities in the UK over this period such as the Windrush scandal, the deaths of BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnicity) people in police custody, the disproportionate amount of BAME deaths in the Grenfell Tower fire and post-Covid-19 analyses of health outcomes. Efforts to mitigate the worst effects of climate change and avert catastrophic flooding have seen London work hard to implement ecological projects in the last three decades.

2.2 Economics and voting patterns in Britain

Despite a change of ruling party from Conservative to Labour in 2024, post-financial crash, post-Brexit, post-pandemic Britain is still grappling with the social issues that divided the country before these crises, namely class and wealth distribution, immigration and environmental concerns. These issues run deep through the socio-political landscape of Britain and Surridge (2021) names them "clear and distinct fault

lines, with socio-demographic roots running through them" (n. p). Surridge further comments that these “multiple divides are perhaps better thought of as fragments and the core process of the last decade of British politics being one of fragmentation rather than polarisation” (n. p.). The move away from traditional regional and political loyalties and break down of social groups has been brought about in part by the changing economic landscapes of Britian. In the past the traditional heavy industrial areas of the north tended to vote Labour, and the south and rural areas tended to vote Conservative, but deindustrialisation and reduced trades union participation means that voters exhibit much more political unpredictability. This, coupled with promotion of fringe-politics through the internet and social media, has led to a much more complex political landscape than that existing pre-2000.

In addition, increasing numbers of people appear to feel disengaged from the political process and up to a third of eligible voters have never voted (Clark, 2025). There is also a trend towards declining political participation amongst younger people (Resolution Foundation, 2024), with a general downward trend overall. This is shown by Clark (2025) who noted that in the 2019 general election voter turnout was 67.3 percent, down from 68.8 in 2017, and the 2024 election saw it fall to just under 60 percent. Whilst these figures suggest increasing voter apathy, many UK residents do not qualify to vote at all and despite living, and often working in the country, have no franchise. There are an estimated one million illegal immigrants living under the state radar, although estimates vary. The Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (2023) states “There is no definitive figure on the number of undocumented people in the UK. Recent estimates suggest that it is between 800,000 and 1.2 million people” (n.p.). The number of people living in precarious housing is also hard to estimate but the consensus is that the number has been growing steadily since the beginning of the third millennium. This has led to large groups of the population struggling to meet basic necessities and unwilling or unable to participate in the political process in effect, living adjacent to mainstream society.

2.3 Class, socio-economic and geographical inequalities

Despite Margaret Thatcher’s proclamation that “Class is a communist concept […] it groups people together and sets them against each other” (Thatcher, 1992 quoted in

Umney, 2018, p. 16), the issue of class division in Britain stubbornly refuses to go away. Class stratification is still very much part of modern Britain and although the former Conservative government's *Levelling Up* White Paper (2022) never mentioned the word class, the disparities brought about by the unwritten rules of social stratification contribute in no small part to the economic inequities between social groups. Umney (2018, p. 6) writes that, "The idea of class poses a problem […] because it suggests that there are more deep-rooted and intractable divisions in society that cannot be resolved without significant upheaval." Class is sometimes a taboo subject because any discussion necessitates a degree of introspection that is uncomfortable for those who benefit from their inherited status,

> Most people do not particularly want a society divided along class lines. But rather than do anything about this, people tend to invent ideas (e.g. 'meritocracy', 'social mobility') that make it seem a bit less offensive. Hence, it is often argued that the ideal society should be one of 'equal opportunity', where every individual succeeds or fails on their own merits. This way, we would still have a class-divided society, but at least we would know that the people at the bottom truly deserved to be there. (Umney, 2018, p. 2)

The British class system has been traditionally categorised into working, middle and upper classes, but there is also a contested concept of an underclass of economically disadvantaged and/or behaviourally challenging citizens who pass their status on to offspring, "the underclass is said to be intergenerational, sometimes by heredity and sometimes by socialisation" (Macnicol, 2016, p. 2). The underclass live at the margins of society and appear trapped in a cycle of benefit dependency and low wages, poor health and educational outcomes. In recent years government initiatives have attempted to address the issues. These included *Levelling Up* (2022) and *The Problem Families Programme* (2015) which was aimed at families who have "a wide range of problems: worklessness and problem debt, poor school attendance and attainment, mental and physical health problems, crime and anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and abuse and children who are deemed as in need of help" (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2017, p. 4). These programmes recognised that social inequalities are a problem but seem to be ineffective in tackling the root causes of the phenomena.

The Conservative government's 2022 *Levelling Up* policy was the key initiative intended to try and redress some of Britain's most glaring socio-geographical inequities, "Levelling up is a moral, social and economic programme for the whole of government. The Levelling Up White Paper sets out how we will spread opportunity more equally across the UK" (UK Government, Executive summary, 2022, para. 1). The government acknowledged "not everyone shares equally in the UK's success. While talent is spread equally across our country, opportunity is not. Levelling up is a mission to challenge, and change, that unfairness" (para. 1). As the government starkly admits, "This requires us to end the geographical inequality which is such a striking feature of the UK" (para. 2). The ambitious policy was actioned by a number of economic investments such as relocating government departments out of London, extending fast broadband, funding some key transport and other infrastructure projects such as schools and other education providers, changes to the tax and benefits system, introducing a points-based immigration policy to reduce immigration to the UK, and ironically providing "20,000 more police officers on our streets by 2023 and a £70m Safer Streets Fund to improve the environment and cut offending in high-crime areas" (para. 12), thus reversing years of police cuts enacted by the former Conservative government of Theresa May. By using the Italian Renaissance independent city states as a model for economic and cultural entities, the government dubbed this without perceivable irony a "contemporary Medici model" (para. 8). Opinions as to the success of this policy were mixed and a full analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis, but according to Bunn (2023) a cross-party commission identified "significant flaws" including "the absence of the 'substantive' long-term funding necessary to help councils deliver economic growth threatens to condemn levelling up to failure" (Bunn 2023, para. 1). The election of a Labour government on 4 July 2024 after 14 years of Conservative leadership indicates public dissatisfaction with the former government's lack of progress in addressing social inequalities. However, it is too early to assess what, if anything will change under the new regime.

A lack of housing stock also means that housing insecurity is a large obstacle for many, impacting heavily on quality of life, "Only 17 per cent of the most disadvantaged who rent in social housing rate their quality of life at least 8 out of 10, compared with 52 per cent of those who own a property" (Commission for Social Justice, 2023, para. 4).

Housing charity Shelter estimates that Britain is short of approximately 1.5 million homes (Shelter, 2024, para.2), whilst Watling and Breach (2023) put the figure at an estimated 4.3 million homes. Whatever the actual figure, in the past three decades central government has moved away from providing social housing, preferring a market-led approach more reliant on private landlords, which has failed to deliver hoped for housing capacity. The issue has reached crisis point in recent years with Shelter estimating 95,000 households are either homeless or in temporary accommodation in 2020, up from 40,000 households in 2019 (Shelter, 2024, para. 1). At the same time housing affordability has decreased; in 2000 a home cost four times the average salary, but in 2021 the figure had risen to eight times the average salary. In a real sense Britain is divided amongst the housed and unhoused, including those in precarious and temporary housing.

Prior to the 2024 general election the Commission for Social Justice (2023, para. 3) stated that "the most disadvantaged in Britain are no better off than 15 years ago – the time of the financial crash – and […] for them the jump from welfare into work is not worth it." Changing such deeply embedded structural inequalities is the work of decades, but despite recent attempts to redress inequality, according to the Commission for Social Justice's (2023) report *Two Nations: The State of Poverty in the UK,* "The UK is in danger of sliding back into the 'Two Nations' of the Victorian era marked by a widening gulf between mainstream society and a depressed and poverty-stricken underclass" (para. 1). Mental health issues exacerbated by Covid-19 pandemic lockdowns have also increased sharply across the most deprived areas of Britain leading to an increase of beneficiaries who are unable to work.

Socio-economic and geographic disparities are acknowledged as unfair by the former and present governments, but they are entrenched in British society. Insecure housing is often a result of the poverty trap of low wages, expensive housing stock and lack of robust protection for those renting. People at the bottom of the economic pile are sometimes labelled as belonging to an underclass which may or may not be a lifestyle choice, but whatever the cause, a substantial minority of the British public are othered from mainstream society and are deemed to be a problem to the state.

2.4 Racism in Britain

In the later decades of the twentieth century and early decades of the twenty-first, anti-migrant rhetoric in the British media, coupled with poor social conditions contributed towards disaffection amongst many people from migrant backgrounds. A review of opinion polls conducted between 1988 and 2006 conducted by Field (2007) found that non-Muslim hostility towards Muslims increased during this period "paralleling the developing discourse amongst politicians and the media" (Hussain & Bagguley, 2012, p. 3). Some individuals became radicalised by hard-line Islamic groups and attended training camps which eventually led to the London suicide bombings of July 7, 2005, which killed 56 people. Three of the four bombers were second generation Pakistani migrants living in West Yorkshire. The videotaped statement of one of the bombers, Mohammad Sidique Khan refers to the media as a "predictable propaganda machine" and complained that "Your democratically elected governments continuously perpetuate atrocities against my people all over the world. And your support of them makes you directly responsible, just as I am directly responsible for protecting and avenging my Muslim brothers and sisters" (Khan, 2005, n. p.). The ideological logic that justified the atrocities came from a feeling of deep dissatisfaction and sense of grievance against the media and the British state.

A number of recent public inquiries have highlighted the extent of racism in British institutions. The 1999 *Macpherson Report* concluded that institutional racism was a norm in the Metropolitan Police, and a quarter of a century later the *Casey Report* (2023) came to the same conclusion, adding misogyny and homophobia to the list of failings. According to Coles (2024) since 1990 there have been 1888 deaths in police custody or closely following contact with the police in England & Wales, 16 % of those deaths have been BAME. This is over twice the rate of white deaths in custody.

The 2020 *Williams Inquiry* into the bureaucratic racism that disadvantaged the post-war Windrush generation of migrants from the Caribbean found institutional deafness, "even when stories of members of the Windrush generation being affected by immigration control started to emerge in the media from 2017 onwards, the department [Home Office] was too slow to react" (Williams, 2020, p. 7). Whilst Williams stopped short of finding the Home Office institutionally racist, the report

concluded that there was “institutional ignorance and thoughtlessness towards the issue of race and the history of the Windrush generation within the department, which are consistent with some elements of the definition of institutional racism” (p. 7). An inquiry also found that a disproportionate number of the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire victims were Muslims and/or from BAME backgrounds (Apps, 2020, para. 6) and placed in substandard public housing made unsafe by deregulation. The Kensington and Chelsea Borough Council, the police and charities working with survivors were also criticised for cultural bullying and discriminatory practices (Gillard & Olden, 2020).

Post-Covid reviews of health and social services found that people from ethnic minorities experienced socioeconomic disadvantages and worse Covid-19 health outcomes than white people as a result of structural racism (Rezai et al., 2021). Conducting an overview of British institutions in 2023, a United Nations working group of experts on people of African descent issued a report alleging that many institutions in the UK are racist, and that austerity measures have exacerbated issues with a disproportionate number of black Britons in the criminal justice system and dying in police custody.

The picture is not one of unmitigated gloom however, as many institutions are beginning to confront their history of slave-owning and actively work towards addressing past atrocities. Many art galleries, museums, schools, university colleges and other bodies owe their existence to endowments form the wealthy trading barons who made their fortunes in tobacco, rice, sugar, cotton and other slave-driven industries. Since the 2007 bicentennial of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain there has been increased media coverage and public awareness of the impact of slavery on the present. During the height of the Black Lives Matters protests in June 2020, a statue of slaver Edward Coulston was torn down and thrown into Bristol harbour. This act was widely reported and became emblematic of the changing public attitudes towards confronting historical wrongs (Brown, 2023).

Groups who are actively providing reparations include individuals whose families historically benefitted from slave ownership, such as the *Heirs of Slavery* founded in 2023. Other bodies who have acknowledged and apologised (or come close to apologising) for past links include King Charles III who expressed “profound sorrow”

(Conn, 2023), the Church of England, the Bank of England, Lloyds and the cities of Bristol, Liverpool, London and Glasgow which initiated audits into historical connections and modern legacies of slavery (Brown, 2023).

There are reasons for optimism as BAME representation in public life and entertainment is becoming more mainstream. Notable popular culture successes of multiethnic *Bridgerton* and the appointment of the first black *Doctor Who* occurred around the same time as Indian ethnicity Rishi Sunak became Prime Minister in October 2022, simultaneously appointing four other ministers from minority ethnic backgrounds. The current makeup of parliament following the 2024 election includes 87 ethnic minority MPs, up 21 from the previous election. This means that the 13% BAME representation in the Commons comes close to reflecting the 14% ethnic minority of the population (Bicer, 2024), although Uberoi and Carthew (2023) estimate the number at 16%. In London the current Mayor, Sadiq Khan, and seven other of the 25 Members of the London Assembly are from BAME backgrounds, as of September 2022. This amounts to 32 %, compared to approximately 40.6 % of London's population (Uberoi & Carthew, 2023).

2.5 Austerity Britain and police cuts

In 2007 – 2009 much of the world suffered a global financial crisis which triggered a recession. Some analysts including Anthony (2024) believe that Britian never fully recovered from that recession and post-Brexit and Covid-19 lockdowns it is experiencing another one. According to Hall (2023) "austerity policies implemented since 2010 have not been substantially reversed" (para. 2) and Britain is still struggling with the effects of cuts in public spending which have led to, for example increased child poverty and reduced housing security for many low-income residents (Hall, 2023). From 2010 there were also cuts in funding to the police, the justice system and the courts. The cuts in the police budget were reversed in 2019, but police numbers and effectiveness have not yet recovered, this is due to a loss of experienced officers, and a lack of allied staff which means that sworn officers are performing roles better suited to support staff (Dodd, 2024; Dodd, 2025).

In 2012 the Metropolitan Police launched *Operation Yewtree*, a criminal investigation into media personality Jimmy Saville. This resulted in a number of historical child sex

abuse investigations made against public figures, including Members of Parliament that had not been properly investigated at the time. In 2015, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, established the *Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse*, to investigate the handling of investigations into allegations of historical child sex abuse. The final report was published in 2022 and the government accepted all but one of the recommendations. The cost of investigating historic crimes largely fell on existing police budgets which Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police in 2015 called “a drain on dwindling resources” (Dodd, 2015, para.14).

The 2021 Police Federation of England and Wales survey of members indicates the impact of cuts to police budgets on serving officers. Of the 29,587 officers who responded, 58 % said that their morale was low, 67 % would not recommend the police as a career. And 12 % said they would resign over the next two years. Of those intending to resign, 82 % said that low morale was a major factor in their decision and 77 % blamed government policy for their decision. Ninety-two percent said their pay did not compensate for the stress experience as a serving police officer (Bradley & Knight, 2022, para. 13). Clearly policing cuts have had severe negative impacts on police resourcing and morale.

2.6 Brexit

In 2016 Britain voted to exit the EU and finally separated in 2020. According to Bui et al. (2024) the economic cost to the country is estimated at £140 billion. One point eight million jobs have been lost and household incomes reduced with an average £2,000 reduction in income per person in 2023. Brexit has also exacerbated the cost-of-living crisis with 30 % of the increase in food prices between December 2019 and March 2023 directly linked to leaving the Customs Union and Single Market (Bui et al., 2024). Other social costs include perceived discrimination by migrants and a consequent reduction in social cohesion as anti-migrant rhetoric became commonplace in public discourse (Grinan-Moutinho, 2022). Fernandez-Reino (2020) found “adult children of migrants who were born in the UK are much more likely to perceive discrimination against their group than migrants themselves (32% vs. 16% in 2016-18)” (para. 5). Brexit exacerbated racial tensions within the UK with a 2019 poll indicating that “Seventy-one percent of people from ethnic minorities now report

having faced racial discrimination, compared with 58% in January 2016, before the EU vote" (Booth, 2019, para. 2). The evidence strongly suggests that public debates over Brexit fuelled racial tensions and helped to undermine social cohesion in Britain by further alienating disaffected groups such as second-generation Muslim migrants.

Brexit also exacerbated divisions within England and highlighted the increasing divide between London and the rest of Britain as voters in more deprived areas tended towards voting to leave the EU, possibly as a protest against central government. In London, however "a substantial majority (60%) voted Remain, whereas in the Midlands and North-East, the percentages were reversed with approximately 58%–59% voting Leave" (Richards & Heath, 2023, p. 553). The economic impact of Brexit has disproportionately affected the capital with the average Londoner experiencing a £3,400 loss of income in 2023, and London's economy has shrunk by over £30 billion as a direct result of Brexit (Bui et al., 2024).

Brexit has also illustrated how British sovereignty is under stress from outside forces who benefit from destabilising British internal cohesion. Russian interference in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum and the 2016 Brexit referendum are strongly suspected but unproven, and the UK Parliament's (2020) *Russia Report* published by the Intelligence and Security Committee concluded that Russian interference in UK politics is commonplace and that "Putin's Russia is actively hostile towards the UK and the West, and fundamentally unwilling to adhere to international laws and norms" (Gould-Davies, 2020, para. 3).

2.7 London geography and flooding

London is a city of contrasts with large tracts of greenery interspersed amongst the urban landscape. London has an estimated population of 9.7 million people (UN World Urbanisation Prospectus, 2024) and is placed 37 in the world's largest cities by population by the UN. London is also Europe's largest city but has the most parks and green spaces (3,000) in a survey of Europe's 30 most populated cities, with Berlin placing second with 2,500 parks (Eagling, 2022). The founding of London is attributed to the Romans around 410 BC but there is evidence of human settlement before that (Akroyd, 2000). With 2000 years of human history, according to the Encyclopaedia Britannica (2024, Landscape of London) "modern London is built on 'made ground,' the

deposits of centuries of continuous human occupation" which have raised the ground between 3 and 5 meters in the oldest parts of London around the City and Westminster.

By virtue of its geography London is in constant danger of flooding despite being protected from flooding by tidal surge by the Thames Barrier at Silvertown in addition to a number of barriers, embankments and walls on each side of the Thames estuary towards the seacoast. This is largely due to its location on a tidal river in a low-lying basin. The Thames has been rising at approximately 2.8 feet (0.9 meters) per century (Encyclopaedia Britannica, Flood Control, 2024). The encyclopaedia also warns that "A serious flood would threaten 45 square miles (117 square km) of London's low-lying land, affecting some 1,250,000 people and 250,000 buildings." It would also paralyze the capital's intricate infrastructure of underground railways, sewers, cabling, pipes service tunnels, and utility ducting.

According to Arcadis (2022, para. 1) London ranks sixth on the Arcadis Sustainable Cities Index which ranks 100 of the world cities on "51 metrics, across 26 indicator themes, arrayed under the three pillars of sustainability: planet, people, and profit." In an effort to mitigate the worst effects of climate change Mayor Sadique Khan has committed to London becoming net carbon zero by 2030 and zero waste by 2050 (London Assembly, 2024). However global warming means that even the most optimistic models do not expect the current flood defences to last much beyond 2070 (Hall et al., 2019). The Greater London Authority's (GLA) website (2023, para.3) states that "London has been impacted by multiple sources of flooding and the risk is increasing with climate change." A growing awareness of the risk of flash floods has led to a large investment in flood mitigation projects such as sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) which manage surface water flooding by capturing and managing rainfall in a way that mimics nature. One of these projects has been installed in the 'Lost Effra' catchment area (GLA, 2023). London residents are encouraged to do as much as they can as individuals to mitigate flood risk, such as greening their properties by depaving gardens which many people concreted over to provide the convenience of off-street car parking whilst reducing the capacity of the land to absorb rainfall. The economic price of flooding is monetary very high, but the human cost of "degraded life quality"

including poor physical and mental health for survivors following flooding events is also very high (Tapsell et al., 2002, p. 1512).

2.8 Conclusion

In common with much of the world Britain has faced many challenges in the first three decades of the twenty-first century. Global forces outside of government control had severe impacts; the GFC and Covid-19 pandemic left Britain struggling with economic and health repercussions and global warming demanded increasingly urgent action to mitigate flood risks. Other negative impacts on social cohesion, however, may be attributed to government policies such as austerity measures which exacerbated social inequities and led to a reduction in police morale. The decision to put EU membership to a referendum resulted in the financially ruinous and socially divisive Brexit, and ideological reliance on market forces has failed to produce social housing or trickle-down benefits for those on low wages and benefits. At the same time racism and class continue to divide communities, and despite a change of ruling party, there is limited cause for optimism.

Chapter 3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This study takes a transdisciplinary approach to the work of Aaronovitch. History of the city and London in particular, as well as the genre history of urban fantasy and the fantastic in English fiction, is foundational to the analysis presented here. Geography and architecture play smaller but essential roles. The methodology of close reading (Federico 2016) is employed to analyse text. The analysis also draws heavily on myth criticism and is informed by Carl Jung's work on the unconscious (also sometimes known as depth psychology). There are many synergies between Jungian psychology and mythopoeic literature, that is works that contain mythic themes. In particular Jung's concept of archetypes and the human striving towards individuation are universal ideas that may be applied to other academic disciplines but particularly lend themselves to the study of literature. This is because the process of closely analysing a text requires the reader to deeply engage with the subject in order to draw out occult or partially occluded elements of symbolic meaning in an act similar to psychological inquiry. Jung describes the human need to reconcile conscious and unconscious elements in the process of individuation, or psychological growth, and Rowland (2019, p. 61) describes how works of literature such as the coming of age novel similarly describe individuation and the often rocky process of personal growth.

3.2 Myth criticism

Myth criticism is the interpretation of texts focussing on how mythological elements may frame or inform the work. Perhaps the most celebrated myth critic was Northrop Frye who theorised that literature contained myths and metaphors stemming from the cycles of death and rebirth from the natural world which formed archetypes. However, Frye's use of the word differed from that of Jung's archetypes which Jung posited arose from the collective unconscious. According to Rowland (2019, p. 68) Frye's concept of archetypes in literature are "deep patterns that imprint human functioning within seasons, tides, and planetary orbits", so Frye's mythology was intimately connected to nature. Hart (2009, p. 30) commented that literature is "the home of displaced myth," likewise for Frye narrative literature is symbolic communication

which acts as a type of cultural glue and meaning-giver, as myth would have acted in the past (Rowland, 2019). Frye also believed that the study of myth and metaphor can reveal the assumptions which form the basis of ideological thought (Hart, 2009, p. 44). This idea was expanded on by Barthes (1957) in his reflections on modern myths engendered by the dominant societal values of the culture in which they manifest.

There are many definitions of the origins and constituent elements of myths (see for example Malan, 2016) but this work adopts Cupitt's (1982) description of myth as a means to interpret the world through narrative,

> [Myths are] traditional sacred story of anonymous authorship and archetypal or universal significance [… that] tells of the deeds of superhuman beings such as gods, demigods, heroes, spirits or ghosts […] the superhuman beings are imagined in anthropomorphic (i.e. humanly formed) ways […]. the work of myth is to explain, to reconcile, to guide action or to legitimate. (Cupitt, 1982, p. 29)

Cupitt's definition has the advantage of recognising the potential ideological purpose of myths to legitimise a certain worldview or cultural hegemony. Myth criticism has been criticised for focusing on the "psychological quest for meaning but ignor[ing] the way meaning is always politicized and historicized" (Martin, 1995 cited in McAvan, 2012, p. 12). However, Eapen claims that North American myth critics adopted an ideological sociological interpretive approach which was "employed for purposes of literary nationalism" (Eapen, 2020 p. 10). For example, the myth of the west as a symbol of freedom and promise is a powerful tool for nation building. This thesis will argue that Aaronovitch plays with ideas of myth and ideology and reconsiders the role that mythical archetypes play in twenty first century Britain. Akroyd (2002, p. 447) writes of "the English predilection for compromise and moderation" and Aaronovitch offers a very British compromise over the national river which becomes jointly shared between two opposing factions of river gods.

Creative works often extend mythology into new avenues, reinterpreting old stories for new epochs and thus works of literature may be regarded as 'mythopoeic' if they include "narratives which human beings take to be crucial to their understanding of their world" (Coupe, 2009, p. 4). Fernández-Cano et al. (2012) point out how Greek mythology may be employed as metaphors or interpretative similes to explain and evaluate modern phenomena such as educational research. Myths help human beings

interpret their lives and their societies, offering comfort, warning, wisdom and entertainment. According to Ricoeur, myth is a "disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening on to other possible worlds which transcend the established limits of our actual world" (Ricoeur, 1991, cited in Coupe, 2009, p. 9). Myth therefore permits a transcendence of the everyday, a suspension of the laws of physics and an entrance into the realms of the impossible to explain everyday phenomena and human truths. There is a strong moral and/or spiritual element to many myths and Filmer (1992) describes how later twentieth century New Age philosophies derived from the rediscovery in the western world of ancient and eastern spiritual practices reenergised mythic archetypes to encourage spiritual growth and psychological wholeness.

3.2.1 Jungian myth criticism

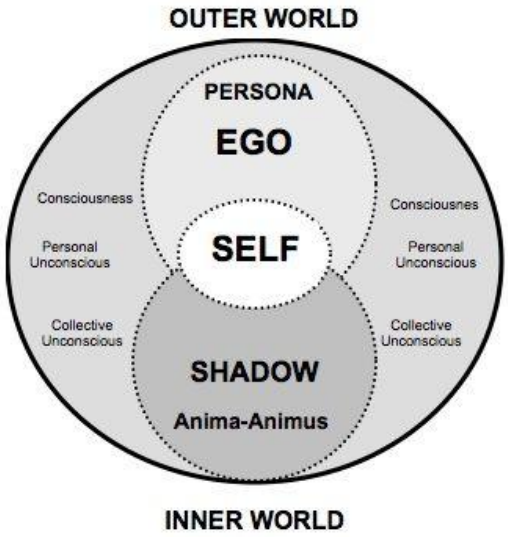
Carl Jung is especially helpful in analysing Aaronovitch because they have similar concerns. Jungian psychology aims to integrate troubling psychological elements to help realise a healthy psyche. Likewise, Aaronovitch's fantasies allow the reader to actively imagine a robust society where difference is tolerated, individuals are free to express themselves in non-normative ways and institutions such as the police are encouraged to evolve to better serve the needs of the public.

Myth criticism as a method of textual interpretation is heavily influenced by Jung who viewed myths, especially creation myths as descriptions of the beginning of consciousness, delineating the process of psychical development which needs to be brought from the unconscious to the conscious to enact deliberate change (Malan, 2016). Jung wrote of the dangers of excessive identification with the persona/ego which prevents the process of individuation, in which an individual becomes closer to the true self, or unified whole.-Rowland (2018, p. 62) writes that "the fundamental drive of the human psyche is towards wholeness" which according to Jung involves integrating the conscious with the unconscious urges. Jung also postulated that everyone carries a shadow archetype which is composed of dark elements of the personality and is resistant to moral control (Perry & Tower, 2023). Jung wrote that "everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual's conscious life, the blacker and denser it is" (Jung 1937/1968, CW11, para. 131). He identified the unconscious with the shadow self that fails to align with the ego ideal, theorising that the shadow must be integrated or else remain in conflict. In *AION* (1951/1968) he

speculated that if a person fails to become conscious of their inner opposite they are compelled to act out the tension between the conscious and unconscious. Thus conflict occurs as a result of repressing the shadow.

Figure 1

Jung's model of the psyche



From Bennet, A. (2011, March 1). Psychodynamic coaching and type. In C. Schumate & M. Hunziker. *Personality Type in Depth* https://typeindepth.org/psychodynamic-coaching-and-type/ Creative commons

Jung is a key intellectual figure of the twentieth century whose influence has extended far beyond the psychological community. Darowski and Darowski (2016) argue that Jung's theory of archetypes which identified recurring characters and patterns of events in world mythologies influenced Joseph Campbell who then went on to influence George Lucas who created the Star Wars universe. Thus, Jung's legacy extends into the world of mass-produced popular entertainments. Jung theorised that the hero figure springs from the collective unconscious, along with other recurring character archetypes such as the mother, the wise teacher, the shadow and the trickster. Jung primarily used archetypes to decode dream images and to analyse personality (Darowski & Darowski, 2016), but his theories helped Campbell (1949/2004) to articulate the monomyth or the hero's journey which Campbell linked to Jung's collective unconscious (Darowski & Darowski, 2016, p.33). Campbell (1949/2004, p. 17) identified the archetypes as "basic images of ritual, mythology and vision" and the interplay between these symbols contained in traditional stories reveal

universal truths which allow narratives to be adapted time and again by story tellers throughout the ages. Lucas famously adapted the monomyth for his Star Wars narratives and Campbell and Moyers (1988) expanded on the theories in a best seller which brought the monomyth into a wide readership which helped propel it into the default storyline for mass consumed entertainments. Brooker (2004) later mapped out seven basic story types based around a single meta plot, and Vogler (2007) helped popularise the hero's arc as a script writing pattern which proliferates in popular culture narratives today. Criticisms of the monomyth include the gendered nature of the hero prompting Maureen Murdock (1990) to posit a heroine's monomyth which mapped the path of estrangement and integration of the archetypal female heroine. Other criticisms are that the monomyth ignores oppressed groups and peoples with different cultural values who may for instance prioritise collective action over individual achievement. Nevertheless, the monomyth continues to be a powerful plot device, and it is also employed by Aaronovitch, particularly in the first *Rivers of London* (2011) novel (please see chapter seven for a more detailed discussion of the role of Peter Grant as hero).

Jung's influence on narratology may be even more profound than helping to articulate the monomyth. Rowland (2019, p. 3) demonstrates how Jungian theory may be applied to literary criticism, by applying his explorations of personhood, ideas of interconnectedness and cultural loss and reimagining. According to Rowland (2019, p. 117) Jung believed that the psyche could be viewed in terms of a personal attribute and also as an attribute of a society or group. Jung believed that the Western psyche was sick because it had too rigorously repressed the 'other' or the shadow. However, the psyche is also self-healing, seeking balance, and art and literature are mediums through which this process may be facilitated. "Thus, Jungians after him are free to argue that literature as a source of repressed material could be the engine of social change" (p. 117). This legitimises the view that art not only reflects society, but may enact change upon and within it. Rowland goes on to make the claim that art can also be predictive of societal change by virtue of the ability to access the creative interplay of unconscious archetypes. According to Stevens (1994) interpreting Jungian symbolism requires an intuitive, emergent, and evolving representation of human experience. This approach bears many similarities with the work of the literary critic.

The shadow is a powerful archetype which manifests negative parts of the psyche. According to Hamilton (2020) Jung equated monsters with emergent 'shadow' fears, symbolic of death, cancer, or other existential threats. Hamilton (2020) theorises that monsters may also symbolise disliked or feared elements of the self that must be confronted before change is possible. The work of Jungian psychotherapy therefore is to "own and re-integrate shadow feelings into the psyche" (Hamilton, 2020, p. 6). Rowland (2019) also devotes a large section of her Jungian approach to literary criticism to the shadow/trickster, noting that the trickster archetype is deeply wedded to crime fiction. Meyer, (2003) commented that in popular entertainments problematic archetypes such as the shadow and the trickster "are under-explored and under-theorized" (p. 520) in contrast to the hero archetype which has received a large amount of critical attention. This is still largely correct, see for example Boll's (2011) analysis of Harry Potter's hero's journey. However Jungian theorists such as Rowland (2019), Hockley (2001) and Tower (2023) have paid attention to the shadow in entertainment narratives, often working in transdisciplinary paradigms. Hockley, (2001) analysed how Jungian archetypes including the shadow manifest in film, and Tower (2023) conducted a reading of Daphne du Maurier's *The Scapegoat* using Jung's shadow and individuation process to throw light on the struggles of the protagonist.

Jung also shares synergies with ecocriticism and ecopsychologist West (2007) describes how loss of intimacy with nature (the unconscious) has resulted in pathologies such as alienation and breakdown. The health of nature is dependent on the health of human psyche and vice versa. She argues that in order to live in an ethical manner with nature and community it is necessary to confront the shadow and works of literature can demonstrate models of how to do so. Rust (2023) explores the ecological shadow which must be confronted as an urgent psychological task and makes a plea for humans to reintegrate with our shadow/animal nature and to respect the natural world as a matter of urgency.

An important Jungian archetype is that of the cave which represents the unconscious, or as Jung described it "the world of the primitive (instinctual, archaic) man within myself – a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness" (Jung, 1963, cited in Yeoman & Lu, 2024, p. 97). Many works of fantastic fiction feature underground spaces and critical analyses of urban fantasy equate the act of going

underground into darkness as a way of confronting primal fears (Tiffin 2008; Elber-Aviram 2013; Houswitschka 2015; Benczik 2017). Pike (2013) describes underground as a realm of myth and instinct and Cavallaro (2002) opines that "narratives of darkness" evoke the inhuman and the primal irrational. Vanderbeke's (2014) analysis of Neil Gaiman's and China Miéville's London urban fantasies posits that subterranean London is a dreamscape of fantasy and legend representing the city's unconscious repressed instincts and desires. Jungian critic Rowland (2019, p. 148) comments that "the unconscious will always produce 'otherness' to the ego in order to incite individuation. Where the ego is subject to domination, the Jungian unconscious will resist" (p. 148). Thus the dream images of the fantastic often manifest in the monstrous other which represents a resistance by the unconscious to the 'real' world of the ego above. The psyche seeks reconciliation and healing through making visible repressed urges.

3.3 An overview of the city in religious and speculative texts

The city is the arguably humankind's greatest achievement and cities have certainly become cultural and creative centres, as McAdams (2007) puts it, "the foci where the human and material resources of civilizations have been concentrated" (p.151). The city is the growing medium for arts and literature, but there is also a tension between the natural world and insulated city life which can so easily slip into dysfunction. In the earliest found example of literature *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (circa 2000 B.C.) "the civilized life of brick-built Uruk is opposed to the steppe where Enkidu lives like an animal with the animals" (Woolf, 2020, para. 3). This positions the city as cultural hub in opposition to the wild and bestial nature of the wilderness outside the city walls. Lehan (1998) explains the civilising potential of the city space that is able to regulate the environment so that inhabitants are no longer at the mercy of the elements. And yet there is a cultural ambivalence towards cities that may nurture culture whilst simultaneously enabling vices to develop.

In Judeo-Islamic-Christian tradition there is something inherently transgressive about all cities. They are in direct opposition to the garden of Eden, a place built by man not God, so it is fitting that the first murderer, Cain, also founded the first city of Enoch (Genesis 4:17). Babylon, historically founded circa 19th century B.C.E., according to Biblical tradition by Nimrod, descended from Ham, the cursed son of Noah, became a

city that worshipped idols and freely practised prostitution and acts of sexual license. Scheil (2016) points out that cities have a dual significance, they are at once an image of human achievement, but simultaneously a symbol of overreaching pride. The blasphemous act of constructing the Tower of Babel to scale heaven and touch the face of God resulted in a polyphony of languages and ensuing chaos. In Christian writing Babylon, the city of sin is often contrasted with the new Jerusalem, the city of God (Rafferty, 2003). This difference between the idealised city and the earthly reality can be seen in popular Christian literature notably in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World, to That Which is to Come* (1678) where everyman Christian undertakes an allegorical quest to leave the City of Destruction to gain the Celestial City. It also appears in William Blake's poem *Jerusalem* (1804) famously contrasting the city of God with England's "dark satanic mills." Cities may therefore be viewed as a metaphor for the attempts of humanity to ape the celestial city of heaven. This view of the city as a contradictory nexus of civilisation and excess has permeated into representations of the fantastic city in popular culture. Today Babylon is evocative of adventure and romance, particularly through the displaced Babylons of nineteenth and twentieth century speculative fiction (Scheil, 2016), an example being J. Michael Straczynski's *Babylon 5* television science fiction series (1994–98). It also remains a synonym for the tainted world of hostile materialism in Rastafarian belief (Partridge, 2009).

The city has a long history in Western literature, as has the character of the antihero. Lehan (1998) argues that Dionysus in Euripides' *The Bacchae* (405 B.C.E.) introduces into Western literature the character of the mysterious other, the stranger from the hinterland who throws urban order into chaos. He sees this as the precursor to other subversive and uncanny influences and postulates that the character of Dracula can be traced directly back to this lineage. In Jungian terms this character is associated with the shadow. City walls may present the illusion of safety, but they are unable to keep out the malign influences that represent an eruption of the primitive into the rational urban space. This concept of uncivilised nature as antithesis to, and in conflict with the urban can also be seen in fantasy literature. As Atteberry (2022, p. 17) puts it, "the city redefines wilderness as enemy, just as the Hero remakes the defender of the wilderness into a monster." In fantastic literature the hinterland beyond the well-

travelled paths of the city is a dangerous place where the non-human world constantly threatens to overwhelm the traveller.

The drift away from an agricultural life and the urbanisation of the human species has gathered momentum in recent decades and according to the World Economic Forum 56.2 % of the global population were living in cities as of November 2020 (Buchholz, 2020). This is forecast by the United Nations to rise to 68% by 2050 (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2018). The city may now be the home of choice for the majority of the world population, but there is a dark side to the metropolis where the rich may indulge their appetites whilst the poor are crowded into informal settlements, often experiencing a precarious, unsafe existence (Ritchie et al., 2018). The separation from the natural world has also resulted in certain pathologies or disorders such as biophobia and sedentism (Beery et al., 2023). This ambivalence towards the gifts and dangers of the city has a long history. In 1800 Thomas Jefferson acknowledged the creative power of cities, whilst condemning them for breeding vice "I view great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health and the liberties of man. True, they nourish some of the elegant arts; but the useful ones can thrive elsewhere" (n. p.). The tension between poverty and opulence, the potential for violence and corruption and the daily human drama of city life has led to a proliferation of fiction set within the urban landscape.

As cities have grown in size, they have become unlimited generators of story, and this potentiality has given the city a unique place in literature. Tiffin (2008) describes the totemic status of cities in the human imagination where "no individual can hope to experience and absorb the full meaning of the city" leading to them becoming "emblematic, iconic, more than themselves because of the need to extrapolate beyond their reality to account for their hidden, exclusive spaces" (pp. 33–34). This sense of mystery and potential permeates certain cities which capture the public imagination in a special way, becoming centres of art and storytelling. Hansen and Verkaaik (2009) write that "some urban spaces are so heavily mythologised and enframed through circulating images and narratives that they suffuse, if not overdetermine, any empirical or sensory experience" (p. 6). Tally agrees that by virtue of their literary life Paris, London, Rome and New York have attained "almost mythic status" in the popular imagination (Tally, 2011, pp. xii). Some major cities by virtue of their geographical size

and population density seem to invite the marvellous. Irvine (2012) suggests that by its sheer size and diversity London "becomes a fantastic landscape" (p. 203) and a place where anything seems possible.

London seems to inhabit a special place in world literature; Clute (1999) writes that London's literary heritage is "so irradiated with story and mystery that tales set there often have an air of the fantastic without in fact involving the impossible" (p. 975). Witness the numerous James Bond and other actions films, television series, novels, games and other entertainments set in London. There is also a great tradition of fantasy and speculative fiction stemming from the British capital. This holds as true in the first quarter century of the twenty-first century as it did in the twentieth century and the new millennium has seen a new crop of London themed fantasy authors, or London based narratives capture the public imagination, including China Miéville, Paul Cornell, Mike Shevdon, Samantha Shannon and Ben Aaronovitch.

3.4 Urban fantasy

This study takes a broad view of fantasy and follows Katherine Hume's (1984/2014) definition of fantasy as "any departure from consensus reality" (pp. 20-22). A closely related term is speculative fiction which according to Oziewicz (2017) is an ever-increasing fuzzy set of non-mimetic narratives that includes fantasy, science fiction, horror "and all their derivatives" (para. 1). Fantasy may be set in an imagined alternate or "secondary world" (Tolkien, 1947) such as Middle Earth or Discworld, or in an imagined setting which intersects with a real-life location or "primary world" (Tolkien, 1947), as in Neil Gaiman's London of *Neverwhere.* Zahorski and Boyer (1982, p. 57) make the distinction between secondary worlds remote from the everyday; primary and secondary worlds connected by magical portals; and worlds contained within other worlds. Rosemary Jackson (1981) uses an optical metaphor to describe a "paraxial area" in fantasy literature which is a kind of third space in the fantastic imagination named "the spectral region of the fantastic, whose imaginary world is neither entirely 'real' (object), nor entirely 'unreal' (image), but is located somewhere indeterminately between the two" (p.19). Because the writer and reader inhabit the world of reality, fantasy may invert the real, but it cannot fully escape it, instead

coexisting in a symbiotic relationship. Thus fantasy is a potent medium for conveying commentary on everyday life.

Definitions of urban fantasy differ between commentators, but a working description is identified by John Clute as a genre of writing which foregrounds “the Unseen” and juxtaposes the mundane and the fantastic within a city (Clute, 1997, p. 975). In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries it has evolved into an important subset of fantasy and has blended with, and incorporated into itself other genres, leading Vanderbeke (2014) to comment that “urban fantasy is a hybrid genre, merging elements of fantasy, magical realism, satire, utopia and dystopia, allegory, urban fiction, science fiction, steampunk, salvagepunk and a few other genres” (p. 162). Stefan Ekman’s (2016) analysis of eleven different definitions of urban fantasy emphasises the hybrid nature of the field, noting common elements of “the Victorian tale of the magic city, the Gothic roots, and the meeting between folktales and modernity” (p.453). It may also include elements of crime fiction and mystery which Borowska-Szerszun (2019) writes facilitates commentary on contemporary events. Urban fantasy can simultaneously be both mainstream and subversive. Jackson (1981) contended that fantasy is essentially a literature of subversion which can be imbued with social and political commentary in the same manner as more traditional highbrow texts. Attebery (2022, p. 3) agrees that “part of the cultural work of the fantastic is to tell us that things need not be the way they are.” Ekman and Taylor (2016) name this process critical world building. Occupying a space between the mimetic and the impossible, more than any other fantasy genre, modern urban fantasy reflects the complex social problems of secular capitalist culture and gives voice to the “silenced imaginary other” (Jackson, 1981, p. 180). Ekman (2016; 2017), McMahon-Coleman and Weaver (2012) and Young (2016), for example explore how racial issues are explored through abused minorities in fantasy settings.

The Gothic heritage of concealment is seldom far from the surface of urban fantasy; Ekman, 2016, p. 464) describes the Gothic “thematic concern with the Unseen” in the form of obscurity, concealment and hiding places. Ekman (2013) identifies three main thematic strands within the genre. The first thread concerns the juxtaposition of modern urban life with the fantastic. The second thread is the use of Gothic horror tropes of darkness and labyrinths which are unseen by mundane characters, and the

third thread involves protagonists who can move amongst marginalised social groups. “This Unseen is largely related to a social Other, to the less savoury aspects of modern/urban life: criminality, homelessness, addiction, prostitution and physical and sexual abuse are rife in urban fantasy” (p. 466). This emphasis on the realistic and seedier aspects of life is one of the threads that sets the genre apart from the epic fantasy of Tolkien.

Ekman provides a salient breakdown of key urban fantasy tropes, but neglects the humorous strand exhibited most famously in Terry Pratchett’s Ankh-Morpork novels. Pratchett’s use of humour allows for social criticism and engagement with contemporary themes whilst avoiding overt polemicising. Ekman also neglects to mention animal fantasies featuring animal companions which Swinfen (2019, p. 26) points out has “one of the longest and strongest traditions of all types of fantasy.” The literary tradition of animal fantasy can be traced to Aesop’s *Fables* (c. 590 BCE) and Aristophanes’ *The Birds* (414 BCE). Twentieth century examples include C. S. Lewis’s Narnia series (1950-56) and Richard Adams’ *Watership Down* (1972). There is often cross over with eco-criticism in animal fantasies which frequently contain ecological commentary and warn of the consequences of over-exploitation of nature arising from urbanisation. Culler (2012, p. 81) describes eco-criticism as “an earth-centred approach to literary studies […] in thinking about the environment and human impacts on it.” In animal fantasies animals are often anthropomorphised to illustrate human foibles and the struggles of the outsider or the othered. Again, there are synergies with depth psychology as “Jungian psychology is an historical intervention into Western modernity that sees its psyche as dangerously fragile because it has exploited the other, rather than embraced it” Rowland (2019, p. 158).

Animals feature heavily in more recent fantasy books and book series’ such as Kevin Hearn’s *Iron Druid Chronicles* or Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy which has large urban fantasy elements, particularly in the first book. Lee (2021) provides a comprehensive list of 102 contemporary fantasy books with animal companions. Although many do not fall exclusively within a loose category of urban fantasy, that is, fantasy largely set within an urban environment, they nevertheless intersect with urban fantasy. The Harry Potter series, for example features companion animals such as owls, and contemporary and realistic portrayals of locations such as the Dursley’s

suburb and the forays into London which are arguably urban fantasy. The multiple definitions of urban fantasy are fluid and contested, often adding little to understanding of the texts themselves, prompting Brian Attebery (2014, p. 11) to take aim at genre criticism for its "boundary disputes and turf wars." By adopting Clute's (1997) broad definition of urban fantasy and critically exploring the juxtaposition of the fantastic, humour and realistic detail, this study aims to understand how urban fantasy can illuminate aspects of contemporary society.

3.4.1 Diversity in urban fantasy

Fantasy texts, particularly high fantasy has long been a preserve of the white male saviour. According to Dalton (2017), Fabrizi, (2016), McGarry and Ravipinto (2016) and Young (2016) this is because the foundations of western fantasy and science fiction were laid in the early twentieth century and therefore exhibit a largely white, middle-class, male-dominated ethos. Historically science fiction and fantasy story arcs have been dominated by white able-bodied male heroes, often on a quest in the Tolkien epic mode (Palmer-Patel, 2020). Hourihan (1997) criticised this heroic tradition with its traditional view of gender roles and the side-lining of non-white, non-heteronormative or disabled characters to subordinate or token positions. Calling these patriarchal values "the culture of mastery" she points out that women in heroic quest adventures are stereotyped as motherly or beautiful. Blonde, white beauties are almost always good, whereas dark women are evil, deceptive and dangerous, *La Belle dame sans Merci* in a different guise. This fossilised representation of women and ethnic minority characters transferred to mainstream mid-century U.S. science fiction novels (Westfahl, 1997), to television from the 1960's to the 1990's (Helford, 2000), and into popular written fantasy and science fiction genres. The ongoing trend in the publishing industry towards privileging white male writers endlessly reenacting the monomyth has not helped to encourage diversity. Fantasy author Juliet McKenna (2011) points out the difficulties faced by women writers of speculative fiction of successfully passing the gatekeepers and getting published, namely the halo effect which privileges white male authors and the sticky floor and the glass ceiling which penalises everyone else.

Much mainstream speculative fiction continues to reinforce societal norms, such as the absence of disability and the dearth of non-white characters in the *Harry Potter*

series (Misra, 2021; Turner-Vorbeck, 2009), and the victimhood of the black character Rue in *The Hunger Games* (Thomas, 2019). Thomas (2019, pp. 3-4) describes it as a "problem of representation […] a long-entrenched lack of diversity" in fantasy and science fiction literature. Similarly, the Twilight series has drawn a critical response from academics (McClimans & Wisnewski, 2009; Myers, 2009) point out the "ick" factor of Edward's voyeuristic interest in, and control over the century-younger Bella. Dalton (2017) writes that it can be difficult for an author to break away from these patriarchal, white, gender normative reader expectations as sales demonstrate the persistent popularity of these historically entrenched themes. This white-centric thinking can also be observed in online forums such as Young's (2014) examination of the rhetorical strategies of *Game of Thrones* online fan communities. She found a white-normative fan identity which quickly closed down discussion threads that raised criticism of the racial composition of Westeros. As Young puts it any criticism is "suppressed using tactics which strongly reflect discourses which support white privilege in modern western society by normalizing it." (p. 738). Similarly, Lothian and Stanfill (2019) condemn the fan fiction site *Archive of our Own* for allowing racist content. Young (2016) goes on to map the typical textual features of fantasy genre which are largely drawn from Anglo Saxon and medieval Europe and claims that "fantasy habitually constructs the Self through Whiteness and Otherness through an array of racist stereotypes" often with associations of Blackness (p.11). As an example of this Young suggests that orcs represent the fear of racial difference, claiming that unlike most other traditional monsters, orcs have not been rehabilitated and remain dehumanised. However, it appears that Young has not read Terry Pratchett's *Unseen Academicals* (2009) in which an urbane and cultured orc is one of the key characters and even becomes a human character's love interest. See also Lissauer (2014) on the spiritual orcs of Eberron in Dungeons and Dragons 3.5 edition (2004). Oziewicz (2016) also points out that Young ignores a large number of fantasy subgenres such as animal fantasies, graphic novels and retold fairy tales that do not fall into the white saviour trope. Nevertheless, Young's indictment of the normalised racism and white-centric fantasy universe (including the world of publishing, awards and fan communities) remains a well-argued and coherent criticism of the popular fantasy genre as a whole and is helpful in orientating Aaronovitch within the historical landscape of popular fantasy.

3.4.2 The importance of place in urban fiction

This section will provide an overview of how fantasy and urban fantasy puts an emphasis on setting and place. Tolkien's *On Fairy Stories* (1947) laid the grounds for much of the scholarship on setting in fantasy fiction. He maintained that the "sub-creator" of a secondary world must maintain an inner consistency within the invented world to maintain audience credibility. A break in consistency will propel the reader back into the reality of the primary world and break the spell of the fiction. Hume (1984/2014) maintains that for works set in a fantastic landscape "the landscapes dictate the adventures" (p. 160) allowing actions that could not take place in the real-world. This echoes Jackson's (1981) symbiotic relationship between the landscape and the characters' development within the story arc.

Ekman (2013) explores the role of paratexts in the form of maps, and settings in fantasy, taking a "topofocal" approach, where "the setting […] provides a critical way into the work" (p. 216). By analysing the landscapes and maps of fantasy works, much can be gleaned about the balance between nature and culture (usually represented by the urban centre) within the fantasy realm. Fantasy maps are a key part of the world building and generally have a "pseudomedieval aesthetic" (p. 49) as is common in the fantasy genre. They also provide clues as to the purpose of liminal spaces and politico-historical events. Referencing the Fisher King, a link is strongly made between the moral and physical health of the ruler and the moral and physical health of the world.

Maps in literature also give the reader the illusion of scientific impartiality and contribute towards the veracity of the story. Most maps are found at the beginning of the book and become the reader's first experience of the fantasy world whilst simultaneously providing an overview of the geography of the setting. The very act of "placing a map at the beginning of a work of fiction situates the reader within a place and gives them a visual overview of the novel" (McLeod, 2022 p. 35). According to Ekman (2013, p. 22), maps of city-based primary world fantasies made up less than 4% of the maps found in his survey of fantasy novels and are least suited therefore for analysis using a topofocal perspective. McLeod offers another perspective, that in mapping fantasy spaces, the London Underground map created by Harry Beck, provides coherence through its lack of precision which "is fundamentally more "useful" than precision to scale in creating an imaginary space for traversing the city" (p. 41).

One of the pioneers of literary mapping and literary geography, Piatti (2016) explains how “literary mapping can open up new dimensions in terms of ‘reading’ a landscape or cityscape” (Piatti, 2016 cited in McLeod p. 215). The act of mapping literary texts may add to understanding of the intersection between real and non-real realms by facilitating a deeper understanding of both real and imagined topographies. This literary geography reveals the layers of history, function, symbology, value and meaning behind places within a text.

The last decade or so has seen the popularisation of an archaeological approach to urban fantasy. Elber-Aviram (2013) theorises that narratives can be analysed through urban archaeology because urban fiction “almost invariably follows an archaeological pattern of revelation whereby suppressed material evidence from the past opens up a portal into the secret history of the metropolis” (Elber-Aviram, 2013, p. 2). The weight of the past in urban fantasy constantly threatens to break into the reality of the conscious mind, and because the subterranean city contains unquiet supernatural forces which threaten the surface the historical weight of the fantastic city imperils the integrity of the present (Elber-Aviram, 2013). This blend of archaeological and psychological criticism draws upon psychological explanations of the subterranean as articulated by Houswitschka (2015) where archaeological revelations from the past open portals into forbidden areas of knowledge. Urban fantasy frequently emphasises the forgotten and the hidden within the socio-economic fabric of the fantasy city and equates the hero/archaeologist of the story with an “ethical excavator […] who digs in precisely those spots where others turn a blind eye”, risking oblivion in order to bring the marginalised dignity (Elber-Aviram, 2013, p. 9). In this analysis Elber-Aviram (2013) emphasises the role that urban fantasy has to play in promoting social justice.

Young (2016, p. 141) describes a sub-genre of suburban fantasy which can include a setting which is literally suburban in that it is set on the city fringes, or metaphorically “sub-urban” in which elements of the fantastic intrude from below ground as well as from the past. The underworld has long been a source of human fear and has been utilised in many Gothic texts as a representation as a descent into the unconscious or madness. Neil Gaiman uses Gothicised sub-urban settings in *Neverwhere* (1996), a book and BBC television series set largely below London, featuring monstrous or bizarre characters including a labyrinth housing the Beast of London. Other

explorations of sub-urban London include China Miéville's *Kraken* (2010) and *Un Lun Dun* (2007). In all these texts the subterranean world under the city becomes a fantasy world where the features of the world above are mirrored in a distorted glass which provides commentary on the 'real' mundane world. In another example, J. K. Rowling sets the Ministry of Magic and Gringotts below London as a pastiche of the world of civil servants and bankers above. The London Underground features prominently in British sub-urban fiction including several Doctor Who episodes (Morgan-Russel, 2019). The British horror films *Death Line* (directed by Gary Sherman 1972) and *Creep* (directed by Patrick Brice 2004) also feature cannibal killer survivors of respectively a nineteenth century cave in, and the victim of horrific childhood experiments. In both these films the London Underground serves as a portal between the mundane world and the horribly fantastic.

A useful critical tool for analysis of the urban environment is Michel Foucault's (1986) *Of Other Spaces* which introduced the concept of heterotopias or "counter-sites" which are spaces that are different although they exist inside normal social spaces. They are usually urban sites such as theatres, prisons, boarding schools, museums, and cemeteries where ordinary spaces "are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (p. 24). Cemeteries, libraries, and museums can also display "heterochrony" or superimpositions of time. Rest homes, prisons and psychiatric units are examples of "heterotopias of deviation" where those who are outside of societal norms may be banished. These are compared to utopias which are "placeless-places" (p.24) which do not exist in reality. An exception being the mirror which is a unique space that is simultaneously both a utopia and a heterotopia. Foucault points out that heterotropic spaces are not freely accessible and "to get in one, one must have a certain permission and make certain gestures" (1986, p. 26). Similarly in urban fantasy there are hidden portals to spaces that resemble reality, but obey different rules of physics, time and space. These spaces are often accessed accidentally by characters who satisfy the conditions of entry and must then learn to navigate within the world within a world. The *Narnia* and *Harry Potter* series, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* and Susanna Clarke's *Piranesi* (2021) are examples of urban portal narratives. As are Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novels where Peter is

initiated into a hidden counter-site within the metropolitan police which is tasked with protecting the city from supernatural threats.

3.4.3 The psychogeography of London

Originating in the nineteenth century figure of the *flâneur* or walking observer in *The Painter of Modern Life* (Baudelaire, 1836), psychogeography examines the human response to a space in terms of sensations, emotions or affect. It may include aesthetic musings, socio political criticism, cultural commentary, historical fact or folk memory; it is above all a personal, reflective and subjective response to a place. Psychogeography is concerned primarily, but not exclusively within the built environment and frequently involves eclectic attempts to describe the cityscape. Elana Gomel (2014, p. 343) points out that "the postmodern metropolis is under pressure along two axes: sociopolitical and psychohistorical" and this creates "an urban imaginary in which space and time can no longer be neatly separated to generate a coherent narrative of the city." This lack of coherence reflects the fragmentary human psyche which Jung posited cannot ever truly be known. Certainly, urban fiction has a preoccupation with the fluidity of time in which timeslips and portals opening into the past, future and alternative realities are common tropes. The psychological robustness of the population is also inexorably linked to how successful (or otherwise) the built environment meets their physical and emotional/spiritual needs. Gomel's "urban imaginary" appears to reference psychogeography which explores how topography intersects with the human experience, examining how historical events, geographical features and built structures may impact the psychic health of the city.

According to Richardson (2015) British psychogeographers often express a "nostalgic bent" (p.10) exhibiting a sense of loss and poignancy for the past. She describes London psychogeographical texts in particular as frequently recovering occult forgotten histories and characters playing upon a sense of nostalgia that is frequently melancholic. Tso (2020, p. vi) describes "the existence of a London invisible but nevertheless palpable" which encompasses the spirit of a place for those with sensitivity to perceive it. This "London-ness of London" (p. vi) prompts contemporary authors Alan Moore, John Ackroyd, and Iain Sinclair to view London as incoherent and fragmentary. Iain Sinclair's work is often concerned with the aftermath of Thatcherite economics and those who have become dispossessed and marginalised in the modern

city (March-Russel, 2013). Houswitschka (2015) discusses the psychogeography of London in the London novels of Michael Moorcock, describing it as “the topography of London’s collective memory” (p. 73). He posits that “the cityscape of subterranean London represents the city’s Other” (p.64). That is, the subterranean reflects the hidden and unconscious elements of the city dwellers’ psyche, and as much of London’s past has been traumatic, this explains the frequency of the subterranean monster motif.

3.4.4 London and the urban fantastic

This section will begin with a brief review of the British urban fantasy tradition, with a focus on London, and thence to subterranean London and its waterways. According to Elber-Aviram (2021) there are two literary traditions in British fantasy: the pastoral of J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis and John Ruskin which looked towards an idealised past, and the urban of Charles Dickens, H. G. Wells, Michael Moorcock, Neil Gaiman and China Miéville. The writers of the urban tradition approach to fantasy forms part of “a socially and politically engaged genre deeply engaged in the forms and fashions of urban life” (Elber-Aviram, 2021 p. 1) which tended towards a bleaker view of the human condition. Other writers on the fantastic city include Benczik (2017 p. 163) who likens the fantasy city to a carnival where “transgression and subversion are the norm” but as carnival is regulated within the grid of the church calendar, so the carnival tradition strengthens the existing order rather than destroying it. Benczik does not elaborate on this concept, but she implies that there are rules and conventions which the fantastic city must abide by.

Many urban fantasy writers are based in and write about London which Benczik (2017 p. 165) calls “the locus of marvels.” Eckman (2018, p. 280) agrees that “it is special—no other city is used by so many urban fantasy writers, is familiar to so many readers, and has such a long history to draw from.” Stories set in the metropolis often reflect fears about the inhumanities wrought by industrialisation and urbanisation, examples include Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1931), and George Orwell’s *1984* (1949). Another strand of London fantastic and speculative fiction involves threats or disruptions from outside the state. In *War of the Worlds* (1895-7) H. G. Wells’ Martians landed in Horsell Common in the Thames catchment prompting the unnamed narrator to venture into an invaded London. In urban fantasy, the intrusion of a magical event

marks those texts as non-realistic in a way that is beyond the everyday marvellous nature of the city as described by Tally, (2011), Irvine, (2012) and Clute, (1999). P. L. Travers' (1934) Mary Poppins blows in holding an umbrella, and J. M. Barrie's (1904) Peter Pan appears magically in Kensington Gardens to spirit the Darlings to Neverland.

Benczik (2017, p. 168) describes "the spatial palimpsest of the dual city in urban fantasy" referring to the overlap where the fantastic overwrites the mundane city. In texts where the real city is simultaneously a city that contains fantastic elements, and the overwriting of the city occurs in the same spatial-temporal coordinates, Benczik (2017) comments that a new mapping system is required, but fails to specify what form this could take. A fascinating possibility is offered by literary geography and cartography. Literary geography is the study of landscape in works of fiction and literary cartography gives visual representation to the landscape and its physical features. It is also possible to map the trajectories of protagonists within the city and overlay the paths taken by characters within the same or different books. Digital literary maps may therefore uncover "the rich [literary] layer hovering above the physically comprehensible world" (Piatti and Hurni, 2011, p. 218 cited in McLeod p. 18). This concept bears synergies with psychogeography and is beautifully expressed in Michael Moorcock's *Mother London* (1988) where Mummery describes a London where "the city's inhabitants create an exquisitely complex geometry, a geographical passing beyond the natural to become metaphysical, only describable in terms of music or abstract physics" (p. 7). This sublime London is created from the paths of the inhabitants creating infinitely complex forms described in quasi-divine terms.

McLeod (2022) took a corpus of 36 contemporary London fantasy fiction books produced for children and young adults between 1991 and 2021, including Aaronovitch's (2021) *What Abigail did that Summer* (2021) featuring Peter Grant's cousin Abigail Kamara, and produced a digital map of the paths taken by protagonists, spaces that protagonists repeatedly frequented, and places particularly associated with magic. The resulting maps contained the "multilayering involved when navigating fantastical representations of a real space" (McLeod, 2022 p. 20). These place-identities rendered by "repeated interactions with landmarks enable protagonists to envisage who they are and what it means to belong in London" (McLeod, 2022, p. 107). Many of the places traversed by the protagonists overlapped at landmark sites.

These landmarks being “the locations where reality and fantasy meet” (p. 109). McLeod found that many of the novels clustered around the Thames, primarily the West End, and often begin and end at familiar landmarks of the city, Buckingham Place, the Houses of Parliament, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Hyde Park, The Tower of London and the Embankment. Many of these places are also very close to, or adjacent to the Thames which runs through the heart of the city in both a literal and metaphorical sense.

The Thames is perhaps the greatest of all English waterways, it is certainly the most celebrated in literature, visual and other art forms (Akroyd, 2007) and as such it has a unique place in the popular imagination of Britons. Schama explores “the great myth of the Thames as the nation’s bloodstream” (Schama, 1995, p. 361). And Akroyd (2007) posits that the Thames is a symbol of the national character with the destiny of England (note not the British Isles) linked to its fertility. Akroyd (2007, p. 9) claims that the river can be seen as “the image of the nation” able to create harmony from discord through its capacity to mollify the land. Given the importance of the Thames to the history and imagination of the British people it is unsurprising that it is a recurring motif in urban fantasy.

3.4.5 Subterranean London

Many writers who engage with London mention at some point the subterranean city. As an ancient place with its origins dating back to pre-Roman settlement, there is over 2000 years of history above and below ground. Underneath London run miles of tunnels, some still in use, some abandoned, cabling, ducting, sewers, pipes and culverted rivers and also “archaeological remains of Roman temples, crypts, plague pits, cemetery catacombs, as well as various caves and deep-level shelters” (Pleßke 2014, p. 225). Peter Ackroyd as both a writer of fiction and author of seminal accounts of the history of London and the Thames describes the compacted past artifacts and stories underfoot: “all of [London’s] history from the prehistoric settlers to the present day [is] packed within 24 feet of earthen fabric” (Ackroyd, 2011, p. 1). Ackroyd also points out that London is sinking and the city is quite literally built upon earlier iterations of itself. This image of a palimpsest of erasure and rewriting occurs frequently in attempts by psychogeographers to reclaim forgotten histories.

Fear of the dark is a powerful human compulsion that even the most rational adult experiences (Johnson, 1988). The darkness of underground evokes an ancient human fear of what may lurk unseen beyond the light of the campfire, and what may dwell in the cave, often seen as an entrance to an otherworld (Moyes, 2012). This connection between darkness, underworld and fear is exploited in countless horror texts and there is a large body of fiction which describes monsters living under cities, a surprising number choosing London as their home. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, long-time London resident is credited with writing one of the first science fiction novels with his 1871 novel *The Coming Race* featuring an underground master race. H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* (1895) displays this influence in the troglodyte and monstrous Morlocks. London has long been a mecca for writers of fantasy and speculative fiction who are often fascinated by its long, often violent, and darkly melancholic history, as well as its vibrancy and multicultural richness. Peter Hutchings names this "Horror London" which is "a site of jarring juxtapositions, unnerving contrasts and an exciting array of differences" (2009, p. 190) which is also closely bound to the Victorian Gothic.

Young (2016, pp. 141-142 identifies a category of 'sub-urban' fantasy in which elements of the fantastic intrude from below ground. Underground London features prominently in British sub-urban fiction. An early television example is the BBC's *Quatermass and the Pit* (1958-9) where a buried Martian object awakens and brings destruction to London. Underground London also features in several Doctor Who episodes (Morgan-Russel, 2019). Neil Gaiman uses sub-urban settings in *Neverwhere* (1996), a book and BBC television series set largely below London, featuring monstrous or bizarre characters including a labyrinth housing the Beast of London. The London Underground features in many films, television series and books and Welsh (2010) analyses how the Underground is used in the fiction of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. The Underground system has also generated historical accounts such as Ackroyd's (2011) *London Under: The Secret History Beneath the Streets*. The tube system is a patchwork of historical eras as Pike (2002) explains, "as a material space, the tube is not unified at all; it is quite literally Victorian, modernist, and postwar, all at the same time" (Pike, 2002 p. 112). This multiplicity of historical identities is a feature of London itself and will be discussed in more detail in chapter six: The city and identity.

3.4.6 The living city in urban fantasy

This section explores the living city as a character in written text and how the fantastic city is viewed in the critical literature. Bickham (1999, p.1) states that setting is crucial to establishing the history, cultural attitudes, mood and even spoken accents of the characters in a text. However, setting can act in an even more powerful way and even play an active role in the text. Mendlesohn (2008, p. 28) observes that in portal fantasy texts where the protagonist transitions from the mundane to the fantastic, the setting is a vital element in the narrative to the extent that "the primary character in the portal fantasy is the land." John Clute (1997) observes the phenomena where the setting is so powerful that it gains the status of a character in its own right, describing Mervyn Peake's Gormenghast as an "edifice fantasy" in which the castle becomes a protagonist in the novels. Lissauer (2014, p. 265) agrees, saying that "in many ways, settings are like characters themselves" able to act upon the narrative in a similar way to a human protagonist. Pheasant-Kelly (2015) describes settings in fantasy films that have become sentient entities, such as animated trees in *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter* books. Natural scenery can also become active participants for example in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) the titular farmhouse acts a protagonist in the plot, simultaneously protecting and isolating the inhabitants, but also capable of enabling acts of violence as when the ghostly Catherine Linton's wrist is repeatedly sliced on the broken window glass by a terrified Lockwood.

There is also a critical tradition of analysing the city as a protagonist; Addison (2012) describes how Dickens uses the city as a metaphor for vice and sin "which appears on occasions to take on a life of its own and determine the fate of those living within its environs" (p. 4.). For example, the London fog becomes a manifestation of the obfuscating legal system in Bleak House. The Dickensian city is also personified as a giant prison where individuals are trapped by economic necessity and escape to the countryside can only be achieved by a lucky minority. Hezam (2020) likewise discusses Pamuck's description of Istanbul as a dynamic character, and Hartley (2013) describes how the ambiguous liminality of Takeda Taijun's Shanghai works upon the action like a character. However, these arguments rely upon metaphor or metonym to establish their position. Urban fantasy novels, unlike mimetic texts are given license to make real the figurative corporeality of the city. In urban fantasy Hobson and Anyiwo (2019,

p. 1) write that “the city and (sub)urban spaces play an essential role within the narrative to the point in which the location itself is a character in the plot. The city is alive, not simply as a location but creating both obstacles and aids for the protagonists.” In China Miéville’s *Kraken* (2010) London is partially alive in a biological sense with its own inscrutable thought processes and motivations where Londonmancers are able to read the future from the city entrails, and London antibodies made of city components “brick, slate, tar, road sign and smell” patrol the city streets attacking invaders.

3.4.7 Living rivers and *genius loci*

Irvine (2012, p. 201) calls these living cities *genius loci* (literally, spirit of the place) that add to the fantastic flavour of fiction by “animating the narrative” in both a literal and figurative way. Vecco (2020) defines *genius loci* as “the intangible quality of a material place” (p. 1) which exhibits both physical and spiritual qualities. Literature has a long history of personifying natural features. *Malory’s Le Morte D’Arthur* (1485) depicts the Damosel of the Lake as an embodied woman and in book four of *The Faerie Queene* (1596) Edmund Spenser portrays the marriage of two personified rivers as a solution to a mining-induced ecological crisis (Borlick, 2011). Shippey (2003) describes Tom Bombadil as the *genius loci* of the Old Forest on the borders of the Shire in *The Lord of the Rings* (1937-49). Kipling also employed Puck as representative of the ancient spirit of England *in Puck of Pook’s Hill* (1906). Urban fantasy creators bring these ancient nature spirits into a contemporary setting, and whilst embodying ancient forces, they usually appear in the guise of human beings, albeit with paranormal powers. Gaiman’s Bailey, the Earl of Earls Court and the Angel Islington from *Neverwhere* are more contemporary examples. However, Gaiman’s *genii locorum* are not fleshed out into fully functioning, vital characters in their own right. They remain stylised plot devices, the embodiment of helpers or obstacles that the hero must encounter and overcome to complete the quest.

Urban spaces are densely populated and vital with human activity and Vecco (2020, pp. 5-6) writes that place “transcends its structural dimensions to encompass human activity as constituent of the identity of the space itself.” Consequently, the city is only given meaning by its inhabitants; Loh (2007), cited in Vecco (2020, p. 7) states that the

spirit of a place is culturally rooted and "comes alive in the ways of the community and to serve the needs of the local community." Therefore, *genius loci* change form to reflect the changing cultures of the human players acting on the geography of the place; in *The Rivers of London* the spirit of the Tyburn was once a Saxon white man and is now a black woman, and the Grand Union Canal's presiding deity is an orangutan rumoured to have escaped from London Zoo.

The term *genius loci* is useful for exploring the human interaction with place within urban fantasy, but Irvine's (2012) definition limits the city to only one entity. This thesis contends that a city is too large a geographical area to form one coherent whole, and to be bounded by one *genius loci*. This multiplicity of identities is reflected by Aaronovitch's technique of assigning multiple *genii locurum* as guardians and representations of different aspects of the capital. Brian Attebery (2022, p. 15) describes Ursula K. Le Guin's reading of the many faceted selves of the hero represented by Frodo, Sam, Gollum and Smeagol, and Attebery names the fractured parts of an individual "distributed selfhood." This concept can usefully be employed to understand Aaronovitch's literary technique of embodying distinct characteristics of parts of the capital within different avatars.

3.4.8 Comparisons of the city and the country in fantasy literature

This section of the literature review will first provide a broad overview on the scholarship on the town, country divide in speculative and fantasy literature and then go on to identify gaps in the scholarship relating to contemporary British urban, rural tensions. The town, country divide has a long history in British literature, Dickens' naive view that the countryside is the antithesis of the evils of the city is referred to by Addison (2012) as "pastoral sentimentalism" (p. 22). Langwith (2006) identifies the early British and Irish speculative fiction of William Morris, H. G. Wells, Lord Dunsany, Rider Haggard, David Lindsay and J. R. R. Tolkien as mythopoeic in the sense that their connection to myth is integral to their relationship with the natural world. In their work the "mythic, the natural, and the spiritual [are] pitted against the realist, the artificial, and the scientific or the material" (Langwith 2006, p. 2). This laid the foundations for later fantasy texts generally taking the anti-modernity position that nature is "a virtuous force of spiritual redemption in opposition to modernity and in particular to the dominant modern ideological model of scientific materialism"

(Addison 2006, p. ii). Horner and Zlosnik (2005, p. 95) posit that within "an English cultural and literary heritage" the country house and the countryside represent tradition and are often set against the city as the progressive binary opposite of the rural. Accordingly, the countryside is guardian of the British mythic past whilst the city represents threats to traditional ways of being. Heidemann (2020) broadens the argument to suggest that "the rural and the urban serve as a template to diagnose other forms of division in Britain – racial, social, cultural, and economic" (p. 676). He draws heavily on Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City* (1973) in which the rural, urban divide is linked to the economies of imperialism, so the relationship between the city and the countryside is "a mirror of the relationship between the imperial metropolis and the subject colony" (Williams 1975, p. 279 cited in Heidemann, 2020, p. 677). However, Horner and Zlosnik (2005), and Heidemann (2020) fail to explore fractures within the metropolis itself, instead they write of the city as a homogenous entity which is diametrically opposed to the countryside. This ignores a rich source of inquiry into divisions and tensions within the metropolis between those with political and social capital and those without. Critically examining the way in which speculative fiction relates to the built and natural environment can offer further insights into contemporary British social tensions.

3.5 British identity and speculative literature

Kumar (2003) finds himself baffled when addressing the vexed question of British national identity, pointing out that he shares with George Orwell (1941) the view that it is challenging to come to any firm conclusions about a country that cannot even come to a consensus on a name: Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom, and England (used as a type of synecdoche). Other euphemisms abound: Albion, the sceptred isle, these islands, the four nations. Even before post-Second World War immigration, Britain was ineluctably pluralistic and because of its constitutional arrangements highly tolerant of ambiguity. Historians and commentators may tread carefully around the subject of British identity, yet fiction writers feel compelled to explore it.

One novelist and historian who has deeply engaged with the national character is Peter Akroyd, although he largely limits his focus to England. In *Albion* (2002) he writes

that although English creatives always have one eye on the past, “the history of the English imagination is the history of adaptation and assimilation. Englishness is the principle of diversity itself” (p. 448). He argues that English language, culture and genome is a syncretic mixture of diverse elements which lends itself to the blending of forms in artistic expression and to compromise as a national characteristic. At the same time there is a strong pragmatic streak in the national character that eschews abstractions and celebrates individual experience, exhibited in the episodic form of the character novel. Akroyd also identifies “the territorial imperative” (2002, p. 448) of the local landscape to guide and influence its inhabitants which he describes with an almost religious sense of reverence. These characteristics are very evident in Aaronovitch’s work which itself blurs genres and celebrates hybridity and regeneration of the old world of Father Thames by new post-imperial influence of Mama Thames. The episodic nature of the novel cycle allows the characters to develop and grow whilst being firmly rooted in the landscape of London.

A key theme in post-Second World War British fiction is what it means to be British after the age of empire in the wake of multiculturalism and then later after devolution of power to Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish national assemblies. Burley (2020) describes a crisis amongst liberals in the late 1950s and 60s that is reflected in the themes of “racialized phobia and melancholia of the postimperial imaginary” (p. 375) in Christine Brooke-Rose’s dystopian novel *Out* (1964). Burley cites Hall’s description of a historical forgetfulness which is a symptom of the conscious repression of Britain’s imperial past which gave birth to “narratives of cultural decline at the end of empire and also to emergent myths of white victimhood” (p. 375). Gikandi (1996) argues that the debates over race and nation that so marked the British post-war political landscape were “symptomatic of a larger crisis in the British polis—a crisis of authority, of the social order, indeed of the national character and English literature” (p. 79). Burley (2020) goes on to claim that “this image of an embattled white England was a key element of the post-war English racial imaginary” (p. 377). Conservative politician Enoch Powell’s (1968) ‘Rivers of blood’ speech summed up the defensive and fearful attitude of British conservatives to mass immigration. Race was and continues to be a key feature of the British post-Brexit political discourse.

By the 1960s it had become apparent that "the British Empire was in evident and irreversible decline" (Hurwitz, 2015, p. 448). At the same time inhabitants of former colonies were settling in Britain and beginning to change the dominant hegemonic structures, particularly through the demographic changes occurring in the industrial cities. In Bernard Bergonzi's (1979) discussion of contemporary British novels he describes the "long and painful process of adjustment from being the rulers of the most powerful Empire in the world to being a moderately important power of the middle rank" (p. 57). Thus, many post-war writers of both speculative and traditional fiction refer back to a mythic golden age of the distant past, or retreat into a romantic view of the more recent past, such as Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* written in 1961 but largely set in a romanticised 1930s. Similarly, Hurwitz (2015) reads John Fowles *The Magus* (1965) as an attempt to resurrect an original English identity that predated the British Empire that reflected the author's "desire to confront the emerging geopolitical fact of a postimperial England" (p. 447). The upheavals of the early half of the twentieth century manifested in a strand of what Jaccard (2017) identifies as catastrophe fiction in the 1950s work of John Wyndham. Wyndham's work reflects a pessimism about the future generated by the recent traumas of the Second World War where the revelations of the death camps and other atrocities called into question the nature of humanity. However, a later generation of British speculative fiction writers, too young to remember the peak of empire and one step removed from the war tended towards a more optimistic and forward-facing view of the nation. This general trend towards optimism and playfulness can be observed in fantasy and speculative fiction writers including Robert Holdstock, Susan Cooper, Alan Garner, Terry Pratchett, Michael Moorcock, Douglas Adams and Neil Gaiman. Aaronovitch fits comfortably within this grouping, as commonalities include the examination of societal changes whilst incorporating elements of Britain's mythic past.

Some contemporary writers of fantasy and speculative fiction tend towards a darker more dystopian view such as Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series (1995 – 2000) and Adrian Tchaikovsky's *Children Of Time* (2015) and *Children of Ruin* (2019). China Miéville straddles the two with a distinctly dark tone to the *Bas Lag* novels (2000 – 2004). Other popular examples from outside the UK include Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaids Tale* (1985), *The Hunger Games* by Susan Collins (2008 – 2025) and

Veronica Roth's *Divergent* series (2011 – 2014). Aaronovitch's ludic and hopeful vision for Britain is a counter to the dystopian imaginings of his peers, and by interrogating the thread of British identity stemming from post-imperial demographic trends in his work, new light may be cast on contemporary attitudes to nationhood and what it means to be a 'good' citizen in modern Britain.

Recent historical events surrounding the anti-migrant UKIP party and its role in Britain leaving the European Union are a continuing source of tension in the British body politic and the British psyche. Issues of nationalism are a contested space and under pressure from conservative elements education minister Michael Gove controversially announced in June 2014 that 'British values' including "democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs" were to be taught in schools (Wintour, 2014). Sarah Ilott (2015) traces how the terms 'diversity' and 'Britishness' have been mobilised to push a political agenda that supports the privileged and disenfranchises the poor and religious and ethnic minorities. Although British critics are sensitive to postcolonial process of hegemonic shifts in power, vis-a-vis the Commonwealth, most fail to point out that Britain itself is not a coherent single entity. Many portions of Britain were (and many argue still are) colonised spaces which have been oppressed by dominant powers within the complicated historical and geographical landscape of the British Isles. A strength of Ilott (2015) is that she identifies English, Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish identities, but this does not describe the true complexities of keenly felt regional individualities within counties, and smaller geographical areas. She also neglects the town, country divide, and the political and cultural dominance of London which has often been detrimental to the rest of the country. Similarly, in her discussion of new literary genres she does not discuss fantasy aside from the magical realism of Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. However, she does argue that "new modes of narration" (p. 3) in post-colonial literature, including Gothic tales of post-colonial England which explore cultural fears and concepts of home, and multicultural British comedy which explores "culturally repressed taboos" (p. 7) are helping to create a shared national identity that transcends difference. She makes a key point that stories which construct national identity are worthy of study because "there are implicit affinities between understandings of nation and storytelling." (p.

3). While not made explicit, there are synergies with myth theory here as Ilott claims that “the nation is understood in terms of its constructed nature, its imaginative qualities and its mode of expression” (Ilott, 2015, p. 3). Whilst many stories have universal appeal, many others are contested spaces witnessing a struggle over whose version of the story is correct and even who is even able to tell the stories (Ashcroft et al., 2002; Spivak, 1988/2010). This study aims to address the gap in the scholarship by extending Ilott’s cultural analysis to urban fantasy, encompassing the interplay of social justice and humour to enable a discussion of the disenfranchised (and often hidden) other in contemporary British society

3.6 Monsters, faces and identity

This section will discuss the significance of monsters in popular culture reflecting cultural fears and individual trauma. It then goes on to discuss the damaged face and identifies a gap in the literature relating to facial disfigurement in written texts. The final section examines the role of masks in popular entertainments.

3.6.1 The monstrous

Botting (1996) traces the evolution of monsters from eighteenth and nineteenth-century external figures of horror who may be physically overpowered and cast out, to creatures emblematic of internal processes of trauma, guilt and despair. Monsters are often equated with the Jungian shadow, and Hamilton (2020, p. 142) writes that from a psychological therapeutic perspective monsters can symbolise “unspoken or unprocessed personal and cultural trauma.” They may become symbolic representatives of suppressed or unacknowledged fears, and these monsters can only be banished when they are integrated back into the self. The role that popular culture plays in working through personal and cultural trauma can be a useful one from a therapeutic perspective as encountering monsters in popular entertainments reflects an individual’s struggle with intrusive symptoms of trauma. These must be overcome in an allegorical battle to destroy the monster which “represent fears in a tangible way, presenting a metaphor that ‘gets up and walks’” (Hamilton, 2020, p. 4). Monsters in popular entertainments, then, are performing useful cultural work by allowing individual and collective fears to manifest in a safe environment. Once in the open fears may be worked through and potentially resolved.

In common with screen monsters, many fantasy texts employ horror tropes, as Kearney (2005, p. 7) states, melancholic dread, anxiety and alienation is "one of the characteristic maladies of humanity." Horror stories are likely as old as speech, and *The Eumenides* by Aeschylus (458 BCE) feature the terrifying Erinyes who torment Orestes to madness for the murder of his mother. By hearing ghost stories and encountering the monstrous in story, the human sense of dread, repulsion and fear may be excised in an act of Aristotelian catharsis or cleansing. According to Kearney's (2005) psychoanalytic interpretation, monsters arise from the underworld to "signal borderline experiences of uncontainable excess, reminding the ego that it is never wholly sovereign" (p. 3). These apparitions arise from the unconscious and "ghost the margins of what can be legitimately thought and said" (p. 4). They are undefined, liminal questioning reality, yet they have powers to terrify our mammalian brains. Common horror tropes include creatures from other worlds and strangers from the hinterland, representing the fracture within the human psyche and the split between conscious and unconscious, the same and the other. As readers we can choose to try and understand the strange other, or reject it, thus projecting our fears onto outsiders by refusing to recognise ourselves as others. Kearney (2005) suggests that the solution to our psychological fears and fractures is to recognise and reconcile with the other. One of the best ways to do this is through story or narrative which is "a working-through of loss and fear by means of cathartic imagination and mindful acknowledgement" (p.8). According to Kearney (2005) and Kristeva (1966/1980), story has the power to heal and comfort through a deep understanding of the unconscious drives within the human psyche. It may also contribute to cultural cohesion and self-understanding by allowing a greater empathy for the stranger within and outside ourselves.

Cohen's (1996) monster theory proposed a cultural analysis which delineated seven features of monsters, namely monsters symbolise the displaced fears of society such as deviant sexual practices, racial fears of miscegenation or fear of the feminine (See also Creed's 1993 analysis of the monstrous feminine). The monster always escapes and reappears in a different guise because these types of fears cannot easily be dispelled and that which is repressed will emerge in a new form. Monsters resist categorisation and are liminal in nature existing at the boundaries of repulsion and

desire, representing those outside or different in race or political belief. Monsters warn against crossing a line or exploring beyond known lands and are used by hegemonic structures of power to control progressive thought and to maintain conservative structures. Monsters are the children of society and pose the question of why they have been created and thus allow us to question cultural assumptions. This ability of the monstrous to reflect unconscious human impulses and fundamental fears may also contribute to explaining the phenomenal popularity of horror and fantasy genres within the literary and wider entertainment industries.

Monsters also reflect the fears of society and Collings (2015, p. 106) points out that in popular culture "the aesthetics used in depictions of excessive and monstrous characters can be linked to the preoccupations of the societies and cultures from which they come." For example, Lon Chaney's monstrous screen appearance may be read as a reflection of the postwar American anxieties about masculinity and male bodies. This historical trauma theory draws a parallel between Chaney's grotesque and deformed masculinity to "anxieties in relation to the war and its horrific demonstration of the vulnerability of the male body" (Studlar, 1996, p. 210). Collings (2015) goes on to suggest that British dark comedy's depictions of the grotesque body are a manifestation of the conservative media's obsession with the "topical 'bogeymen' of 'chav mothers', gay men, people who have mental health problems, vain women who get cosmetic surgery" (Collings, 2015, p. 107). These figures are frequently scapegoats, blamed for declining moral standards and societal disfunction whose greater visibility is often taken as a sign of moral and social decline.

Some late twentieth and early twenty first century critics have attempted to reclaim monsters from hatred and repurpose them as representatives of the non-normative and misunderstood whose outward monstrosity is a reflection of societal intolerance, more likely to inspire compassion rather than repugnance in a modern readership (Erle & Hendry, 2020). For example, McMahon-Coleman and Weaver (2014) explore the phenomenon of shapeshifters in popular culture and how modern shapeshifters have morphed from objects of fear such as the werewolf and Stevenson's Mr Hyde, to sympathetic and even attractive beings whose narratives "speak in positive terms about identity and belonging" (p. 2). The shift from human to monster is often

portrayed as a positive transformation and a metaphor for diverse themes of disability, gender, sexuality, adolescence, and race.

3.6.2 Faces and identity

This section discusses facial deformity and how it has been represented in popular culture, specifically in relation to those whose monstrous appearance leaves them othered from society. Because the face is the focus of our outward projection of self, a damaged face is a particularly challenging disability to live with. As Dunbar (2012, p. 168) points out "Disfigurement is a common manifestation of 'otherness'" in life and literature. In popular culture villains often have facial disfigurements, from Victor Hugo's Quasimodo in the *Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1831) to *Skyfall's* (Mendez, 2012) Raoul Silva. Facial disfigurements also bring social stigma for historical reasons as the non-normative face was believed throughout diverse geographical and historical societies to embody the physical manifestation of inner corruption (Cock & Skinner, 2019). Facial disfigurement was often the punishment for sexual transgression, particularly for women found guilty of adultery or prostitution (Skinner, 2014). Diseases such as smallpox, late-stage syphilis and leprosy frequently caused damaged to the face thus cementing the link between sexual deviance, spiritual corruption, and deformity as often the sufferers were believed to be punished by God for societal code transgressions. Eco (2007), however points out the complicated relationship between repellence and attraction positing that often what humans recoil from can be what they are subliminally attracted to.

Whilst disability studies has had a strong influence on literary criticism, see for example Thomson's (1997) study of physical disability in American culture, there is much less research on the non-normative face. Critics have explored the issue of facial disfigurement in nineteenth and twentieth century literature (Fried, 1990; Henderson, 2006; Michie, 1989), ethical reactions to facial disfigurements in mainstream literature (Grabher, 2019), and American literature and film (Fusco, 2018; Klecker & Grabher, 2021; Lowenstein, 1998; Rodriguez, 2014; Tausel, 2021) but there is little discussion of contemporary literature relating to facial disfigurement. Piątek (2014) discusses representations of trauma in contemporary British and Irish novels and illustrates how they help to exorcise "painful secrets, which cannot be assimilated into the collective memory unless they are articulated and worked through" (p. 184). This thesis posits

that images of facial and other deformity may be seen as a particular representation of cultural trauma in which the identity of a place or community has been erased or irretrievably damaged.

3.6.3 Masks

A related theme to damaged faces is the role that masks and puppets play in narratives. The mask is a Gothic trope, seen perhaps most famously in the character of Erik in Leroux's *Phantom of the Opera* (1910). In a time where syphilis was a largely untreatable disease, Erik's deformed face speaks to contemporary fears of tainted heredity and physical and moral degeneration. When superimposed over a human face, masks allow a person to hide and at the same time to enact a new identity. They are also deeply unsettling. Micael Bakhtin (1941/1984, p. 40) commented that the mask, "reveals the essence of the grotesque" through its multifaceted qualities being at once playful and profound in its links to ancient rituals. It is connected to transition and metamorphosis, but it is also transgressive because it violates natural boundaries of the real/unreal, flesh/synthetic, human/other. In Bakhtin's analysis the mask wearer is freed from societal constraints. However, with the advent of Romanticism came a new form of the mask representing the sinister, concealing secrets or even with nothing behind it (Bakhtin, 1941/1984, p. 40).

The role of the mask in popular entertainments has variously represented punishment to conceal identity in Dumas' *L'Homme au Masque de Fer* (1840), to noble crime fighting disguise in McCulley's *Zorro* (1919). In later years the masked psychopath has become ubiquitous in late twentieth century horror films such as Michael Myers in *Halloween* (Carpenter, 1978), Jason Voorhees in *Friday the 13th Part 2* (Miner, 1981) and Ghostface in *Scream* (Craven, 1996). According to Jung the everyday persona adopted by individuals is a type of mask which conceals the identity of the true self, so serial killer Jason Voorhees' hockey mask conceals not only his facial deformities, but his own psychological trauma, and arguably traumas enacted on society. The proliferation of the masked superhero in recent years suggests a bland commodification of the hero. Many experience a similar path to super-normalcy, usually through random tragedy the often-orphaned superhero constructs a new identity which simultaneously enables them to pursue a version of a 'normal' life. This

duality is not present in the shadow villains of Alan Moore's *V* (1982-85) and Rorschach from *Watchmen* (1986) who Favaro (2018) argues fully commit to the mask.

3.7 The crime novel and fantasy

This section will examine the intersection of the crime novel with urban fantasy, identifying a lack of critical literature in the sub-genre of humorous crime fantasy. Cities face many challenges to maintaining social order which are held in check largely by the police. The Enlightenment model of social order posits that citizens voluntarily relinquish some freedoms in exchange for a rule governed society that benefits the majority. This idea of the good citizen has its roots in Plato and Aristotle's views on ethical and virtuous behaviour (Kraut, 2001). Virtuous qualities include respect for authority, courtesy, honesty, tolerance, moral courage and participation in civic duties. Much of the tension in crime narratives arises from the criminal lack of respect for the social contract versus the police officer's constricted options for ethical action.

In modern Britain cuts to the police budgets have resulted in community fears of a breakdown in social order (Syal & Dodd, 2022). These fears are not new, and crime narratives and the urban fantasy novel reflect preoccupations of society and the concerns of the populace. Crime fiction has a long history of providing social commentary, as Messent (2013, p. 178) writes "the police novel is a form that, at its best, has mutated into an ongoing (serial) enquiry into the state of the nation, its power structures and its social concerns." Likewise, Ekman (2017, p.48) comments that crime stories may be used within the urban fantasy genre "to emphasize, reinforce, or introduce urban fantasy's social commentary." There is a large genre of paranormal investigative texts encompassing TV series *The X Files, Grimm* and *Fringe* and novels such as Jim Butcher's wizard turned private eye Harry Dresden and Charlaine Harris's Sookie Stackhouse.

3.7.1 Humorous crime fantasy

The detective character in supernatural speculative fiction has already received a large amount of critical attention (Andrew, 2015; Blackwell, 2020; Carney, 2014; Hartwig, 2013; McGuire & Buchbinder, 2010; Perrings, 2016; Szanter, 2020), but little attention has been paid to humorous police fantasy. The jarring juxtaposition between mimetic police procedural crime solving and the fantastic elements

provides a key source of humour in Aaronovitch who is not the first to use this clash of genres for comedic effect. For example, Pratchett's *City Watch* novels and Charles Stross' *Laundry Files* blend of spy thriller and out of control bureaucracy complete with paper clip audits. Another example is New Zealand's *Wellington Paranormal* (TVNZ 2).

British critics are sensitive to the possibilities of comedy to promote both positive and negative social values. Gillespie (2003) demonstrated how well scripted television comedies can challenge racist attitudes in Britain and promote more positive race-relations, and Ilott (2018) argues that comedy can create new communities through shared laughter and challenge stereotypes which have arisen from a historical "narrative of the stigmatization and disenfranchisement of migrant communities in Britain" (p. 212). She points out that Homi Bhaba posited that in order to displace the stereotyped other, one must "engage with it effectively" (Bhaba, 1994 cited in Illott, 2018, p. 214). Humorous texts are one way in which the empathy of the reader can be successfully engaged with a stigmatised group or individual and throw light on the structural inequalities that cause some communities to suffer disproportionately in relation to privileged groups. Rainer Emig (2010) explored the post-colonial concept of the third space in cultural hybridity and how the Asian British hybrid can use humour to deconstruct identities. In this way humour can perhaps provide a means for Spivak's subaltern to speak (Spivak, 1988/2010). Peters and Becker (2010) however, take a less optimistic view and argue that racist attitudes are still prevalent in British humour, and as a response to political correctness it has merely shifted form to 'aversive racism' (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986) which Peters and Becker (2010, p. 2) describe as when tensions between the "egalitarian attitudes of our post-modern society and pervasive negative stereotypes produces a conflict which leads to an unease and reticence in recognising these negative stereotypes as being overtly racist." As a counterpoint to this narrative, the trend towards inclusivity in urban fantasy (McMahon-Coleman & Weaver, 2012; Young, 2016), provides a positive model of inclusivity, particularly by using humour as a method to both acknowledge and mediate racial stereotyping.

3.8 Conclusion

This literature review began with a discussion of why Jungian myth criticism is a useful tool for analysing literature. The relationship between the city and the human psyche also has synergies with psychogeography and depth psychology where the dysfunctional city may be read as a metaphor for the unbalanced mind, and underground for the unconscious. Urban fantasy explores the human experience of the built environment and there is a long literary tradition of personified landscape including cities. The role of monsters in popular culture allows for the expression of societal anxieties and the link was drawn between damaged faces, masks and trauma relating to loss of identity.

A brief review of British speculative fiction argued that writers in the early to mid-twentieth century had twin preoccupations of declining Empire and war time trauma, but later postwar generations tended towards a more ludic and optimistic vision of the future. This strand may be traced into the sub-genre of the humorous fantastic detective fiction which is under-theorised in the academy.

Chapter 4 Methodology And Results

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is firstly to explain why close reading textual analysis and thematic analysis were chosen as the most suitable methods to analyse the data in this exploration of the *Rivers of London* novel cycle. Secondly the strengths and weakness of thematic and textual analysis will be discussed and how the methodology informed the data collection process. After data collection and analysis three main strands emerged for deeper investigation: 'The divided city', 'The city and identity' and 'Policing the magical city'. The chapter will finally go on to present a brief overview of the key findings organised under these three themes.

4.2 Methodology

Close reading (Federico 2016) was chosen as the most suitable methodology, and thematic and textual analysis were employed for their flexibility when analysing large bodies of work, in this case nine full length novels and two novellas. Close reading is a methodology which combines elements of artistic inspiration and scientific inquiry. It often begins with an intuition about a text which is then mined for evidence to support the hypothesis. It requires an emotional as well as a rational response from the researcher (Rowland, 2019, p. 34). Close reading is a methodology, but according to Federico (2016, p. 6) "close reading also supersedes theory because it's the end goal of theorizing." That is, close reading throws light on a text in order to better illuminate the myriad facets of possible meaning contained within, rather than imposing one critical approach. Put another way, close reading is agnostic and conforms to no one ideology, employing instead an eclectic approach to finding meaning. Federico (p. 9) posits that close reading enables a reader to better understand three aspects of a text: the form, ("craftmanship or artistry"), the feeling ("personal and psychological resonance") and the ethos ("implied commentary on human values"). Or as Rowland (2018, p. 37) summarises "formalist, reader-response and ethical." The reader must allow themselves to become open to the possibilities contained in a text, and Rowland asserts that close reading resonates with Jung's therapeutic method of employing

active imagination to work with powerful images or symbols to relieve psychic pressure,

> Active imagination is a dialogical process with the psychic image-other that re-makes consciousness. So is reader response close reading. Whether the symbols are inscribed on paper or a screen or recalled from a dream, they are encountered by what Jung called active imagination that can be continued through amplification. (Rowland, 2018, p. 41)

Rowland (2008) also reminds us that Jung believed that the psyche can never be truly known, and likewise complex texts may never fully give up all their secrets, but active imagination can be employed as a tool of inquiry to amplify themes that lie beneath the surface. This study employs various methods to tease out the "different levels of coherence" (Federico, p. 10) in Aaronovitch's work. There are also strong strands of environmental and architectural criticism in the *Rivers* novels as well as a sustained social and political commentary on the state of contemporary Britain, therefore approaches are also drawn from psychogeography and cultural studies.

The large range of potential research strands arising from this corpus necessitated a meta-critical methodological approach encompassing a number of theoretical perspectives chosen for their ability to illuminate the key themes. These include Jungian approaches to myth criticism, eco-criticism, psychogeography, monster theory and socio-political analysis.

4.2.1 Research methods

Research methods are the tools selected by a researcher to "collect, sort and analyse" the data that has been collected for study in order to show that the findings have validity (Walliman, 2017, p. 7). The researcher selected thematic and textual analysis to critically examine the relationship between the representation of the city in the *Rivers of London* novels and the exploration of conflict and identity in contemporary urban society.

Thematic analysis involves the interpretation of text to identify explicit and implicit themes to explore how people make sense of their world and their ontological assumptions about the social world they inhabit (McKee, 2003). This study employs a post-structural form of textual analysis that "attempt[s] to understand the likely

interpretation of texts made by people who consume them" (McKee, 2003 p. 9) and is based on an interpretivist epistemology (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This study is qualitative in nature because the data consists of "words, [and] the development of concepts" rather than numbers (Walliman, 2018, p. 81). It is also exploratory in that "not much has been written about the topic or the population being studied" (Creswell, 2014, p. 29).

Textual analysis is subjective and different possible interpretations are possible, McKee (2003, p. 52) goes so far as to claim that "there's no single correct interpretation of any text" although there are "limited numbers of reasonable interpretations available in a given culture at a given time" (McKee (2003, p. 57). Therefore, in order for the findings to be valid the researcher needs to be aware of her/his own experiences and cultural conditioning and recognise "their importance in shaping the analytical work being done" (Terry & Hayfield, 2020, p. 430). Validity of findings may also be increased by carefully considering the context of the text, such as the antecedents and intended readership. To be successful qualitative analysis relies on the skills of the researcher to present "a good argument […] high quality evidence and sound logic" (Walliman, 2018 p. 151). Through employing thematic and textual analysis, the researcher can gather data on conflict and identity in the *Rivers of London* novels, and employ academic approaches of Jungian myth criticism, ecological and socio-political criticism to interpret the results.

Thematic analysis requires a close reading of the text to first identify, then interpret key ideas and patterns in the data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). It lends itself to large data sets such as in this case a series of novels (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The inductive and reflexive nature of thematic analysis allows for agency of the interpreter/researcher to dissect the text to find the themes which lie within. It also provides flexibility and allows the research question to be modified in response to emerging data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2011). In the case of this study, once the researcher began fully engaging with the material, the research questions were adapted to better reflect the emergent themes and provide a clearer focus for analysis.

When the initial thematic analysis had been conducted, a close textual reading was conducted to illustrate and identify metaphorical meanings in context. According to Walliman (2018, p. 151) if the data set involves a large number of texts, words and concepts the data needs to be reduced "through coding, clustering and summarizing" in order to simplify it so the compacted data may be displayed in tables to allow for the exploration of relationships and to "gauge the relative significances of different factors." In this way sense may be made of diverse themes.

4.2.2 Research design

The researcher selected Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* novel cycle as a rich field of research for a number of reasons. The books are a popular success indicating that they resonate with the zeitgeist of fantasy readers in Britain and beyond. They have attracted some academic research, indicating that they are worthy of study, but there are large parts of the cannon which are still unexplored. The researcher is particularly interested in how these particular texts provide socio-political and ecological commentary on contemporary urban issues, with particular reference to Britain. Walliman (2018, p. 162) describes how detailed textual analysis can "reveal the undercurrents that may lie beneath the simple narrative of the story." The researcher originally identified ethnicity and otherness as key areas for exploration, but as data analysis progressed it became apparent that conflict and identity emerged as overarching themes that included ethnicity and otherness within their scope. The imagery of damaged buildings and damaged faces of characters also emerged as significant, speaking to the psychogeography of loss and trauma in the capital and its inhabitants. A strong eco-critical element was identified early in relation to flooding and culverted and hidden rivers but as data analysis continued the role of the foxes and chimera came to the fore as significant themes. The role of the police in maintaining order in a diverse city also emerged as did a strong mythological theme so Jungian inspired myth criticism was selected as an analytical tool to interrogate the data.

A decision was taken to include all nine full-length novels for analysis. The novels are a series in that they have the same central characters and follow each other in time, although each may be read as a standalone book. One novel, *Foxglove Summer* is set mainly outside of London, but as it centres around the main character Peter Grant who

is engaged in magical police work, it fits comfortably within the parameters of the research questions. Of the four novellas two are set outside of the United Kingdom and deal with peripheral characters in Germany and the United States. They do not add significantly to understanding the themes of the London based novels and so they were left out of the data set. The two novellas set in London, *The Furthest Station* and *What Abigail Did that Summer* were included in the data set as they centre around key characters engaging with issues of urban living, identity and conflict and can thus contribute towards answering the research questions. *What Abigail Did that Summer* is the only text to feature a different narrator, in this case Abigail Kamara, Peter Grant's younger cousin. The nine graphic novels were also omitted from the data set as visual imagery falls out of the scope of the research project which centres around the written word. Analysis of visual material would require different methodologies which are inconsistent with textual and thematic analysis identified as suitable for written text.

4.2.3 Data collection

During data collection the researcher read the novels and novellas several times and key texts were read over a dozen times to enable close acquaintance with textual detail. Terry and Hayfield (2020) argue that the long process of familiarisation is necessary for pattern recognition which can then be extrapolated into emergent themes. On preliminary readings notes were made in the margins of the books themselves and key passages were underlined and annotated as possible items for further investigation. This method is described by Brown (2014) as a type of active reading. These marked passages were then transferred into word documents and grouped into typological categories such as 'magic', 'rural versus urban' and '*genius loci*.' After several more readings other categories emerged, morphed or faded into the background as more categories were added, merged or removed.

Initial attention was paid to meta-data such as book titles, plot, chapter headings and key interactions between characters. These provided the large themes of conflict between the urban and rural rivers, ecological issues of pollution and flooding, intergenerational conflict, the struggles of the marginalised in society and the efforts of the police to maintain order in a complex and diverse city. Detailed textual analysis was also undertaken at paragraph and sentence level to identify repeated imagery

through simile and metaphor. Attention was also focussed on semantic choice and juxtaposition of images which identified the repeated use of damaged and mutilated faces and buildings, masks and monsters combined with the author's social commentary on contemporary Britain.

4.3 Results

Following data collection, the researcher was left with detailed notes and quotations in several word documents. Coding was necessary to make sense of the mass of data and the researcher "review[ed], select[ed], interpret[ed] and summarize[d] the information without distorting it" (Walliman, 2018, p. 153). During this process the following codes were identified: London as a living entity, multicultural London, London and provinces divide, class, economic and social disparities, ugly and damaged architecture, underground and hidden London, flooding, the fantastic *demi-monde*, Mr Punch and puppetry, mob violence, terrorism, damaged faces and masks, magic police, austerity, policing cuts, immigration and UKIP, media, institutions and institutional language.

After reflection on the data, the researcher pattern coded the data into three main research strands. These were: 'The divided city', 'The city and identity' and 'Policing the magical city'. These three themes encompassed the previously identified codes or topics of interest and put them into context with each other whilst providing a clear framework for analysis. They eventually formed the basis of exploration in the three analytical chapters. The researcher then created graphical displays in the form of three tables which identified sub-themes under each key theme and selected quotes to illustrate each one. Some quotes illustrate more than one sub-theme and may be used twice under two different sub-themes. Please refer to the appendices for the tables.

4.3.1 Research questions

After several modifications the following primary research question was finalised: 'In what ways does the representation of the city in the *Rivers of London* novels reflect socio-political currents in contemporary Britain?' In order to answer that three sub-questions were devised to interrogate the three main strands derived from the data: 'How does Aaronovitch employ myth and allegory to interrogate sources of division in Britain?'; 'How does the representation of the city reflect the identity of its

inhabitants?' and 'How is the hybrid genre of fantasy police procedural used to explore contemporary concerns related to social justice and policing?'

4.4 Theme 1: The divided city

Criteria for inclusion under this theme includes conflict, fractures in Britain between city and country, geographical location, generational conflict, class, housing status and ethnicity. Also flooding caused by urban expansion versus conservation interests. The river Thames is a central motif, and the first novel in the series published in 2011 gives the book series its name *The Rivers of London.* However, the Thames both in reality and within the secondary world of the books has a split identity and is bisected at Teddington Lock. This marks the division between the fresh water rural upper Thames with its catchment in the Chiltern Hills and the Cotswolds, and the urban tidal Thames which runs through the city of London and its ports. Sub-theme 1 explores how the divided river can be seen as a metaphor for a Britain which is fractured along many issues including rural versus urban lifestyles, traditional versus progressive outlooks, indigenous versus immigrant ethnicities and economic and class divisions.

Sub-theme two explores how the divided Thames may also be read as a metaphor for divisions in Britain between the capital city and the rest of the country. The novels are necessarily London-centric, but the excessive importance placed upon London, often to the detriment of the provinces is a source of tension within Britain.

The Thames dispute also has an ecological component which is analysed in sub-theme three. Father Thames fled the city in the nineteenth century as the London rivers became choked with industrial effluent and sewage. He concentrated his energies on preserving the countryside which Mama Thames considered an abrogation of responsibility to the city. Today, the hydrography of London coupled with climate change means that the capital faces an existential threat and the large eco-critical strand in the novels is discussed under this theme. Please refer to Appendix A for a table of quotes illustrating the above themes.

4.5 Theme 2: The city and identity

The second theme concerns identity and how it may be lost, changed or regained. Criteria for inclusion within this category include London as a character, the

destruction of London and uglification post WW2, damaged faces, damaged buildings and infrastructure, masks and changing faces, chimera, foxes and monsters, magical underclass and marginal identity.

Sub-theme one explores how the identity of London is established as a character in its own right within the novel series. The researcher identified evidence of anthropomorphic imagery as well as the depiction of *genii locorum* as physical and allegoric representatives of geographical areas. Frequent imagery of destroyed and damaged buildings and the mutilated faces of key characters provided horrific and unsettling images which speak to an underlying trauma beneath superficial surface appearance. Two key historical epochs were identified through repeated reference within the texts. These were the destruction meted out to London during World War Two, and the rebuild and remodelling of the city in the post-war era in the modern style. There are also frequent architectural critiques of ugly and ill-suited buildings which are contrasted with London's rich history and elegant buildings of the past.

Sub-theme two explores how identity may be changed and distorted. Repeated images of ugly or damaged buildings were sorted into this category, as the literal damaged face of London is used as a metaphor for the damaged psyche of modern London and its inhabitants. Likewise, the damaged faces of characters reflect the scars inflicted on the physical material of the city. Peter's police partner Lesley's deformed face is described in architectural imagery, and many other characters receive disfiguring injuries or decapitation. Repeated imagery of masks and puppetry also emerged from the data and sub-theme three explores how people may literally and figuratively wear masks to hide their real identities.

Sub-theme four discusses those with marginal identities who inhabit the shadow world of insecure housing and unemployment. The magical underclass of the *demi-monde* or half world act as a metaphor for the real-world disenfranchised poor where tramps and down and outs rub shoulders with trolls under Blackfriars Bridge. The Quiet People and the chimera are faced with having to adapt to a new world and the talking foxes are also changing their identity to become domesticated in order to adapt to urban living. Please refer to Appendix B for a table of quotes illustrating the above themes.

4.6 Theme 3: Policing the magical city

Criteria for inclusion within this theme include Peter Grant as police hero, non-ecological threats to the stability of the city, Mr Punch, riots and mob violence, domestic and international terrorism, police budget cuts, immigration, xenophobia and the role of the media. The third theme of policing magical London explores non-ecological threats to London, both magical and mundane and is divided into five sub-themes.

The first sub-theme identifies Peter Grant as the archetypal hero and traces his development towards maturity (individuation). The researcher coded frequent references to his mixed heritage and personal qualities that make him suited to his role of mediator. The second sub-theme examines threats to public order from Mr Punch who is frequently the instigator of mob violence and riots which need to be contained by the police. Punch is mentioned in every full-length book and is a key character in two novels *Rivers of London* and *Lies Sleeping*.

The third sub-theme of terrorism meets the criteria for inclusion as it represents a threat to the city and its inhabitants. Terrorism is closely bound up with immigration and the role of the media in creating public anxieties about perceived threats to the country from immigrants and asylum seekers. Martin Chorley the Faceless Man perpetuates domestic terror on Londoners whilst other groups bring terror from outside the borders of Britain.

The fourth sub-theme examines the effects of policing cuts and austerity Britain on public safety. This becomes a growing theme as the book cycle progresses, and under-resourced police have to weigh up budget constraints against operational demands. The fifth theme encompasses the real-life struggles of the Met to tackle racism and misogyny in the ranks. This is reflected by the attempts of the Folly to modernise and make itself fit for purpose in the twenty first century. Please refer to Appendix C for a table of quotes illustrating the above themes.

4.7 Overview of results

Given the diversity of the emergent themes elicited from textual analysis, a set of critical tools was identified to assist with interpretation. The large mythological strand

of the *genius loci*, the repeated imagery of water and Peter's growth as an individual and his interaction with father figures suggested Jungian myth criticism as a helpful approach. Jung's work on the unconscious and the shadow helped illuminate the significance of underground London and the key villains Mr Punch and the Faceless Man as the antithesis of Peter as hero. Other helpful analytical tools were adapted from monster theory, in particular Cohen's sociological approach to the monstrous, and psychogeography also provided assistance in decoding imagery and repeated patterns.

Analysis of the data allowed the researcher to come to some conclusions about the key messages of the books. In theme 1, 'the divided city', although the Thames is a divided entity, divisions are able to be overcome through the mediating influence of the mixed race Peter who is able to tread two worlds between the past as represented by Father Thames and the Folly, home to the remnants of the British magical police in the guise of Detective Chief Inspector Thomas Nightingale, and the modern Mama Thames and the Metropolitan Police force. This is a hopeful message of compromise and tolerance. Peter also successfully negotiates a peace in the inter-generational dispute between the two factions of the river Thames. Romano-British Father Thames and sons represent rural life and traditional Britain whereas post-1950 Nigerian Mama Thames and daughters represent modern multi-cultural urban Britain. The tensions between the two families also contain an element of class disparity with Tyburn and Fleet representing the power and vested interests of the ruling political elite, the arts and the media. Father Thames and family are rural working class including travelling communities with deep roots in the myths and legends of the land, and they are reluctant to give up their traditional rights to the urban section of the river. These two different worldviews allow Aaronovitch to comment on contemporary social issues as they echo many of the divisions in British politics between conservative and progressive approaches to social policy. Tensions engendered by social inequities ultimately led to the Levelling Up policy, a key feature of the Conservative Party's attempt to address some of the geo-economic inequalities within Britain.

Aaronovitch also uses the Thames to illustrate ecological issues within the capital. Many of the city rivers were culverted and diverted underground to a hidden world beneath the surface, but the potential of nature to disrupt the built environment

through flooding is an ever-present danger. The new generation of urban London rivers work hard to clean and rewild the inner-city watercourses, but the existential threat of inundation through climate change and flooding is repeatedly referenced through the characters of the river gods and goddesses. The divided river metaphor particularly lends itself to interpretation through Jungian analysis of the divided psyche with water, underground and flooding symbolic of the unconscious potential to overwhelm the conscious mind.

In contrast to the hopeful message of theme 1, theme 2, 'the city and identity' sorted data which established the identity of London and linked it to a history of trauma. The city is anthropomorphised, possessing a memory which Peter is occasionally able to access. The *genius loci* are the living embodiments of facets of London with distinct characteristics which together create a kaleidoscopic or fractured identity lacking any overall coherence. London is frequently portrayed under stress from war, terrorism, riots, poor urban planning and flooding. Destroyed landmarks including Covent Garden, the Royal Opera House, Harrods, Skygarden and Oxford Circus tube station, reflect a sense of dislocation and disorientation within real-world communities which have suffered physical and bureaucratic acts of violence. Frequent mentions are made to London's architectural past versus ugly new buildings erected without care for the citizens they serve.

The social history of London and the architectural history of ordinary buildings and notable landmarks are frequently explored within the texts, but two key historical events are referred to in all the novels and are presented as traumatising for the appearance and psyche of the inhabitants and the city itself. The first event is the trauma of the Blitz and the V1 and V2 rocket attacks in which an estimated 30,000 civilians were killed by 12,000 metric tonnes of ordinance dropped by the *Luftwaffe* (Imperial War Museum, 2023). The second event is the botched post-World War Two (WW2) rebuild in which lost communities were replaced with ugly social and community infrastructure and housing which prioritised architectural dogma over human need. Aaronovitch uses the metaphor of monstrous architecture sheltering damaged or even monstrous inhabitants to protest dehumanising public policy. The twin metaphors of mutilated faces and ugly or damaged buildings lend themselves to interpretation through psychogeography and monster theory.

Frequent references to puppetry and masks were also identified as a recurring motif representing how identity may be hidden, lost and possibly regained. Lesley May is forced to wear a mask after sequestration by Mister Punch results in severe facial mutilation. She is simultaneously hiding her betrayal of Peter and the Folly behind a façade of loyalty. The Faceless Man Martin Chorley also wears a mask to hide his identity as an ethically challenged magical practitioner, and faceless corporations hide behind masks of shell corporations.

Another pattern that emerged was the presentation of the *demi-monde* as refuge for the misfits of society living on the margins of what is considered socially acceptable. The characters of Zach, Lesley, Peter and the Faceless Men illustrate what it means to be a good or bad citizens. Finally, the Quiet People, the chimera and the foxes represent the mixed blessings of cultural adaptability.

Theme 3, 'policing the magical city' centres on the character of Peter who straddles the mundane world of the Metropolitan police force and the magical police of the Folly. The Met's 'working together for a safer London' slogan is adapted by the Folly to 'working together for a stranger London' as Peter and Nightingale keep the Queen's Peace within the magical *demi-monde*. Peter's journey towards maturity is explored and his morality and humanity impel him to stand up for the marginalised seeking fairness and justice for all. Forces of chaos and destruction are represented by the frequent appearances of Mr Punch who functions as counter to the rules-based philosophy of the police. As trickster and agent of chaos he is the antithesis of Peter and become his nemesis, representing Peter's shadow impulses.

The role of the police in modern Britain as upholders of Peelian policing by consent is explored and is juxtaposed with images of riots and public disorder that mirror real-life events in Britain. The real-world effects of cuts to police budgets become more acute as the novels progress. The data also revealed repeated references to terrorism and xenophobia which reference recent and more distant historical events. Finally, the efforts of the Folly to modernise are contrasted with the Met's struggles to overcome a toxic work culture.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of why textual analysis and thematic analysis were chosen as the most appropriate methods for a data set such as this corpus. The rationale for excluding the graphic novels and two novellas centred around peripheral characters was explained. The large size of the resulting corpus meant that coding for thematic strands was a long process of trial and error, but eventually three main strands emerged under the broad categories of 'the divided city', 'the city and identity' and 'policing the magical city'. Key findings were then outlined in a summary of the data, outlining how the fantastic secondary world of the books provides commentary on the primary world of London and the British Isles.

Chapter 5 The Divided City

5.1 Introduction

In order to answer the overall research question 'In what ways does the representation of the city in the *Rivers of London* novels reflect socio-political currents in contemporary Britain?' This chapter focusses on the sub-question; *How does Aaronovitch employ myth and allegory to interrogate sources of division in Britain?* In particular it analyses how Aaronovitch employs the allegory of the divided Thames to illustrate social tensions and environmental concerns within contemporary Britain to create a new mythology of conflict, synthesis and tolerance.

Drawing on psychological theory, especially Carl Jung's theories of archetypes and the collective unconscious, myth theory is employed to decode key themes within the *Rivers of London* novel series. The chapter is divided into three sections, beginning with a brief discussion of Jungian archetypes, allegory and myth criticism. The second section explores major points of tension within the books, focussing in turn on geographical, generational, ethnic, cultural, economic and class conflicts. The third section analyses the privileged position of London regarding the rest of the British Isles, underground London as a place of confrontation and integration, the environmental significance of the lost rivers, and the threat posed to the capital by flooding.

5.2 Jungian archetypes, allegory and myth theory

The world of the *Rivers* closely resembles primary, or real-world London, but Aaronovitch introduces fantastic elements by employing archetypal characters and familiar symbols, adapting them to modern Britain to create a new pantheon of nature deities. In the *Psychology of the Child Archetype* (1940/1968) Jung described archetypes as patterns or motifs which arise from the collective unconscious to form the content of human myth, religion and narratives such as fairy tales and legends. Sharp (1991, p. 14) writes that archetypes occur "on a personal level, through complexes, and collectively, as characteristics of whole cultures," and that Jung believed it was the task of each generation to reinterpret archetypes to make them relevant to a new age. Aaronovitch does this by reinterpreting ancient archetypes of

the wise father, the nurturing mother, the trickster and the hero and blending then with detailed descriptions of London architectural and geographical features. This allows for an exploration of conflict and identity in the capital and beyond. Old Father Thames is an ancient mythological figure who takes the form of an elderly white male water god. In an act of deistic revisionism Aaronovitch creates a new mythology better suited to multicultural 21st century Britain by reimagining the Thames as a dual entity comprised of female and male, urban and rural and multicultural elements. The conservative pre-War male monotheistic culture is replaced by a plurality of voices reflecting an emergent psyche bursting with possibilities.

The dual nature of the Thames as a tidal river below Teddington Lock and non-tidal above is employed by Aaronovitch as an exploration of cultural divisions between two opposing factions of river gods, whilst simultaneously acting as a metaphorical/mythological narrative about the changing demographics of Britain. In this new origin myth for the Thames, the Nigerian Mama Thames, reborn in the 1950s, controls the city tideway whilst Old Father Thames rules the rural upriver section. This metaphor is extended to encompass the tributary rivers which take the form of the respective children of Mama and Father Thames, and their interactions are employed to discuss the rural, urban divide and conservative versus progressive viewpoints. At first antagonistic towards each other, Aaronovitch is able to achieve a Jungian synthesis between the warring parties negotiated by the archetypal heroic figure Constable Peter Grant.

Like many urban fantasy texts, Aaronovitch's narrative probes into the historical-social structures underlying modern Britain. The ability of fantasy to comment indirectly through metaphorical language and analogy on real-life events is summed up by Attebery (2022, p. 14), "realism is very good at depicting form […] fantasy is better at probing hidden structures." Black (2003) makes similar claims to Rowland (2008), positing that fantasy writing may change the reader's worldview,

> Fantasy is naturally suited to metaphor and imagery, as the genre itself is a 'metaphorical mode', with its allegorical images serving as transport for ideas and feelings that can – at their most successful – result in an eventual restructuring of personal reality (Black, 2003, p. 48)

This “restructuring of personal reality” bears synergies with the aim of Jungian psychoanalysis to encourage the full potential of the subject through coming to terms with hidden (shadow) impulses. Therefore, the divided Thames and other fractures within the London of Aaronovitch readily lend themselves to interpretation through Jungian psychology and myth criticism. The underground tunnel systems and lost tributary rivers of the Thames may be interpreted as Jungian symbols of the cave, which in addition to representing the unconscious, are also places of transformation and rebirth (Yeoman & Lu, 2024). In Aaronovitch underground London is a place where fears and conflicts may be confronted and resolved. This occurs both at an individual level, and at the level of society, so when Peter descends underground he is confronting his own internal conflicts, and successfully resolving these allow him to enact change on the wider environment of London. Water and rivers permeate the novels and historically the flood barriers and culverting of the London rivers represent attempts by engineers to impose order on the natural world, but the ever-present threat of flooding is a reminder of the power of water (the unconscious) to disrupt the built environment of the human ego.

The *Rivers of London* novel series may be read as an extended allegory commenting on the rifts and tensions within modern Britain. According to Johnson, (2012, p. 4) allegory is similar in some ways to figures of speech such as simile, synecdoche, metonymy and metaphor because each of these “asks readers to understand or to see one thing in the terms of another.” Although Johnson further usefully comments that the mere fact of allegory within a narrative does not mean that the entire text should be read as exclusively allegorical (Johnson, 2012). The *Rivers* novels are a blend of genres including urban fantasy, police procedural and comedy and lack the sustained allegorical focus of for example Orwell’s *Animal Farm* (1945), so it is more accurate to claim that they contain a large allegorical element. However, allegories and myths may achieve similar effects as they are both types of analogy requiring the reader to impart meaning into story (Malan, 2016). In a Jungian reading of *The Rivers of London* the two factions of the Thames represent a struggle between the two halves of the psyche which must be integrated to avoid continued conflict.

5.3 The divided Thames

The Thames is the most important river in Britain with Schama (1995) claiming that it is metaphorically the bloodstream of the British nation. Akroyd (2007) discusses the centrality of the river to the English imagination and argues that it is inextricably linked to the fertility of the nation. However this unifying symbol of national identity is a dual entity in Aaronovitch's London; bisected at Teddington Lock with the eastern urban downstream tidal deities taking the form of largely black female avatars, and the western upstream rural deities represented by white, largely male characters including the Old Man of the River, Father Thames himself, "Downstream, the Thames was the sovereign domain of Mother Thames; upstream, it belonged to Father Thames. The dividing line was at Teddington Lock" (RL p. 81). This symbolic bisection of the river incorporates the mythohistorical as well as the geographical landscape, as Schama (1995, p. 5) writes "to go upstream was, I knew, to go backward: from metropolitan din to ancient silence, westward towards the source of the waters, the beginning of Britain and the Celtic limestone." Schama articulates the mythological significance of the upstream of all great rivers such as the Nile, the Tiber, the Seine and the Thames. The source representing a mythologised Eden with the course of history flowing downstream towards civilisation and urbanity. It is significant that Father Thames has exiled himself to the headwaters, shunning the city and literally fighting the tide that leads inexorably from rural innocence to urban corruption.

The centrality of the Thames to the British concept of self (Schama, 1995; Akroyd, 2007) means that the Thames serves as complex metaphor for ecological crisis and mitigation, a divided Britian and a nation regenerated by immigration. This acute sensitivity to the psychogeography of the "distributed selfhood" (Attebery, 2022, p. 15) of the London topography and the rich layers of history and myth that form the body of the city mark Aaronovitch as an accomplished world builder. His world is meticulously linked to real London and geographically exact, full of detail about one-way systems and traffic flow. There are few vague locations, and most scenes are precisely placed within the body of the city. It is possible to use Google maps to follow the exact geographic progress of the characters (McLeod, 2022). This extensive naming of buildings, shops, streets, parks and other topoi places the reader within a hyper-realistic insider's rendition of the city whilst frequent references to historical events

and legends remind the reader of the mythos of London as a historical-architectural entity. Aaronovitch employs eco-critical commentary through reference to the built environment and changing land use patterns. The plethora of non-human or para-human characters also challenge the status of humankind and arguably calls into question the stewardship of homo sapiens over the planet.

According to Von Hendy's (2002) ethnological interpretation of myth the usefulness of myths to explain modern society lies in the fact that "'literature' is an increasingly secularized analogue of sacred narrative" (p. 14). As literature has filled the void left by decreasing religiosity in western culture, myths have survived as a way to make sense of the world and account for repeating patterns of behaviour. Furthermore, "the more intensively a tale has been worked into the fabric of a culture, the more likely it is to be worked further" (p. 15) thus explaining the perennial appeal of popular myths such as Oedipus' complex relationship with his mother (Hamlet, Psycho) or Prometheus' punishment for hubris, famously embodied by Doctor Frankenstein. For Britons the mythological figure of Old Father Thames is well established in the national consciousness, so Aaronovitch's reworking of the symbolism is both a satisfying retelling of an old story, but also a radical questioning of long-established beliefs. By focussing on the way Aaronovitch portrays the *genii locorum* of the two halves of the Thames this chapter will go some way towards filling the gap in the literature of the urban fantastic and the intersection of fantasy and contemporary real-life concerns relating to divisions within the United Kingdom.

5.3.1 The divided Thames: Urban versus rural life

Reconciliation of opposites is at the heart of Jungian psychology. In order to achieve a sense of wholeness which in turn allows growth and wellbeing, opposing forces within the self, such as the anima (female aspect of the male psyche) and the animus (male aspect of the female) must be accepted and harmonised to resolve inner conflicts. The synthesis of opposing aspects of the self, such as the rational and irrational, the unconscious and conscious and male and female is referred to as the syzygy (Casement, 2021). In the *Rivers* novels opposites are paired against each other: male and female *genius loci,* white and non-white ethnic groups, human and non-human, and urban and rural communities. The key figure in resolving these conflicts is the narrator and hero, Peter Grant. Peter himself is comfortable with his mixed-race

heritage and insider/outsider status as police officer. It could be said that he is already advanced in the process of assimilation of opposites and is well placed to help resolve opposing tensions in others. Peter represents the archetypal hero and his hero's journey is discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

Peter is especially interested in architecture, and the texts are peppered with his sardonic commentary on modernist buildings. He is highly attuned to the urban environment and is uncomfortable in the countryside,

> "I don't understand how you can know five types of brick bond," he [Nightingale] said, "but you can't identify the most common of trees."
>
> Actually, I knew about twenty-three types of brick bond if you counted Tudor and the other early modern styles, but I kept that to myself. (BH p. 16)

This personal bias means that he is better placed to understand the urban court of Mama Thames, and he initially struggles to understand the rural community of Father Thames.

The town, country divide has a long history in British literature (Addison, 2012; Horner and Zlosnik, 2005; Williams, 1973). Heidemann (2020) states that "the rural and the urban serve as a template to diagnose other forms of division in Britain – racial, social, cultural, and economic" (p. 676). Whilst acknowledging the fractures within the British polis as a whole, these critics fail to explore fractures within the capital itself. This gap in the literature provides a useful way of approaching an analysis of Aaronovitch. In the same way that William (1973) identified the country house as an imperial structure, contrasted with the rural countryside of the agricultural worker, the *Rivers of London* series juxtaposes the genteel Georgian Folly, home of British magic against modernist architecture such as the brutalist Sky Garden, or Peter's council estate home. Aaronovitch often portrays famous landmarks under stress such as a flooded Covent Garden, a wrecked Harrods or a demolished Oxford Circus Underground Station. These images are confronting, and the damaged face of London is discussed in more detail in chapter six.

Aside from the Thames, most of the rivers of the capital are culverted and hidden, thus the book series' title refers to an occult, suppressed world running parallel to the

everyday. In Jungian terms, the underground represents the chthonic mother and hidden forces of the unconscious (Yeoman & Lu, 2024), and water is a symbol of femininity and fertility. Despite having the surface appearance of escapist fantasy, once viewed from a Jungian perspective, the book series explores old and new fractures within the (dis)United Kingdom and offers a hopeful resolution by establishing a new origin myth for London which better reflects contemporary demographics. As the title suggests, Aaronovitch's novels are set largely within London and ventures into the countryside are treated almost as forays into an unknown country. Whilst the capital is stressed and damaged, the ancient town, country divide remains a source of tension which is symptomatic of wider fractures within British society.

Jung postulated a collective unconscious which is a part of the human psyche that is inherited and shared with other humans and that archetypes were universal human symbols dwelling in the collective unconscious (Shiraev, 2017). One of the key archetypes is the ruler, and Mama and Father Thames represent different aspects of the ruler archetype. The patriarch Father Thames is the archetypal father/ruler and the largely male rural Thames tributaries represented by himself and his sons are portrayed as country-loving characters who uphold tradition and look to the past as a source of strength and guidance. Father Thames' origins are ancient, dating back to at least the Romano-British period and his name, we find out was originally Tiberius Claudius Verica. Peter deduces that "Verica wasn't a Latin name, I suspected it was British," as many British nobles who became Roman citizens "kept their native name and prefixed the praenomen and nomen of their sponsors – in this case the Emperor [Claudius]" (RL p. 275). Father Thames is portrayed as a countryman who views the city with suspicion and more than a little resentment, blaming industrialisation and resulting pollution for the death of his sons. Father Thames' son, the *genius loci* Oxley explains, "The Old Man has never loved the city, not since it killed his sons […] Ty and Fleet and Effra. All drowned in a flood of muck and filth and finally put out of their misery by that clever bastard Bazalgette" (RL p. 142). Joseph Bazalgette was chief engineer of the Board of Works who oversaw the construction of the London sewer network built in the Victorian era and still in use today. Oxley is the eldest surviving son, "about twelve hundred years old" but has hazy memories, of the past whereas he

claims, “The Old Man remembers everything” (LS p. 115). Father Thames is thus the keeper of ancient knowledge and traditions dating to the druids and perhaps beyond. Peter speculates that the source of this power comes from the earth, forces of weather phenomena and the indigenous magical creatures of Britain,

> They both have genuine power […]. But it feels different; hers [Mama Thames] is from the sea, from the port and all that. His is from the earth and the weather and leprechauns and crystals for all I know. (RL pp. 144-5).

In this key passage Peter articulates the elemental differences between the two rulers. Mama Thames is explicitly linked to the sea and the port. The sea is a symbol of the vastness of the collective unconscious and the female principle (Jung, 1969). The port is a place of commerce where the land and sea intermingle and salty tidal waters support fishing and shipping but can cause damage to crops. The tidal Thames is intimately connected to the wealth of London as a trading centre and urban power. In comparison Father Thames is a river god deeply rooted in the earth and ancient myths and rituals of Britain. Although the origins of Father Thames are obscured by time, Ackroyd (2001) suggests that he shares links with other tutelary gods of the Tiber and the Nile, and his long hair evokes the flow of the water. Aaronovitch mythologises him as a pre-Christian fertility god complete with symbolic accoutrements of power. His throne is made from haybales covered in embroidered horse blankets “near the priory in the shade of an ancient yew tree” (RL p. 296). The horse is a symbol of the water god Neptune, and due to its evergreen nature the yew symbolises everlasting life and rebirth and was sacred to pre-Christian Druids. The yew tree also symbolised death and resurrection for the Celts (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, n.d.). Father Thames marks the changing of the seasons, holding court at Spring and Midsummer. Where he urinates wild flowers grow (BH p. 149) which articulates a direct link between the life-giving properties of his waters and the fertility of the soil, as well as an agrarian uncomplicated approach to bodily functions. These images are evocative of an old England of the past, closely connected to the land and myth of the countryside.

The upper Thames family run their lives in close connection to the seasons, and the rhythm of their life is regulated by agricultural land use and the ancient solar calendar with gatherings on the Spring Equinox and the Summer Solstice. Peter deduces that

the spring court is held at Trewsbury Mead because “it’s the source of his river […]. Where else is he going to go in the spring?” “He’ll have arrived there around about the Spring Equinox, which was last week, and he’ll stay until All Fool’s Day” (RL p. 135). Peter has a deep understanding of the power of symbols and so his solution to the Thames conflict is to arrange a symbolic hostage swap in which Mama Thames’ daughter Beverely Brook is fostered on the upper Thames whilst Ash, Father Thames’ son moves the city. This “medieval solution designed to appeal to two people who definitely still believed in divine-rights” (RL p. 137) expresses trust in the other party as well as binding each party to good behaviour or risk losing a loved family member. Significantly, the exchange takes place at Runnymede on Midsummer's eve. Runnymede on the Thames was the site of the signing of the Magna Carta which established the key principle of English law that no one, including the King is above the law. It also established the right to unimpeded navigation of waterways. According to Chertsey Museum (2014, n.p.), the Magna Carta stated that,

> “all fish-weirs shall be removed from the Thames, the Medway, and throughout the whole of England, except on the sea coast”. It was important to those who lived and worked on the rivers as weirs slowed down the flow of the water resulting in sediments being deposited until silting of the river meant it was no longer navigable, affecting trade.

In constructing a new myth for the fractured river Thames and in enacting a Jungian synthesis between the warring parties, Aaronovitch evokes the historical symbolism of the site to legitimise the peace.

In another example of how Aaronovitch weaves historical fact with creative fantasy, Father Thames resembles King John forced to make concessions to his nobles in order to retain his crown. Once King of the entire river, he reluctantly concedes to the status quo and acknowledges the new power in the lower tidal waters. This process can be interpreted as Father Thames becoming reconciled to his anima, the feminine unconscious part of his nature which is traditionally thought of as passive. By embracing his anima Father Thames avoids a bloody conflict and demonstrates deep wisdom, repressing his ego for the benefit of his family, and London as a whole. In doing so he embodies the wise father archetype.

In keeping with the conservative values of the countryside, the ancient rituals of rural Britain are maintained by those who live along the path of the upper river; some people are not consciously aware of the source of their behaviours, but others seem to be cognisant of the fact that a river deity moves amongst them in the guise of an elderly man,

> Most people thought the little rituals they performed – the occasional bottle of beer left out in a riverside garden, the champagne broken on the bow of a boat, the odd bit of bank work or rewilding […]. These were harmless little superstitions. Others entered directly into a pact because the blessing of the Old Man of the River could raise wild flowers out of season and cause HSE inspectors and bank managers to let things slide until the business picks up. (LS p. 108)

This link to the past and respect for tradition means the upper Thames deities may be considered by some to be anachronistic, clinging to a bygone era which Mama Thames' family believes outmoded, but which many Britons, particularly those living rurally, value as an integral part of their identity. Father Thames has power over the natural word causing flowers to bloom and exerts influence over political institutions such as the Health and Safety Executive. Again, an analogy may be drawn between these two river factions, and wider divisions in Britain over traditional conservative values and more progressive views that reflect changing demographics and societal norms. Even their choice of vehicle marks the two Thames factions; Mama Thames' daughter Bevereley Brook drives a brand new yellow Mini convertible (RL), while "Oxley drove a Triumph sidecar combination, and on the rare occasions that Father Thames drove himself, it was in a Morris Minor Traveller estate" (AOW p. 39). The upper Thames family are reluctant adopters of technology, guardians of a traditional way of life and Beverly complains that during her stay with Father Thames, "There was no internet or other electronics" (LS p. 110). Father Thames' family may be viewed as technophobic, but they have seen how rampant technology can cause catastrophic damage to the environment, and the original Fleet, Tyburn and Effra paid a heavy price for the rise of London as a world power and commercial centre.

The antithesis of the ancient, white, rural upper Thames clan, Mama Thames was a Nigerian trainee nurse who committed suicide in the 1950s by jumping into the Thames off London Bridge and was reborn as a goddess. Now Orisa of the tidal

Thames, Mama Thames retains a surprising amount of resentment about her earlier mortal life. She claims not to remember her own name but remembers that “there were too many Igbo” [a Nigerian tribal group] in my class,” and “because of those stupid patients I failed my exams.” She also remembers the name of “my beautiful Robert” who jilted her in favour of “a white bitch Irish woman” (RL p. 86). As a newly formed goddess her ego is largely unchecked, and her casual racism is shocking. This passage illustrates that her path to assimilation of her shadow self and journey towards self-realisation has only just begun.

Mama Thames is goddess of the tidal river south of Tedding Lock where it runs through the centre of London. The archetypal female ruler, her power is generated from the port, commerce, industry and the sea and her magical signature is “saltwater and coffee, diesel and bananas, chocolate and fish guts” (RL p. 84). Mama Thames has her throne room in a converted warehouse in Wapping, in contrast to Father Thames’ ancient British yew, she is covered by a mangrove tree, symbolic of her African origins and her throne is the “finest of the executive armchairs. Her hair was braided and threaded with black cotton and tipped with gold so that it stood above her brow like a crown” (RL p. 84). She holds court in a largely black-dominated household with the exception of the River Lea and Uncle Bailiff an odd jobs man with a swastika tattoo who fell under her influence and never left. In contrast to the agricultural working sons of “Baba Thames”, the daughters of Mama Thames are educated and sophisticated, with Tyburn earning a double first from Oxford and Beverley pursuing a degree in Environmental Science (LS, p. 234).

As London is built on a large floodplain, in the past the rivers frequently burst their banks, as well as providing convenient open sewers for the expanding city. The act of culverting the rivers represented human engineers’ attempts to master the power of natural forces. However, the culverting has proven to be only partially successful as London is still prone to flooding, and as Mama Thames relates so vividly to Peter, her tidal surge and flooding could drown London and overwhelm any man-made barrier ever erected, “Ready to drive to drive a wall of water ten metres high up the river and bring down the bridges, towers and Uncle Tom Cobley and all” (RL pp. 274-275). In a Jungian sense Mama Thames represents the animus, or masculine part in a woman’s unconscious. She vigorously asserts her rights to the lower portion of the river and is

not afraid to threaten destruction of the city she rules. The imagery of “drive” evokes another Jungian archetype, that of the Chariot tarot trump which brings the masculine energy of a young king, or “new-fledged ego” exerting his will over the vehicle he controls, feeling “that he can ride roughshod towards whatever goal he may choose” (Nichols, 1980, pp. 144-5). As Mama Thames experienced her elevation to goddess in the 1950s, she is a new deity, lacking Old Father Thames’ accumulated wisdom and ability to recognise necessary change. Her unchecked ego coupled with her power means that she is dangerously unstable. Peter recognises this and plays to her weakness, paving the way towards reconciliation with the upper Thames by propitiating her with an articulated lorry full of alcohol.

5.3.2 Generational divisions

The obvious ethnic and generational divide between the upper and lower Thames can be read as an allegory for multicultural London and its changing demographics with the conservative rural communities pitched against urban cosmopolitanism. In accordance with the purported more flexible attitudes of urban centres towards LGBGT+ communities, the sexual orientation of the younger Thames goddesses is more varied than the upper Thames men. Father Thames’ signature is clearly heterosexual, and Peter describes “the force of his personality” drag at him promising “beer and skittles […] a warm fireside and uncomplicated women” (RL p. 138). The hypermasculinity of the Upper Thames family can also be seen in the pissing contest which Peter is invited to join as part of the midsummer festivities. Oxley is in a long-term relationship with the river Isis who describes herself as “twice married and a mother” (RL p. 141) before she met Oxley. Although there is limited information on Father Thames’ other sons, they are described as being in conventional marriages, “Around him were arrayed his sons, their wives and his grandchildren” (RL p. 297). Ash, the hostage from the upper Thames shows a relaxed sexuality, and although he is largely heterosexual, after spending some time in the city he has an encounter with a male, “I didn’t know he was a guy until we got back to the room […] and I was having such a good time I thought, why not?” (MOS p. 90). The river Ash runs past Shepperton Film Studios and Ash is described as having movie star good looks, perhaps the broad-minded culture of the entertainment industry has influenced Ash’s fluid approach to sexuality. In contrast to the more conventional upper Thames clan, Mama Thames’ daughter Effra is in a same-

sex, inter-species relationship with a fae which is considered a little risqué even by Beverley “Scandalous, isn’t it?” (FS p. 323). Lady Tyburn’s daughter Olivia McAllister-Thames is also in a same sex relationship with a school friend.

Another aspect of the generation divide can be seen in the relationship between Peter Grant and his “master” Detective Chief Inspector Thomas Nightingale, also Britain’s last official wizard. Although Peter baulks at the term, “I said the word in my head and it kept on coming out *massa.* ‘Couldn’t I just call you Inspector instead?’” (RL p. 56). Nightingale, born in 1900 shares a conservative outlook with Father Thames in that he is a reluctant adopter of technology and drives a Mark 2 Jaguar from the 1960s which Peter who drives a Ford Focus greatly admires. Although a man of the past, Nightingale is sensitive enough to realise the colonial connotations of the word master, and tells Peter, “And you can call me Inspector” (RL p. 56). Nightingale is the wise father archetype who nurtures and protects Peter, in contrast to his biological heroin addicted father. Nightingale also represents the magician archetype in his role as Britain’s last official wizard, and head of the Folly. According to Nichols, (1980, p. 45) the Magician tarot trump initiates the process of self-realisation or individuation. He is a guide “into the underworld of our deepest selves.” Nightingale initiates Peter into the world of magic, taking him into the Folly as his first apprentice and guides Peter through the first stages of his hero’s journey (Campbell, 1947/2004).

Nightingale also represents an older generation of the traditionally stiff upper lip Englishman, whilst Peter represents the younger metrosexual male who is not afraid to admit that he visits a counsellor (LS p. 402). Hugh Oswald, Nightingale’s near-contemporary similarly congratulates Nightingale on his choice of apprentice, “Nightingale’s starling. Tough and clever, that’s what he always said he was looking for in an apprentice” (FS p. 115). The allegorical nature of the *Rivers* novels is betrayed by Peter’s nickname of “the Starling” and his master’s title “the Nightingale”. The definitive article and capitalisation bestowing a symbolic significance reminiscent of the personified abstractions of Constance, Hopeful and the Giant Despair in the *Pilgrims Progress.* Starlings feature strongly in folklore and are connected to communication as they can mimic human speech, and divination where their murmurations were closely observed in ancient Rome. They have adapted well to the urban environment and have a reputation for being exceptionally clever. Emanating

from an earlier, less industrial age, Nightingale, as his name implies, has a much more rural background than Peter and is familiar with British flora and fauna.

The *genius loci* Beverley Brook is a key figure in the narrative, as Peter's lover, and later mother of their twin girls, but she is also one of the main drivers of Aaronovitch's eco-criticism and, with Peter, is key to the enhanced understanding between the two river factions. Beverley represents a younger demographic and in Jungian terms signifies the desire of the ego to assert itself. However, she is willing to learn and grow and also embodies the archetype of the wise divine child who surpasses its parents in wisdom. In Beverley's case this is both literally true as a goddess in her own right, and metaphorically true as she transcends her survival-based ego and moves towards maturity and individuation. Jung posits the birth of the divine child as a "coming to consciousness of the self" (Jung, CW 11, para 714, cited in Lilla, 2013). The divine child represents radical change and new beginnings and is therefore "a threat to the status quo" (Leeming, 2014b, p. 516). This is a key concept in Aaronovitch's new mythology which rejects simplistic binary divisions of the past and reimagines a better Britain which is able to assimilate the traditional wisdom of Father Thames with the energy of new cultures represented by Mama Thames.

Whilst living in the countryside as part of hostage exchange Beverley learns a great deal about the agricultural way of life and changing land use in Britain. Prior to this Beverely was almost as ignorant as Peter about ecological concerns. Peter summarises for the reader that once Britain was covered by the wildwood until approximately 6,000 years ago when agriculturist began to clear the forest to plant "fancy genetically modified crops" and raise "artificially mutated cattle, sheep and goats" (FS p.143). Peter betrays his city origins and employs tabloid shorthand language of "genetically modified" and "artificially mutated" to explain the long process of selective breeding that has produced modern breeds. Beverely goes on to explain that there are only remnants of the wildwood left, "By the Middle Ages most of it was gone and Britain entered the Napoleonic War desperate for timber" (FS p. 143). Beverley adds a summary of changing land use and recent growing environmental awareness of the importance of species diversity (FS p. 142).

Peter questions Beverley about how she knows about this, and she replies,

> it's all anyone involved in working the countryside ever talks about […]. That and the vagaries of the EU subsidy regime and how evil the supermarkets are. Anyway, ground cover has a critical impact on water tables and flow rates, so you can bet we all take an interest in that – even Tyburn who's pretty much a storm drain from one end to the other. (FS p. 143)

The divine child Beverley has not only learned about the political and environmental issues affecting rural life, with frequent complaints from primary producers about the asymmetrical power relations with supermarkets (Whitehead, 2024), but she has also understood that the two Thames factions have a lot more in common than she first realised. As she explains, both the lower and upper sections of the river are directly affected by human influence on reduced ground cover which impacts on water flow, which is vital to the health of any waterway. Thanks to her stay with Father Thames, she has a better understanding of the rural way of life and a longer historical perspective on evolving geography. Crucially, she willingly shares her insights with Peter, educating him about the countryside and the importance of ecology. As the novels progress Peter becomes increasingly interested in conservationism, at first barely able to distinguish one bird from another he becomes actively involved in rewilding Beverley Brook's banks[1]. However, Beverley's youth is betrayed by a slightly scathing attitude to Tyburn, perhaps based on the fact that Beverley Brook is largely free flowing in the open. This is in contrast to the Tyburn stream, which along with the Fleet, was incorporated into Bazalgette's sewer system in the 1860s. The process of acquiring wisdom is a life-long project and the youthful Beverley's ego asserts its need for dominance at the expense of her elder sister.

5.3.3 Ethnic and cultural divisions

The basic premise of Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* series is that some of the ancient spirits of London watercourses are regenerated through new souls sourced from Britain's former colonies. This offers an ecological perspective on contemporary British urban society. By creating a new mythology of the river Thames and a London

[1] "quite a large part of our relationship involves me wading hip deep in the river [placing] hurdles which can be carefully placed in the river to promote meandering […] which promotes biodiversity and mitigates flash flooding" (FV p. 235).

populated with gods and goddesses from non-white backgrounds, Aaronovitch challenges traditional cultural archetypes. Recasting London's greatest river as a Nigerian immigrant nurse subverts the traditional Old Father Thames legend and casting mixed race Peter Grant (and later Abigail Kamara) as magical apprentice upsets the archetype of the young white apprentice from T. H. White to J. K. Rowling. By blending new and old motifs, Aaronovitch presents a fresh and hopeful way of approaching contemporary tensions such as racial conflict and the town, country divide. There is a growing body of critical work examining gender, race and cultural issues in fantasy, however most critics point out how texts fail to successfully engage with these issues and often find the texts falling short of sensitive and realistic portrayal of minority and non-normative cultural groups (Young, 2014; Palmer-Patel, 2020; Helford, 2000; Hourihan, 1997; Misra, 2021; Turner-Vorbeck, 2009; Thomas, 2019; Westfahl, 1997). For example, Anyiwo (2019) highlights how the British television show *Penny Dreadful* "reinforce[s] images of race rather than contesting them" (p. 132). However, there is little scholarship on successful attempts to place marginalised groups such as characters of colour or from religious and cultural minority backgrounds front and central in the fantasy narrative. It is easier to point out poor examples, rather than celebrate successful examples of writing diversity. Aaronovitch is singled out as unusual by McLeod (2022, p. 212) who relates that 13.3% of London residents identify as coming from a black ethnic background, but only 2% of the corpus of 36 fantasy fiction books written for children from 2000 to 2021 featured black protagonists. The titular character of Aaronovitch's *What Abigail Did That Summer* (2021) is a black female, the thirteen-year-old cousin of Peter Grant who subsequently becomes a key character in the full-length novels.

The handful of critics to engage with Aaronovitch thus far, largely focus on his treatment of non-normative characters. McLeod (2022), and Lethbridge (2017) praise Aaronovitch for his diversity, Lethbridge (2010, p. 236) writes that "Aaronovitch emphasises the need to turn difference and diversity into an asset", and Borowska-Szerszun, (2019, p. 2) comments that he "offers an intriguing vision of [a] racially, ethnically and socially diversified London." She notes that Aaronovitch challenges our presumption of whiteness by describing characters as white, "Sergeant Anthony Finnegan, who was a large, imposing white man with no neck" (AOW p. 321), in

contrast to most writers who only mention ethnicity when describing non-white characters. In fact, Aaronovitch does more than challenge the reader's presumption of whiteness, he also challenges other normative assumptions by celebrating pluralism in all categories, such as the Scottish Islamic convert Dr Abdul Haqq Walid, and the Science Museum curator "Cherise Desroche […] a white dwarf-woman with her straight shoulder-length hair dyed a lurid anime red" (FV p. 79). Aaronovitch's cast of characters are as super-diverse (Vertovec, 2007) as the city they inhabit.

Borowska-Szerszun (2019) presents a largely race-based reading of the *Rivers* novels, and points out that,

> As the supernatural inhabitants of London are construed as minority groups that function outside or on the margins of the official system, various attitudes towards them can be examined as a representation of racial and social issues that are often ignored in fantasy fiction (Borowska-Szerszun, 2019, p. 8)

Lethbridge (2017, p. 238) confirms the obvious race-based elements of the novel series, pointing out that Peter first encounters the opposing groups of *genii locorum* in a "race-related gang warfare" when he and Nightingale are called in to investigate "a group of IC1 [white] males dressed in jeans and donkey jackets fighting with an unknown number of IC3 [black] females on Riverside Road" (RL p. 96). This Thames turf war is a literary reflection of the real-world's "historical and contemporary anxieties about the impact of immigration" as Lethbridge (2017, p. 238) puts it. The white upper Thames and the black lower Thames is a metaphor for racial divisions and tensions. According to the 2021 census London's ethnicity is made up of 53.8% White, of whom 36.8% are White British. Asian British consist of 20.8% of the population, Black British 13.5%, Mixed 5.7% and Other 6.3%. This is in marked contrast to the London of 1961 where only 2.3% of the population were of non-white ethnicity (UK Government, 2021).

Inevitably, such enormous social changes bring both opportunities and challenges, and Borowska-Szerszun cites Littler and Naidoo's notion of 'white past, multicultural present', describing a phenomenon that,

> occurs simultaneously as a lament and a celebration—a celebration of our nation being modern, young, hip and in tune with the globalised

> economy as well as harbouring a nostalgia and lament for a bygone contained, safe and mono cultural world. (Littler & Naidoo, 2004, as cited in Borowska-Szerszun, 2019, p. 3)

The monocultural male world is represented by Father Thames and sons, in contrast to the vibrant female world of Mama Thames and her daughters. However, there is more than ethnic and geographical differences between the divided Thames factions, Mama Thames harbours an anger with Father Thames who she sees as abandoning his role as deity and protector of the city,

> When he [Father Thames] was a young man he stood where I stood, on the bridge, [London Bridge] and made the same promises I did. But he hasn't been below Teddington Lock since the Great Stink of 1858. He never came back, not even after Bazalgette put the sewers in. Not even for the blitz, not even when the city was burning. (RL p. 88)

The blitz was a particularly traumatic time for the city and will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter. For Mama Thames, the archetypal female ruler, sworn to protect London, to abandon the city at this crucial, low point is a crime of dereliction of duty, or worse, indolence, "since he couldn't be bothered to step up for the Festival of Britain, let alone the Blitz, he can't just arrive and demand to sit at the head of the table" (BH p. 122). As far as she is concerned Father Thames has lost the moral right of access to his ancient domain. The key role of a tutelary deity is to protect and nurture the city, and Father Thames has conspicuously failed to do this, abandoning London to the ravages of pollution and war. The tensions between the two Thames deities can be read as generational, cultural or ethnic conflict, but at the heart of it is Father Thames' failure to adapt to the modern era. Through his mythopoeic reinterpretation of the legend of the Thames, Aaronovitch has updated old stories to reflect modern multicultural Britain.

Borowska-Szerszun, (2019) cites the mixed-race origins of Peter Grant as son of a Sierra Leone cleaner and a heroin addicted white jazz musician father as evidence of subversion of Young's (2015) "habits of whiteness" However this reading is somewhat simplistic, as well as inaccurate; at the risk of being pedantic, Peter's father is London born and bred, not Scottish as claimed by Borowska-Szerszun, "'Lucky for you she [Peter's nan] unevacuated us back to Stepney before the end of the war. Or we might have been Welsh' – in my dad's eyes a fate worse than being Scottish" (MOS p.44).

And Peter outlines his genealogy in the line, “Generations of Cockney geezers on my dad’s side were yelling at me that this was a diabolical liberty and he deserved a good kicking” (MOS p.205).

A more salient criticism of Borowska-Szerszun’s (2019) interpretation, however, is that she misreads Father Thames “as a representative of the old, colonial or even earlier feudal order” (p. 16). In point of fact the upper Thames family belong to a group that includes travelling show-people, and far from representing Britain’s imperial past, they are often regarded as an outgroup in British society, associated with a transient way of life and antisocial behaviour, often subject to the type of racism aimed at Romany groups. As an ancient god, Father Thames follows a nomadic progress through his domain, as highlighted in Peter’s description of his progress to the Spring Equinox, cited above. Peter’s growing understanding of the travelling culture occurs as he proceeds through his heroic story arc. His first impressions on visiting the camp in *Rivers of London* (2011) is an ego fear driven reactive response to stereotypes, “A London copper doesn’t like to intrude upon a traveller camp with anything less than a van full of bodies in riot gear” (RL p. 136). In *Foxglove Summer* (2014) however, Peter’s macho attitude has evolved and he is able to contextualise the unique nature of the travelling fair community, demonstrating how his understanding has enhanced under Nightingale’s tutelage, “Nightingale had told me that a few of the families are part of the great informal mesh of agreements that link horse fair to showground to winter camp to the old ways and byways of Medieval Europe” (FS pp. 196-197). In *Face Value* (2020) Peter has come to understand that “The showmen […] have a strong connection to the old traditions and the old wisdoms” and if it were not for the showmen “remembering to propitiate the Goddess of the River Fleet every midsummer, the whole area could easily go back to being a malarial swamp” (FV p. 26). In this passage Aaronovitch is blending eco-criticism into his mythopoeic reimagining of London. The nomadic communities including those of Father Thames are an essential element in maintaining the ecosystems. Their traditions help maintain the harmonious balance of nature and the showmen respect the *genii locorum* of the rivers, remembering that even culverted rivers are untamed facets of nature. Aaronovitch’s vision is far more than “nostalgia and lament for a bygone contained, safe and mono cultural world” (Littler & Naidoo, 2004 cited in Borowska-Szerszun, 2019). In fact, both Mama Thames’

nurturing and revitalisation of the city, and Father Thames' maintenance of the old ways are vital for the health of the river. For the new synthesis to occur both elements of the divided Thames, the anima and animus must both fully engage to achieve syzygy or the divine couple.

Aaronovitch's description of Father Thames is also rural working-class, far from Borowska-Szerszun's (2019) cultural elite responsible for establishing and maintaining Empire,

> Short, with a pinched face dominated by a beaky nose and a heavy brow […]. A battered homburg was jammed on his head, whisps of white hair escaping from underneath, and a cigarette dangled from his lip. (RL p. 137-138)

In a clear statement of Father Thames' proletarian character, his dishevelled dress including brass watch fob, tellingly not gold, is contrasted with Nightingale, "With his height and good suit Nightingale should have looked like the lord of the manor mixing with the commoners, but there was no deference in the way Father Thames sized him up" (RL p. 138). For the midsummer hostage exchange "The Old Man of the River had been stuffed into his best suit and his hair and beard combed until merely scruffy-looking" (RL p. 297) in a reference to his hirsute depictions in art as well as his proletarian roots. The Thames sons are "arrayed in all their donkey jacket and sideburned glory" (RL p. 297) which is almost a caricature of the travelling show communities of the 1960s and 1970s with the donkey jacket an emblem of pride in manual labour. Eldest son Oxley has a "large calloused hand" (RL p. 139), again a working-class marker, and Peter even describes him as Isis' "bit of rough" (RL p. 176) further contextualising the upper Thames clan as intimately related to the soil and manual labour.

Whilst Mama Thames's grown daughters are fashionable professionals, Father Thames' family are connected to the travelling fairs which are such as feature of traditional British culture (Toulmin, 1997). At his first meeting with Father Thames and his travelling show entourage, Peter comments, "Every copper knows that the funfairs of Great Britain are run by the Showmen, a collection of interwoven families so clannish that they officially constitute a separate ethnic group of their own" (RL p. 137). In a telling passage Lady Tyburn calls them by the racial slur "the Pikeys" (RL p.

183). “Not the sort of people one wants one’s sister associating with” (RL p. 183). Peter is shocked by the term and explains that “Pikey is a word for Gypsies that a well bought up young policeman is not supposed to know” (RL p. 183). A 2021 OFCOM (Office of Communications) report listed ‘Pikey’ as a “highly offensive” racial term of abuse (p. 2) which needs strong contextualisation before being used. Tyburn’s casual use of racist language echoes her mother’s description of the “white bitch Irish woman” and indicates the unconscious attitudes of an unexamined psyche.

By presenting the Thames as two warring factions who find a harmonious solution to their differences, Aaronovitch’s syncretic approach is a hopeful vision where Britain has successfully negotiated the transition from the past to embrace the advantages of diversity in a synthesis of old and new. His portrayal of ethnic tension is also nuanced and complex, far more reflective of the issues in British society than the simplistic white equals yearning for lost empire and black equals “conviviality and ‘commonplace diversity’” (p. 20) as suggested by Borowska-Szerszun. Borowska-Szerszun (2019) does, however correctly identify the mixed-race, bicultural police officer Peter Grant as the key to resolving the river feud, or as he calls it, the “exciting intergenerational and ethnic conflict that makes life in the big city worth living” (BH p. 121-2). Lethbridge (2017) agrees that Peter’s hybrid nature as the son of a jazz musician and a professional cleaner gives him both practical and artistic skills which allow him to forge links “between social and cultural components which are depicted as drifting dangerously apart in a contemporary London struggling with social imbalances” (p. 237). The rapid changes that have made London a super-diverse city (Vertovec, 2007) make race and ethnicity a highly relevant topic for discussion, and the young, mixed-race narrator Peter Grant is the perfect intermediary with an understanding of both factions. Nightingale realises this and tasks him with a diplomatic mission, “I think you might have a unique insight into this problem. I want you to go and have a word with Mama Thames […]. Find out what the problem is and see if you can find an amicable solution” (RL p. 81). Nightingale, the wise father archetype acts as a catalyst in the hero’s journey. Jung equated the archetype of the magician with male wisdom,

> The wise old man appears in dreams in the guise of a magician, doctor, priest, teacher, professor, grandfather, or any person possessing authority. […] It is his function to give helpful guidance or counsel, and

> he often makes his appearance at a moment of bewilderment. (Jung cited in Sharp, 1991, n.p.)

Peter first encounters Nightingale after he attempts to take a witness statement from a ghost, impressing the Detective Chief Inspector with his open-minded, fearless and practical character. Early in his apprenticeship Nightingale realises that for Peter to progress, he must be given the responsibility to succeed or fail on his own merits. Peter is able to navigate the different worlds of the Rivers, and as representative of the magical division of the Metropolitan Police, the Folly he is able to use the power of the institution he serves to negotiate the hostage swap between Beverley Brook and Ash to promote inter-family relations "a confidence building measure to cement ties between the two halves of the River" (RL p. 294). As further evidence of his unconventional inventiveness, the pseudo-medieval solution was inspired, Peter admits, by playing Dungeons and Dragons.

Peter's youth, ethnicity and working-class origins are contrasted with the century old white, upper-middle-class Nightingale. It is tempting to see him as representative of outmoded institutions, but this is a simplistic reading which ignores the wisdom of the magician archetype. Borowska-Szerszun (2019, pp. 12-13) writes that Nightingale exhibits an imperialist mindset apparent in his attitude, not to people of different ethnicities, but to supernatural entities where "his racism manifests itself in his perception of non-human supernatural creatures as fascinating and not necessarily evil in themselves, yet definitely lower in the hierarchy than people, especially magicians". Although Borowska-Szerszun (2019) concedes that Nightingale revises his attitude under the modernising influence of Peter, this reading is simplistic, and Nightingale's relationship with Molly belies this underlying racism towards supernatural creatures. Molly, later identified as one of the High Fae is part housekeeper, part guardian of the Folly. Since joining the Folly as a child, Molly fears to leave the building and so remains locked in a child archetype. She embraces the role of maid servant by wearing an Edwardian outfit, but her job title has the double meaning of maiden or virgin, which corresponds to the child role she personifies. The ambiguity of Molly's status is further complicated by the etymology of moll which is eighteenth century slang for a lower-class female, possibly a prostitute (OED, 2024). Nightingale protects her in his wise father role and at the same time holds her in the highest regard as a member of the

Folly, calling her “indispensable” (RL p. 96) and he is full of respect for her powers of haemomancy (RL p. 195). In *Whispers Under Ground* (2012) he declines an invitation to spend Christmas with Peter’s family because “he couldn’t leave Molly alone on Christmas day” (p. 291). Borowska-Szerszun’s race-based reading misses the subtleties of Nightingale’s character, and the complex relationships between the two.

Peter’s ethnicity though does mark him as an outsider, “outside the big cities, my very appearance can sometimes be enough to render certain people speechless” (MOS p. 114). And as a non-white person he frequently faces both explicit and covert racism. When seconded to Leominster to assist the West Mercia police he is told that “the ACC [Assistant Chief Constable] thought it reflected well on the force, diversitywise.” “That’s me, I thought. Poster boy for diversity” (FS pp. 67-68). Peter is usually philosophical about the prejudice of others, “my rule of thumb is that if they don’t physically flinch from touching you, then eventually they’ll make the adjustment” (MOS p. 114). However, being human, on occasions he is angered by racist hostility, such as abuse from “two white boys” at a supermarket,

> I wanted to antagonise them. I wanted to give them a smacking they wouldn’t forget […]. At the very least I wanted to show them my warrant card and mess with their preconceptions. But you can’t do that sort of thing, because there’s always the chance you’ll end up in a fight […]. And then you’ll have to arrest them. Which, never mind the ethical issues surrounding the abuse of power, results in a ton of paperwork. (FS p. 77)

Peter is able to realise and articulate his egoic unconscious destructive thoughts and integrate them into his goals in the external world. He is also a highly moral character who is explicitly concerned with ethics and repeatedly refers to upholding the Queen’s peace. Ultimately his good humour, self-control and good sense win out over the desire for revenge. Peter is the consummate police officer with a well-developed sense of justice and social responsibility. His status as archetypal hero will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

5.3.4 Economic and class disparities

Class stratification is an ingrained part of Britain and the identity of Britons, therefore no analysis of Aaronovitch would be complete without a discussion of the part that it plays within his work. Aaronovitch’s new mythology offers an entertaining twist to old

legends, but it also sounds a warning about the state of the nation. In addition to the dangers of a myopically London-centric political focus, the socio-economic landscape of Britian is a very uneven terrain, with huge wealth and privilege disparities (Surridge, 2021). A large proportion of U.K. residents feel disenfranchised and disengaged from the hegemonic structures of power; a third of registered voters do not vote and "less well-off millennials are increasingly unlikely to vote compared to their better-off counterparts" (Resolution Foundation, 2024, n. p.). This means that poor younger people are becoming less engaged in politics which bodes ill for the future of democracy and social cohesion. An estimated one million illegal immigrants are living under the state radar (Joint Council for the Welfare of Migrants, 2023), unable to work legally they make up part of what Standing (2011) describes as the precariat who occupy a social status just one step above the homeless poor. There is also a huge housing deficit and a large number of people living in precarious housing conditions such as temporary shelters, cars and rough sleeping. This has created a large underclass who are in effect living a half-life neither in nor out of mainstream society, but in a place equivalent to Aaronovitch's *demi-monde.* Chapter six discusses in more detail the role that the *demi-monde* residents play as metaphorical representatives of Britain's underclass.

The *Rivers of London* series is populated with many different characters with different ethnicities, sexual orientation and social standing, and as we are always made aware of a person's ethnicity, we are always aware of a character's social class. As accent is one of the most easily discernible class markers, Aaronovitch's character descriptions frequently refer to their speech, "He was young, and he was posh" (MOS p. 249). "He had the sort of default BBC accent that a posh person acquires through trying to avoid sounding too much like he went to public school" (WUG pp. 163-164). In fact, attendance at fee paying public school is synonymous with upper middle-class or upper-class status and Aaronovitch uses it as a shorthand for character description, "'Jo? Are you in?' Male, adult, public school" (FS p. 42). Whilst Peter and Lesley are undercover in Skygarden Estate, they encounter another archetype,

> she was our resident fallen princess. Every estate has at least one of these per block. Middle- or upper middle-class girls who've managed to overcome the advantages of their birth and end up in council housing with a child or an addiction or both. (BH p. 175)

Sweeney (2011, p. 70) comments that the princess archetype "offers the possibility of romance and transformation for females of all ages" but in this case the princess is in reduced circumstances. The ironic description of a woman as a princess references the fairytale Disney myth of happy ever after, and how enchantments wear off as women move from girlhood to the harsh realities of maturity. However, Aaronovitch describes the archetypal fallen princess in terms of class, inferring that class is not entirely static, and it is possible to rise or descend in the ranks, although in an ironic twist, it takes effort to overcome societal privileges.

Class is so ingrained in Britain that Peter even delivers architectural descriptions in terms of class, "The house had been built for the aspirational lower middle class, so the hallway was narrow but well-proportioned." (MOS p. 15). It is natural, therefore that the personified buildings of the novels are identified by social standing. In the following description of Portabello Road, Aaronovitch details the way in which it "became a barometer for social change" as neighbourhoods are defined by the type of residents that inhabit the architecture,

> Starting at the Notting Hill end, the neat little Victorian terraces were snaffled up by people with six-figure salaries, and the big high street chains have been looking to spawn among the antique shops and Jamaican cafes. Only the redbrick council estates stand like bastions against the remorseless tide, glowering down on the City folk and the media professionals and lowering the house process by their very presence. (WUG p. 69)

The passage is dense with imagery of conflict with the humble and vulnerable "neat little" houses of Notting Hill devoured by well-heeled buyers who are satirised through the choice use of "snaffled," a word synonymous with greed. The OED (2024) defines it as taking something "for oneself, typically quickly or without permission." The city is personified as a creature, rampantly out of control with shops searching for places to spawn soulless copies of themselves like frogs seeking to hatch tadpoles, or something far worse (spawn of Satan). The sinister clones of the high street shops are contrasted with symbols of community and diversity, "antique shops and Jamaican cafes" and the public housing estates are personified as heroic holdouts, hostile to middle class "City folk," with "glowering" faces, and fortification imagery of "bastions", defending Portabello from the cruel and indifferent "remorseless" forces of gentrification. In this

cod-heroic mythic narrative the personified structures tell the social history of London where money has driven out the poor who, for now, have taken refuge in the ugly "redbrick" publicly owned enclaves. How long they will be able to repel the hostile forces of money and development remains to be seen.

Class permeates the book cycle; Peter is scathingly described by Lady Tyburn in terms of low social capital (Bourdieu, 1983), "Your father is a failed musician and your mother cleans offices for a living. You grew up in a council flat and you went to your local comprehensive and you failed your A-levels" (RL p. 273). Tyburn invokes the inferior class markers of non-professional job status, public housing and state education to underline Peter's lower-class standing. Peter is also marked as working-class through his use of the vernacular "Me and Lesley, both being aspirational working class" (BH p. 64), as opposed to "Lesley and I" which is the correct grammatical form. His state-funded school failed to teach him Latin, much to Nightingale's disappointment and his housing status is inferior as he lived in a rented council owned flat as opposed to a privately owned dwelling. Peter is a clear-eyed observer of the class divisions in Britain and accepts his social status with humour, he even uses it as a policing tool,

> Apart for my mum and certain senior aunts and uncles, I don't do deference as a rule. And certainly not to inherited titles. But I also believe in making people comfortable enough to make mistakes, so I smiled and called her Lady Helena. (HT p. 125)

Peter sublimates his ego to fulfil the task at hand, exploiting the superior attitudes of those with social privileges to lull them into a false sense of security. Peter himself is equally at home with the older upper-middle-class Nightingale or with his young working-class colleagues such as Danni Wickford his latest police partner in *Amongst Our Weapons* (2022). His social mutability is reflected in his chameleon use of accent which is an asset for a police officer. Describing Danni Peter comments, "Born and raised in Dagenham, she had a proper East London accent, but, like me, could cycle through various degrees of middle-class, cockney and Multicultural London English as the situation required" (AOW p. 4). Peter's flexibility is further evidence of his ability to suppress his ego to fulfil his task of police officer guardian of the city.

Peter is comfortable with his social status, and in keeping with the archetype, the hero often comes from humble origins, but he also realises that he is at a disadvantage and must resist the bullying tactics of the privileged. Again, Aaronovitch portrays class divisions in the language of combat, "you can't show weakness to posh people or they'll mercilessly take advantage. I think it's something they learn at school in between conversational French and practical condescension" (AOW p. 206). Zachary Palmer, otherwise known as Zach the "Goblin Boy" (WUG p. 209) or possible half-fairy expresses surprise that Peter is a member of the Folly, "You can't be part of this, you're … common. This is the Folly, this place is strictly toffs and monsters" (WUG p. 102). Peter, as Zach bluntly puts it is working-class and does not belong in an upper-class organisation such as the Folly.

Peter is contrasted with his police senior officer and magical teacher Detective Chief Inspector Thomas Nightingale who is public school educated and exhibits the class markers of a higher social standing, although he is at pains to say that he is not nobly born, "The Folly was never that popular with the aristocracy […]. We were all much more proudly bourgeoisie than that. It would be best to think of us as professionals – like doctors or lawyers" (BH p. 35). Nevertheless, he bears all the class markers of upper-middle-class and speaks with "a proper upper-class accent, like an English villain in a Hollywood movie" wears handmade shoes and "a beautifully tailored suit" and even carries a "silver-topped cane" (RL p. 21). Nightingale is the archetypal, well-spoken senior wizard recognisable from numerous entertainments (Dumbledore, Gandalf, Mustrum Ridcully) and the cane is later revealed as his wizard's staff. Like the other wise father archetype, Father Thames, Nightingale represents a patriarchal system, but also like Father Thames he is willing to embrace change when it becomes necessary. Despite being representative of an older social order, far from seeing Nightingale as part of the ruling class and the elitism that mars it, Peter sees him as the personification of British liberalism and open-mindedness, "He didn't say it, but I got the strong impression that he felt such panels [Gender recognition] were intrinsically un-British. Like eugenics legislation, banning the burka and air conditioning" (HT p. 105). However, the Folly is an anachronism which is anathema to the modernising powerbroker Tyburn who comments "It's all held together with spit and sealing wax and the old boy network. It's a typical British mashup" (RL p. 184). Nightingale may be

the epitome of the old boy network, but taking Peter, Lesley and Abigail as apprentices demonstrates his flexibility. For the Folly to remain relevant it must reinvent itself, and the old rules must be revised. In Aaronovitch's London, old institutions are not condemned for being anachronistic, they are permitted to evolve and rejuvenate under the influence of fresh blood and new ideas.

5.4 London's relationship with the rest of the country

A perennial issue within British society is the dominant position of London, and by virtue of its halo effect, the Southeast of England, and in particular the Home Counties' economic prosperity vis-a-vis the rest of the country. The north-south divide as it is known is referenced in *Amongst Our Weapons* as "the whole north-south thing' (p. 224) which led to a rift between the magical northern Sons of Weyland smithy practitioners and the London based wizards of Folly. The north-south divide is actually much more complex when ancient geographical rivalries, alliances and historical grudges are factored in. Recent historical events of Brexit and the Scottish referendum have highlighted fault lines within the union and immigration policy continues to dominate political discourse within Britain.

As a London born novelist Aaronovitch gives his narrator an acute sense of pride in London, and a scathing attitude to the provinces which becomes more tempered as the novel series progresses, "It's a sad fact of modern life that if you drive long enough, sooner or later you must leave London behind" (MOS p. 1). Peter betrays his unconscious ego-driven biases by being proud of his insular mindset, and the wiser, well-travelled Nightingale chides him on his attitude,

> 'There's more to life than just London,' said Nightingale.
>
> 'People keep saying that,' I said. 'But I've never actually seen any proof.' (MOS p. 10)

The young self-absorbed hero has a lot to learn about life, and it is the role of the wise father to encourage self-reflection. Nightingale knows that growth can most rapidly occur when the subject is tested away from the comforting surroundings of the familiar.

Like the Thames, London is portrayed as a dual entity; the London of the 'real' non-magical world, and the hidden London of the *demi-monde*. The magical, or magical adjacent denizens of the *demi-monde* are described by Borowska-Szerszun (2019, p. 22) as "a metaphor for all sorts of minority," but taking a psychological approach, they may also represent the sublimated realm of the psyche. By employing a mythopoeic narrative, Aaronovitch is able to make salient comments on the psychological health of the nation. At times London is characterised as a monster of economic greed and power which devours all within its path. At other times it is portrayed as a safe haven for minorities both human and magical. This latter aspect of London has parallels in Jung's collective unconscious, "In terms of collective psychology, cities have represented not only wholeness but a reasoned barrier against the chaos surrounding their walls" (Leeming, 2014a, p.338). Peter fears to brave the chaos outside his ordered London world and travel beyond his familiar boundaries, but the role of a hero is to leave the safe confines of the external world and to journey into the unknown of the unconscious.

Jung's Shadow relates to the unconscious, sometime repressed realm of the personality which is frequently in conflict with the conscious ego personality, or persona. It is not inherently negative but is comprised of unresolved conflicts stemming from emotions and impulses like lust, greed, rage and striving for power (Diamond, 2014, p. 1641). In its dark, or shadow guise, London appears as a monstrous entity that is beyond the control of any one person or institution and even characters who love London frequently point out the rapacious interests that fuel the constant process of expansion and rebuilding that throws it into a state of constant flux. An archaeologist from the Museum of London explains to Peter that, "Most archaeology these days is rescue archaeology – projects designed to preserve as much as possible from the relentless cash-driven redevelopment" (LS p. 45). Even Peter comments on the historical process of expansion of the urban into the countryside that is beyond the control of any individual and appears to be a type of insanity, "At the end of the eighteenth century London was well into the mad, technology-driven expansion that would only stop with the establishment of the Metropolitan Green Belt in the 1940s" (LS, p. 34). The establishment of the Green Belt buffer zone being an early win for conservationists.

Aaronovitch's shadow London is a destructive entity which is personified at times as a mad bully, driven by relentless greed, such as in his description of the Portabello Road. Perhaps the most scathing condemnation of London's supremacy in economic and cultural spheres and the deleterious effect on the rest of the British Isles is articulated by Lesley May, Peter's one time police partner,

> "London sucks. Sucks the rest of the country dry. You want to get ahead, you have to go to London. You want to get away – go to fucking London. All the jobs, all the money goes to London. The rest of the country gets the leftovers, the bits that London doesn't want" (LS p. 281).

Lesley uses the imagery of a vampire or a blood sucking creature that cares only for its own needs, leaving the provinces with its discarded scraps. This depiction of a rapacious capital that greedily consumes whilst being indifferent to the rest of the country is a metaphor that can be argued, is based in fact. The former Conservative government's 2022 *Levelling Up* policy is designed to redress these very socio-geographic inequalities that Lesley complains about. These resentments and internal schisms within Britain are worrying because, according to Richards and Heath (2023) they contribute towards a sense of social dislocation from central government. Their study also found,

> sharp but asymmetrical boundaries within England, between the working class and the middle class, and between Northerners and Southerners. Regional differences in perceptions of Southerners map closely onto those of how well Westminster looks after regional interests, which suggests that power imbalances reduce social cohesion. (Richards & Heath, 2023, p. 553)

Brexit has exacerbated divisions within England (Richards & Heath, 2023) and the resentments between the two factions of the river Thames, and the dual nature of the capital, therefore, can be seen as symptomatic of long-term wider rifts within the country as a whole.

As a Londoner born and bred Peter eyes the countryside with suspicion, and forays outside of the capital are treated almost like trips to a foreign country, Peter commenting with relief that he is "back in civilization" after visiting the countryside (BH p. 17). A dismissive attitude to anywhere that is not London can be seen in the

early books, “Norfolk where the skies are big, the land is flat and the demographics are full of creamy white goodness. It is […] the poor man’s alternative to Australia, now that South Africa has gone all multicultural” (MOS p. 224). Peter may be the hero of the series, but he is far from perfect, and whilst criticising which he perceives as monocultural rural Norfolk he is projecting the unconscious prejudices of his shadow self and betraying his London city bias. At the same time he is offering an ironic comment on colonial nations where the “creamy white” settlers have less than a stellar human rights record towards the indigenous peoples. The diversity of modern Britain, of course being a major theme of the books.

Peter’s antipathy to the countryside does begin to soften in the fifth book *Foxglove Summer* (2014) where he is seconded to Herefordshire to help in the search for two missing schoolgirls. His growing awareness of the natural world goes hand in hand with an increased awareness of regional politics outside the Thames basin. In *Foxglove Summer* (2014) he strays close to the Welsh border and encounters three goddesses, the River Tame, Miss Tefreidiad and her two daughters whose memories go far beyond the present political map of the British Isles to a pre-Roman period,

> “Let me tell you something, Constable Grant,” said Miss Tefreidiad. “Where you are now is not London – it’s not even England.”
>
> “Yes it is Ma,” said Corve.
>
> “Only in a political sense,” snapped Miss Tefreidiad.
>
> […]. “We used to get heads,” said Corve. “The druids used to throw them in along with other offerings.” (FS p. 98)

This passage hints at old allegiances and resentments that still simmer beneath the surface in places such as the Welsh borders where the power of London over the regions is an ongoing source of tension and where the union with England is disputed by some. Miss Tefreidiad holds Beverly hostage for trespassing into her territory, only releasing her to Peter in his role of representative of the Folly. Again, Aaronovich’s mythopoeic narrative weaves elements from ancient mythology and druidic history to reflect the plurality of voices within the British Isles. The Welsh rivers remind the reader that the ascendancy of London and England are still contested, and Aaronovitch appears to be warning not to take these old alliances for granted as memories can be

very long in parts of Britain. In his analysis of British identity Kumar (2003) writes about the disputed nature of Britain, the union of four countries which carries “a history and a culture resonant with ambiguities and conflicts” (p. 3). These ancient fault lines are referenced again in *Lies Sleeping* (2018) where Lesley tells Peter that she and Martin Chorley are attempting to summon Merlin from the Dark Ages. Peter asks,

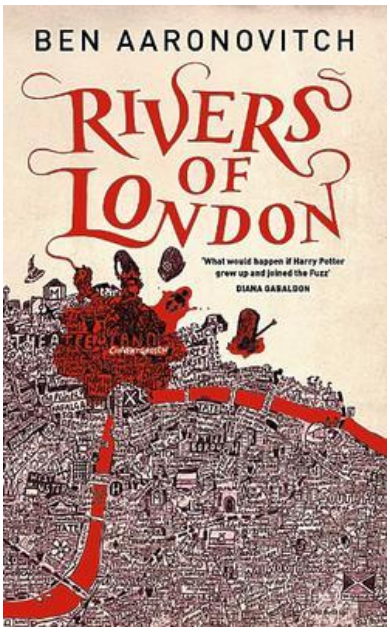
> ‘What if he’s Welsh?’
>
> ‘What if he is?’
>
> ‘Then he’s hardly likely to give you back the England you want, is he?’ (LS p.289)

Many countries lay claim to Merlin, but the *Black Book of Carmarthen* (circa 1250) links Myrddin, Britain’s greatest wizard to Wales. Peter has learnt from his visit to Herefordshire and exhibits a new sensitivity to the unique mythological and political identity of the provinces by challenging Chorley’s Anglocentrism. Chorley’s wish to resurrect the age of Arthur may also be a commentary on popularist politicians who promise to make a country great again by metaphorically turning back the clock to a mythical golden age of prosperity and happiness.

The United Kingdom is pieced together from very different areas with their own mythologies and traditions, and resentment towards the dominant power of England and in particular London still simmers in many areas, especially those that have failed to prosper under Westminster rule. Wales retains a distinct national identity and Welsh nationalists burned down the holiday homes of English owners from the 1970s to the 1990s and sent letter bombs to Conservative MPs in protest at lack of housing for local people (Heath, 1989). Although these acts have not been repeated in the twenty first century there is always the potential for old resentments to resurface in acts of violence. Richards and Heath (2023, p. 553) opine that, “In post-Brexit and post-devolution Britain, relationships among the four nations appear fragile.” The Breakup of the Union remains a very real possibility; Scotland voted to stay within Great Britain in the 2014 referendum, but a sizeable minority voted to leave, 2,001,926 voted against independence and 1,617,989 voted in favour. The rift between the two factions of the Thames, therefore, can be seen as echoing other rifts within the British Isles in miniature.

Figure *2*

Cover Art for Rivers of London



Rivers of London cover art. From *Rivers of Lonon (novel).* Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rivers_of_London_%28novel%29 Copyright Gollanz publishing.

The London-centric nature of the books is proudly proclaimed in the *Rivers of London* title and is also displayed on the cover art which consists of a stylised partial map of London. With the exception of *Foxglove Summer* and *What Abigail Did That Summer*, the cover art for the full-length novels are details taken from Stephen Walter's *The Island* (2008) which is an obsessively detailed hand drawn map of London as reenvisaged as an island separated from the rest of the British Isles. This separation is a fantasy that London could secede from the rest of the country and exist as a separate city state. As Shariatmadari (2015) writes, “maps are never neutral. They make statements about the world” (para. 6). In this case, the use of *The Island* as a running theme for the book jackets illustrates the unique situation of London as a place that neither needs nor cares for the rest of the country. The blood red rivers are additions to the original artwork and hint at the crime novel genre. Lethbridge (2017) also speculates that the bloody river may be a deliberate echo of Enoch Powell’s infamous 1968 ‘Rivers of blood’ speech which reflected the anti-immigration mood of many Britons. The speech referenced the Sybil’s prophecy in the *Aeneid* of the Tiber running red with blood foretelling future conflict for the wandering Trojans searching for a homeland. According to Moore-Bridger (2014) in a poll of 2,0001 people, one in five Londoners supported the idea of an independent London. In the same poll, one in ten

people believed that London would be waterlogged like Venice by 2030. This combination of London-centric jingoism and fears of an impending ecological catastrophe are major themes in the book series which Aaronovitch has woven into his mythological narrative of feuding river gods. The theme of flooding will be examined more closely later in this chapter.

5.4.1 Underground London as a place of confrontation and integration

As a member of the magical police, Peter Grant is often called on to investigate disturbances in the watery world under London. In Jung's system of the collective unconsciousness water represents the unconscious and also "the mystery of creation, birth-death-resurrection, purification and redemption, fertility and growth" (Eapen, 2020 p. 11). Jung also associated the sea with the mother, employing the imagery of maternal waters which Mayes (2016, p. 109) links with amniotic fluid. The tidal rivers of the city are fittingly female in Aaronovitch's new mythology, with many of them culverted and running underground in artificial caves such as pipes and sewers. In *The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious* (1959/1968, (CW i. para.240) Jung considered the cave to be "a secret place of rebirth" where an individual may be ensconced in order to be "incubated and renewed," so entering the cave begins a process of transformation of the personality The cave also is a dark place where a person is engulfed by forces stronger than the individual, and therefore represents the unconscious and hidden part of the mind. Venturing underground is a common feature of urban fantasy where the act of descending into darkness is commonly interpreted by literary critics as a journey into the subconscious prompting a confrontation with primal fears (Tiffin, 2008; Elber-Aviram, 2013; Houswitschka, 2015; Benczik, 2017). Pike (2013) describes the London underground as a contradictory mixture of ordered modernity and otherworldly mythic associations with Hades. Vanderbeke (2014, p. 147) opines that "subterranean London is thus a location of legend and rumour, of delusionary dreams and wild fantasy […] the city's untamed unconscious, the place of repressed desires and uncontrollable instincts." These are Gothic spaces where claustrophobic tunnels are haunted by the memories and repressed fears of Londoners. Similarly, Aaronovitch's underground is a place of danger where the uncanny can irrupt into the mundane in the form of spectres and time slips. It is also a place of rebirth where important progress may be gained through meditation into the

mysteries of transformation. If the confrontation is successful and the shadow is integrated into the consciousness, great insights many be gained.

Campbell's (1949/2004) description of the hero's journey was heavily influenced by Jungian psychology. After the hero has begun his quest and accepted supernatural help (in Peter's case by Nightingale initiating him into the world of magic), Campbell described the next stage as a testing ground where the hero enters "a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. In myth-adventure, this is the crucial part for it has pictured a place of miraculous challenges and ordeals" (Campbell, 2004, p. 89). In his hero's journey Peter undergoes the archetypal trial of the night sea journey when he is entombed in the appropriately titled third book, *Whispers Underground* (2012). In *Specific Problems of Psychotherapy. The Psychology of the Transference* (1946/1968) Jung described it as a regressive movement of energy in neurosis or depression, a "descent into Hades and a journey to the land of ghosts somewhere beyond this world, beyond consciousness, hence an immersion in the unconscious" (CW 16, par. 455). In mythology the night sea journey may involve being swallowed by a dragon or sea monster where the hero must come to terms with their inner world before emerging in a rebirth. In Aaronovitch's updated mythology of London, the sea monster is replaced by Oxford Circus tube station platform under which Peter lies buried after an encounter with a magical creature. Whilst entombed in his narrow cave, near the Tyburn stream with water rising around him, Peter fights "panicked screaming" (WUG p. 220) and overcomes his fears of helplessness and lack of control to tap into the London memory of an 800-year-old earlier version of the *genius loci* Sir William Tyburn, "a sort of echo in the memory of the city" (WUG p. 223). This is not the first time that Peter has accessed earlier versions of London, at the end of *Rivers of London* (2011) Molly sends him back in time through haemomancy, (RL p. 195) but crucially Peter learns to do this himself only when entombed under the city in a state of enforced passivity and meditation. Upon being rescued Peter echoes Jung's description of the cave as "a place of rebirth," "It's difficult to describe the serenity of rescue, like a second birth" (WUG p. 227). Serenity is derived from the Latin *serenus* meaning clear, or fair, suggesting a clarity of mind beyond mere peacefulness. Peter has not only survived but has won a victory over his own fears and has been reborn with enhanced insights into London and in

particular the Tyburn stream. After surviving his ordeal Peter is able to integrate his new understanding and put it to practical use by exploiting the connection with Sir William Tyburn, obtaining information to help solve cases in later books (HT) and LS (p. 200).

In the first novel, the *Rivers of London*, Peter experiences one of his first trials in Campbell's "testing ground." Again, this occurs underneath London in an underground train carriage and takes the form of a psychological intrusion of repressed fears into the present. Under the influence of Peter's nemesis, Mr Punch, the rules governing civilised behaviour are suspended and passengers break social taboos by defecating in public and performing public sex acts. As a police officer, the literal representation of rule-governed society, the breakdown of civilised behaviour is perhaps Peter's worst fear. Provoked by fear and anger, Peter comes close to unleashing his own repressed rage, "I could feel the righteous anger, how wonderful it would feel just to fuck the consequences and let rip. […]. And then I realised that was what it was all about" (RL p. 261). Peter has a revelation and understands that he is being manipulated by Punch "the spirit of riot and rebellion – does what it says on the tin" (RL p. 261). He is able to integrate previously unconscious fear and anger from his shadow into his consciousness and reject the compulsion to lose control. Punch's role as Peter's shadow self is discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

After successfully confronting his fears and mastering his rage, Peter comes to another important realisation that anger and frustration is an everyday part of life in the city. Living and travelling close to other human bodies and suppressing fear of violent attacks is actually the norm. Peter asks Punch "what percentage actually let you in?" and answers his own rhetorical question, "I bet you've got a piss poor success rate" (RL p. 261). Thereby emphasising how few Londoners succumb to base impulses, neither breaching taboos nor rioting, nor inflicting acts of terror on their fellows. The vast majority of people go about their business in peace, respectful of the legal and social obligations expected of them as good citizens.

This encounter with Punch and his subsequent meetings with William Tyburn take place underground in Aaronovitch's version of Jung's cave, and are usually facilitated by the presence of water (the unconscious). Occurring as they do in Campbell's "dream

landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms" (2004, p. 89), the reader is left unsure if they are hallucinations, or reality possibly facilitated by magic. Ultimately the distinction is moot as important psychological work can be achieved through active imagination and dreaming; as long as insights can be brought from the unconscious to the conscious, progress is made towards psychological wholeness.

5.4.2 Environmental conflicts and the lost rivers

There has been a ballooning of books about London's lost rivers in recent years as public interest has soared (Barton 1962/2002; Talling, 2011; Bolton, 2011; Fathers, 2017). There are also numerous blogs, websites, fiction and historical books centred around the Thames and its tributaries including Ackroyd's (2008) *Thames: Sacred River* and Sargent's (2013) *The Story of the Thames.* Aaronovitch released the first novel in the titular *Rivers of London* series in 2011, the year in which Talling and Bolton respectively published guides to the lost London rivers. This upsurge in interest into delving below the surface of London has resulted in particular attention being paid to the 'lost' rivers of London, Although Gardner (2016) points out that losing a river has political and social implications, "the labeling [sic] of a river as lost is not a politically neutral act and that, with its romantic connotations, the term may actually serve to legitimise insensitive and contentious changes to our environment" (p. 1). Rivers may therefore become a locus of competing interests including developers, community groups, government agencies, ecologists and archaeologists. Aaronovitch is sensitive to the controversies surrounding London's lost rivers and repurposes them as a symbol of ecological issues in the twenty-first century.

Public fascination with the lost rivers is reflected in popular culture with websites and blogs devoted to urban exploration and even an episode of the BBC television series *New Tricks* (2014, season 11 episode 5) featuring London's underground water courses. King (2018) lists a series of artistic endeavours such as maps, art installations and graphic design based around the lost rivers. Reasons for this interest include an increased interest in ecology and rewilding the surviving rivers, and also a romantic fascination with the intriguing possibility of their reemergence and possible resurrection. Gardner (2016) writes,

> The attraction of lost rivers seems to be related to their duality; seemingly both present and absent simultaneously. For example, they are rarely entirely filled-in but, rather, culverted beneath roads, railways and buildings, and thus seem to have the potential to re-emerge and return London to an earlier, more watery era. They hint at something primordial and indeterminate lingering beneath a city we tend to see as fixed, mappable and knowable, and act as a frequent source of inspiration and study for those who delve beneath, literally and figuratively. (p. 1)

Gardener describes the lost rivers as inhabiting a "primordial and indeterminate" place of liminality reminiscent of the collective unconscious repository of archetypes and symbols employed by Aaronovitch. They are also a direct link to the ancient past which shades into myth and legend of "an earlier, more watery era" before the modern age removed magic from the world. The mutability of the physical rivers as simultaneously "present and absent", visible and hidden is reflected in the nature of their avatars who are at the same time both human and divine. The subterranean motif is a recurring trope in Aaronovitch's work which employs fantasy to discuss repressed historical fears and trauma, which the following chapter discusses in more detail. Juxtaposed to this is the exciting and unpredictable potential of river gods who take an active role in protecting their neighbourhoods from ecological threats. This is a comforting notion in an age facing the existential threat of climate change.

Aaronovitch reimagines the rivers as distinct personalities, both very human and at the same time possessed of supernatural powers. In *Broken Homes* the child goddess Neckinger is so enraged by the murder of the tree nymph Sky by the ecological act of vandalism that saw the chain sawing of her tree grove, that she drowns the perpetrator on dry land. In a Jungian reading, the youthful ego of Neckinger is unable to control her shadow side which erupts with deadly force. The real present-day Neckinger is culverted, its power diminished by the engineers who diverted it into the underground sewer network under Southwark, but the character in Aaronovitch is far from passive. Perhaps Neckinger's thirst for revenge is prompted by the fact that pirates were hanged from the wharf where the Neckinger enters the Thames (Talling, 2011). It is almost certain that Aaronovitch with his profound knowledge of London history and folklore would be aware of this detail. London's lost rivers inhabit a magical space, compounded by the myths and legends attached to their history, which

Aaronovitch refashions into a modern ecological allegory. The meaning is clear: we need to take better care of the natural world lest it extracts a fatal revenge.

The titular rivers of London are employed as symbols of ecological concerns in an urban landscape. Whilst the Victorians solved the problem of untreated sewage entering the rivers and largely mitigated the flood risk to the capital through culverting the rivers, it came at a cost to the natural world and loss of biodiversity. The Second World War bombings led to fractured sewer lines and pollution from heavy industries continued to enter the Thames from river run off in the post-War period. In the 1950s oxygen saturation in the central London section of the Thames became so low they were unmeasurable, and no fish were recorded in the stretch of waterway from Kew to Gravesend. The Thames became so toxic that surveys in 1957, the year of Mama Thames' genesis as a goddess, "found the river was unable to sustain life, and the Thames was eventually declared 'biologically dead'" (Edmonds-Brown, 2022, para. 7). Aaronovitch traces human intervention in the river system since the Victorian era which,

> led to a great deal of straightening and culverting which in turn led to a massive loss of biodiversity. And that was before they started pouring semi-treated sewage into them. It was into this environment of neglect that the current crop of river goddesses emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, and they have been working for improvements ever since. (FV p. 235)

Since the low point in the 1950s the health of the Thames has vastly improved to the point that it is cited as an ecological success story, although plastic and chemical pollutants are still above acceptable levels (Edmonds-Brown, 2022). Mama Thames claims responsibility for the renewal, stating proudly, "This is the cleanest industrial river in Europe. Do you think that happened by accident? Swinging London, Cool Britannia, the Thames Barrier? Do you think that happened by accident?" (RL p.88). As remarked above, Mama Thames is very ego driven, and in addition to the renewed health of the Thames, she boastfully takes credit for the cultural renewal of Britain and the innovative engineering of the Thames Barrier. Her bombast, however, has a positivity that imparts a renewed sense of vitality and self-confidence to a Britain exhausted by War. This is in marked contrast to Father Thames who has abrogated responsibility for the city.

Through his use of the *genii locorum* Aaronovitch creates a new pantheon of gods and goddesses that blend mythology and eco-criticism. Lethbridge (2017) asserts that "The representation of natural objects as people is a form of allegorisation […] that stresses the interdependence of humans and nature" (p. 239). The gods literally embody the landscape, and when Aaronovitch describes the city, he does it in tandem with the underlying geography and hydrography so the reader is always aware of the natural features amidst and below the built environment,

> The north end of the London Borough of Camden is dominated by two hills, Hampstead on the west, Highgate on the east […] from these heights the land slopes down towards the river Thames and the floodplains that lurk below the built-up centre of London. (RL p. 31)

His use of "lurk below" to describe the floodplains of London is amusing, but also sounds a sinister note, as dangers lurk in the depths.

5.4.3 Threat to London through flooding

Climate change has become a flashpoint for protestors and procrastinators in contemporary London. Whilst vested interests delay taking essential action to reduce emissions (Energy & Climate Intelligence Unit, 2024) environmental groups such as Extinction Rebellion are taking increasingly radical steps to publicise the imminent global environmental catastrophe. Many others work quietly at small group and individual level to compost, recycle and rewild where possible. Whatever the level of individual engagement with the environmental movement, with credible agencies such as the International Climate Initiative predicting a minimum one metre sea rise within a century (Carrington, 2025) few people still cling to the hope that climate change is a hoax. The threat of flooding is seldom far away in London and is becoming more acute with changing rainfall patterns and global warming (The Greater London Authority, 2023). According to Urban Water (2024) the areas most vulnerable to flooding are those located after the Thames Barrier and along the smaller watercourses leading to the Thames. Built on a floodplain, London has always been geographically vulnerable to flooding, and the history of London's battle against the rivers is articulated through Peter who remarks that,

> Life can be tough on London's rivers. Those that weren't turned into open sewers in the eighteenth century were turned into covered

> sewers in the nineteenth. The suburban rivers that escaped death by carefully engineered brick arch faced that most terrible of fates – flood management. (FV p. 234)

The attempts of Victorian engineers to master the power of the rivers had consequences for the ecosystem of the waterways, and the culverting is far from foolproof as recent London flooding has proven (Evans, 2024).

In the novel series, for the most part the rivers are a benign influence, Mama Thames tells Peter that she literally breathed new life into the river, "there was no life left in the river, no Orisa, no spirit" (RL p. 87). However, Peter also sees how Beverley is capable of causing flooding in Rotherhithe when she is angry (BH p. 129). The rivers are personifications of the powers of nature and are capable of inflicting blessings and damage in equal measure. However, with the tidal Mama Thames, the potential for destruction is colossal and her potential power is described in scenes reminiscent of a "trashing London" narrative (Conrich, 1999),

> For a moment it was as if I stood high up on the middle cowling of the Thames Barrier looking east over the mouth of the river. I could feel the towers of Canary Wharf rising triumphantly at my back and beyond them the docks, the White Tower and all the bridges, bells and houses of London town. But ahead of me over the horizon I could feel the storm surge, the fatal combination of high tides, global warming and poor planning, waiting. Ready to drive a wall of water ten metres high up the river and bring down the bridges, towers and Uncle Tom Cobley and all.
>
> 'Just so you understand,' said Mama Thames. 'Where the real power lies.' (RL pp. 274-275)

Mama Thames is reminding Peter that London faces an existential threat from the "fatal combination" of natural forces (tides and global warming) and human hubris and short-sightedness "poor planning". The triumphant achievements of the city are no match for nature's ten-metre-high wall of water which has no regard for built structures, however historically important. This nightmare image is a terrifying reminder of the fragility of Britian's greatest city and its helplessness against the enormous forces which could be unleashed by the tidal Mama Thames. A deeper psychological reading equates water with the unconscious mind, so flooding can be interpreted as the unconscious disrupting the built environment of the ego. However

high we build our internal flood barriers we have no real defence against unconscious urges. The only way to avoid potential catastrophe is to stop avoiding our human frailties "poor planning" and face the negative by bringing it into the conscious mind. This is the process which Peter undergoes in his subterranean ordeals and his night sea journey in the cave.

Despite their human appearance, the rivers are *genii locorum* with god-like powers. Their sense of time is beyond human scale, and they are party to knowledge beyond the everyday that can make even the apprentice wizard Peter apprehensive,

> If you love beside the river, Beverley says, you're going to get flooded […]. A lot of the London Borough of Barnes sits inside a northern loop of the Thames that stretches from Putney Bridge to where the railway crosses the river. One day, says Beverley, she and her Mama are going to pinch it off at the base and make one big island. (HT p. 56)

This is another reminder that humankind is powerless in the face of nature, and Peter ruefully admits that "There's nothing like having your girlfriend talk in geological time to make you feel insignificant" (HT p. 56). Under Beverley's tutelage Peter becomes increasingly aware of the natural world as his horizons expand beyond the narrow confines of the built environment. Aaronovitch's eco-mythology reminds us that whatever our egos try to tell us, humans are not gods. We and all our proud achievements are trivial compared to the awesome power of nature and we would do well to remember that.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has utilised Jungian myth criticism to decode how Aaronovitch employs urban fantasy tropes to create a new mythology which explores themes of division and conflict in modern Britian. Through his mythopoeic reimagining of British legends and reinterpretation of archetypal symbols Aaronovitch subverts traditional structures to construct an eco-critical narrative that embraces duality and tolerance to offer commentary on the present state of the nation. Fantasy has engendered criticism for being escapist and light weight, even trivial reading (Clute & Grant, 1997) but as Furby and Hines (2011, p. 11) point out "escape need not necessarily imply passivity or intellectual inactivity" because readers may emerge with new insights into the 'real' world having spent time in an imagined world, returning better "equipped to make

material changes in their lives." Thus, fantasy which presents a fresh perspective by seeing the familiar differently, and conversely seeing the different as familiar "is perfectly placed to ask questions about the nature of our reality" (Furby & Hines, 2011, p. 13). Aaronovitch follows the fantastical tradition of questioning accepted norms by exhibiting a subversive criticality and rejecting simplistic binary exclusionist distinctions. Through the extended metaphor of the divided Thames, his work dissects contemporary British issues of multiculturalism, urban versus rural, class, generational conflict and the status of London as cultural and economic centre of the British state. He also raises ecological concerns about the state of the London waterways and the increased risk of flooding in the era of carbon forced climate change.

The challenges faced by Britain are substantial, and conflict between competing interests is inevitable. There are always powerful figures who seek to exploit the weakness of others and prioritise self-interest over community need. It can be tempting to turn away from problems as embodied by Father Thames' self-imposed exile to the upper Thames. However, conflict can be an opportunity for growth, and by guiding the Thames factions towards understanding and compromise, Peter is able to synthesise an alliance between old and new powers which strengthens the position of both. This playful and hopeful vision for the country is a counter to the frequent dystopian imaginings of contemporary speculative fiction (Martin, 2023), as characters in the *Rivers* novels are usually able to resolve their differences through tolerance, mature self-awareness, and a sense of citizenship and duty towards the city they inhabit.

Chapter 6 The City and Identity

6.1 Introduction

This chapter uses the research sub-question 'How does the representation of the city reflect the identity of its inhabitants?' as a guide to analyse how the character of London is established and explored via a mythological pantheon. It begins with a discussion of how the metaphorical positioning of London governed by avatars or *genii locorum* describes a city with a fractured identity. In Jungian terms the city is conflicted with the outward persona at odds with the shadow self, holding historical trauma within its fabric. Key characters also have an allegorical function and sound warnings about ecological dangers and the perils of failing to learn the lessons of history. The chapter then goes on to advance the argument that Aaronovitch's portrayal of these internal tensions within London may be extrapolated out to include the social and political complexities of the British state itself, as London can be interpreted as a microcosm of the British macrocosm. The third chapter theme explores how identities may be lost, changed, damaged and perhaps regained through trauma and healing as the disturbed psychogeography of London is expressed in images of broken and misshapen buildings. Monster theory assists in decoding the imagery of monstrous architecture and disfigurement within the books. There are numerous references to the wounds inflicted on the face of London by World War Two bombings and the often shoddy post-war rebuild, and the twin metaphors of damaged façades of buildings and the damaged faces of characters speak to the violence suffered by the city and its inhabitants. A related theme is the role that masks, puppetry and changing faces play within the work. The identities of characters are often hidden or shift between different iterations. In psychological terms masks represent the persona that the subject shows to the outside world. The imagery within the books also suggests faceless bureaucracy and indifference to suffering. The final chapter theme explores the underclass of magical and magical adjacent communities that exist alongside the non-magical in Aaronovitch's *demi-monde*. The Quiet People, chimeras and foxes of the *demi-monde* suggest cultural hybridity and adaptability. These groups are representative of real-world populations living a precarious existence, often with low

social capital and insecure housing, and they are frequently scape goats blamed for the ills of society. The Quiet People, chimeras and foxes of the *demi-monde* suggest cultural hybridity and adaptability.

6.2 The fractured identity of London

The personification of a city is frequently used for dramatic effect in literature, and London has often been addressed as a person by British poets, for example Isabella Whitney's (1573) *Will and Testament*, where the author leaves bequests to her "undeserving lover"; Samuel Johnson's socially critical *London* (1738) where the poet, "Resolv'd at length, from vice and London far, To breathe in distant fields a purer air"; William Blake's *Poetical Sketches* (1783) describing a "golden London and her silver Thames, throng'd with shining spires and corded ships" and William Wordsworth's *Composed upon Westminster Bridge* (1802) where the city lies sleeping, its "mighty heart" "lying still" before the dawn. Ackroyd (2000) discusses the historical personification of London in two opposite images, "London has been envisaged in the form of a young man with his arms outstretched in a gesture of liberation" but it has also "been commonly portrayed in monstrous form, a swollen and dropsical giant which kills more than it breeds" (p.1). These contrary, almost schizophrenic representations reflect different facets of the capital, be it the vice-ridden rake of Whitney and Johnson, or Blake and Wordsworth's mighty and shining magnificence.

These opposite and conflicting images of London may be explained through Jungian psychology. Jung described two sides of the personality, the conscious ego and the unconscious shadow which are often opposed to each other. The persona is the mask that the subjects permit the outside world of society to see. In *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology: On the Psychology of the Unconscious* (1928/1968) Jung wrote that

> The persona is a complicated system of relations between individual consciousness and society, fittingly enough a kind of mask, designed on the one hand to make a definite impression upon others, and, on the other, to conceal the true nature of the individual. (Jung, CW 7, p. 305 cited in D'Cruz, 2014, p.2).

Thus, the mask enables others to view a curated persona whilst simultaneously concealing hidden impulses. The mask will be discussed in more detail in relation to Mr

Punch and Lesley May later in the chapter, suffice to note it is a recurring motif in the novels as characters struggle with the outward manifestation of their personalities, and inner forces of the emotional subconscious. Some characters such as Peter and Oberon are usually able to integrate their opposing ego and shadow selves whilst others are less successful in achieving synthesis.

6.2.1 Allegorical representations of London

Much urban fantasy has a social-critical subtext, and Aaronovitch follows the tradition of using the device of the city to illustrate social and political inequities (Rață, 2016; Vanderbeke, 2014). A unique feature of Aaronovitch's portraiture of London which has hitherto been under-examined in the literature is his use of *genius loci* as allegorical devices to embody social and ecological concerns, albeit in a humorous and largely hopeful way. Much as pre-modern societies used stories of supernatural beings to explain natural phenomena, Aaronovitch personifies familiar London geographical features to illustrate themes of identity, social justice, environmental degradation and flooding. These powerful supernatural entities enact a new creation myth for London and form a pantheon of uniquely London deities who reflect the diversity of the modern city. The allegoric function of the divided Thames of Mama and Father Thames as representative of wider fractures in London was discussed in the previous chapter, but there are many other *genii locorum* who bring their unique perspectives to the novel cycle. Each local deity has a distinct identity whilst representing a feature of the city. They embody the history, geography and character of a place, but they also have symbolic meaning and provide an allegorical commentary on aspects of urban life.

The Thames tributary rivers are at once supernatural manifestations of the landscape, and at the same time very human and subject to moods and foibles. In this description of Beverley Brook, the geographical features of the river and the character of Beverley, Peter's girlfriend as young woman and goddess merge into one,

> Beverley Brook rises in Worcester Park in southeast London and flows through a ridiculous number of other parks, recreation grounds and golf courses before joining her mother at Barn Elms. She says that while she averages half a cubic metre of water per second, she's had it up to six cubic metres per second a couple of times. And unless she gets some more care, attention and the occasional bottle of Junipero

> Gin, she's not going to be responsible for where that surplus water's going to end up. (HT p. 4)

Like her mother, the egoic Beverely is not above threatening flooding to obtain the respect she believes is her due. The ambiguity of "she's not going to be responsible", however contains another reading that Beverley is unable, rather than unwilling to contain her surplus flood water. What was once open floodplain is now a series of golf courses and parks, but there is also a great deal of housing with poor water drainage and Bevereley is warning that she cannot be held responsible for flooding precipitated by urbanisation. There is a strong eco-critical subtext in the novels, and through Beverley and her mother, Aaronovitch is sounding the alarm about the need for flood mitigation and better urban planning along the capital's watercourses.

Not all *genii locorum* are rivers, and in *Broken Homes* we meet the character of Sky the wood nymph who lives within the grove of protected trees within Skygarden estate. In an eco-allegory of thoughtless human destruction Aaronovitch describes how she is killed when her plane tree is illegally ringed "a common enough technique used by disgruntled landowners or exasperated neighbours to kill trees that they think are getting in their way" (RL p. 244). Given the importance of the face and masks within the novels, it is significant that on discovering Sky's body the undercover Peter experiences a conflict between his two identities of police officer and a civilian friend to the nymph, which is expressed in the image of a distorted face,

> I tried to open my mouth to ask the right questions, but nothing happened. In my mind I saw myself standing up, stepping back from the body, making a preliminary visual sweep of the locus and then securing the crime scene while we waited for the Homicide Assessment Team to arrive. But all that happened was I felt my face bend out of shape. (RL p. 244)

The link between psychological trauma experienced by characters and the city itself, and the imagery of damaged or distorted faces reoccurs throughout the books. In this passage Peter experiences a disconnect between his professional police persona and his inner self which results in a separation between the two described in terms of an out of body experience. Jung described the persona as a mask between the ego and the outside world, and in this incident Peter's police persona is stretched into a distorted mask. Through the personification of the tree nymph the thoughtless

ecological crime becomes a tragic murder, and Peter finds out that is impossible to always act in a professional role, especially when confronted by overwhelming personal tragedy. Like the earlier incarnations of Tyburn, Fleet and Effra killed by Victorian effluent and relandscaping Sky is intimately linked to her tree and cannot survive without it. Sky is the victim of short-term gain for developers, and by analogy on a deeper level the health of the human race is contingent on the health of the ecosystems we form part of.

Sky's friend the goddess Neckinger, or Nicky, the river running underneath Southwark and Skygarden estate personifies another aspect of London's distributed selfhood. Aaronovitch imagines this facet of London as a child goddess, but she proves that even infant rivers can be deadly by drowning Sky's murderer on dry land. Again, the image of a distorted face is employed to suggest deep inner conflict, her visage "twisted out of shape by anger, grief and terrible betrayal" (RL p. 245). She makes the ground tremble, and Peter imagines "the mains water pipes of Elephant and castle groan and twist and shiver" (BH p. 245) as the water course responds to her ungoverned rage and grief. Like Mama Thames and Beverley, Nicky embodies the huge and potentially deadly forces that nature can unleash on the human population of London.

Other social issues are expressed through supernatural creatures such as Nicky's guardian Oberon, husband of the river Effra, a former slave whose magical signature is "the smell of blood and the cut of the lash" (RL p. 245). The character of Oberon references the history that slavery has played in building the power and wealth of London. The West India Docks, for example, begun in 1802, was partially funded by profits from slavery and designed to improve the efficiency of importing slave-grown goods (Thom, 2018). At the time of writing *Broken Homes* in 2013 mainstream Britain was becoming more aware of the role that slavery played in British history and there was increasing interest in discussing the issue in the media (see for instance Kaufman, 2012). Aaronovitch subtly weaves issues of social justice into the narrative by incorporating characters with diverse origins and history. By granting them the mythological status of supernatural beings he elevates their standing, amplifying their voices whilst bringing the issues they represent into the mainstream of popular culture. The fact that the wealth of Britain rests on a legacy of slavery is confronting for many Britons, who would rather not engage with the historical guilt. Therefore, by

obliquely addressing the issue through Oberon, Aaronovitch is undertaking important cultural work by helping to move uncomfortable truths into the mainstream.

Oberon is also a soldier and carries a cavalry sword, possibly as a reminder of the role that foreign and Commonwealth soldiers played in the history of Britain. Their efforts and sacrifices on behalf of the 'mother country' were all too often forgotten after the wars in which they played a part (Wakefield, 2024). Oberon is a noble figure who is quick to come to the defence of Sky, but he is able to contain his rage, and he bows to Nightingale's objection to vigilante justice. His considered response is contrasted with the immature Neckinger, "'I want them dead,' she said. 'Dead, dead, dead'" (BH p. 246). He has successfully integrated his shadow and egoic impulses into a unified whole, modelling adult behaviour for his young ward.

A feature of Aaronovitch's writing is his frequent pop culture references, and in homage to Terry Pratchett's Discworld librarian, the *genius loci* of the Grand Union Canal and Regent's Canal (that appropriately runs through London Zoo) is an orangutang named Mrs Canal, who likes to be propitiated with Fair Trade bananas (FV p. 163-4). The ecological commentary about endangered species and disappearing habitats is visible amidst the ludic intertextual references and intimate knowledge of London geography. Aaronovitch's combination of humour and social commentary is also apparent in his portrayal of the Rivers Crane, Westbourne and Counter's Creek. The river Crane runs past Heathrow Airport and as Beverley explains "She's never in the country […]. She's always flying off somewhere, sending us text messages from Bali and postcards from Rio" (RL p. 295). Mama's Thames' daughters Olympia, *genius loci* of Counter's Creek and her sister Chelsea, goddess of the river Westbourne are younger than Beverley Brook, in their mid to late teens. Together they represent rivers flowing through upmarket areas of the city and a remnant of the Westbourne flows through a pipe running above Sloane Square Tube station. Fixated on pleasure and the ego they have appropriated a disused World War Two bunker next to Holland Park tube station for use as "a private nightclub" and Peter describes them as "my least favourite pair of Bev's sisters" (LS p. 176). Peter's animosity stems from partially from an incident in which they left him in the Thames at risk of drowning (WUG p. 204). The immature sisters also exhibit a sense of entitlement and disrespect for authority along

with their privileged position of river goddesses which may be a commentary on the exclusive nature of the fashionistas of Chelsea and Kensington.

The river Lea illustrates the complicated interconnected familial and geographic relations of the Thames watercourses. Lea is an elderly white woman in Mama Thames' court, dressed conservatively in a twinset and pearls and "seated incongruously" but "perfectly at home" amidst Mama Thames' middle aged African lady cronies (RL p.84). The Lea rises in the Chiltern Hills and runs through Tottenham in central London but escaped the worst of the pollution meted out to some of the other rivers. Other parts of the Lea run through Green Belt or Metropolitan Open Land, protected from further urban sprawl. Peter with his familiarity with London geography recognises that, "It's the least urbanised of London's rivers and the largest, so of course it survived the great stink. Lea must be one of Oxley's generation of *genii locorum* – if not older" (RL pp. 270-271). Although she comes from Father Thames' era, she has chosen to ally herself with Mama Thames. Her history and ethnicity appear to be less important than personal choice to join the other female London rivers of Mama Thames' court. Her independent mindedness may perhaps stem from the fact that most of her course is non-tidal but becomes tidal below Mill Meads, so like Peter, Lea has a foot in both sides of the Thames divide.

A much older aspect of the city is represented by the river Walbrook, "the second most important river in London" (LS p. 80) whose name is thought to derive from the course the river took under the Roman London Wall. Sir William Tyburn tells Peter that she was the youngest daughter of a wealthy Romano British merchant in First century Londinium. She and her family were tortured and killed in a massacre during Boudicca's uprising against the Romans in 60-61 CE. This act sent her father insane, and he eventually transitioned into the malicious entity Mr Punch, a spirit of riot and chaos because, "Law did not save his children. Law did not save his wife. And, for all his faith in the gods, they did nothing" LS p. 198). Walbrook is eventually revealed to be an aspect of the goddess Isis of the Walbrook who was venerated during the Roman occupation of Britain. Being an ancient goddess in her own right she owes allegiance to neither Father nor Mama Thames and represents the worship of the divine feminine before Abrahamic religions took hold in Britain. In the dénouement of *Lies Sleeping* (2008) she uses her power over her father Mr Punch to allow Peter to attempt to

arrest Martin Chorley, “Because […] I owe him. And I pays my debts” (LS p. 391). Punch has reneged on his deal with Peter, but Walbrook exhibits a sense of duty and honour befitting her ancient origins as Egyptian goddess of healing and magic. It is also interesting to note that this ancient and powerful goddess speaks in the same vernacular as Peter, eschewing the upper-class social markers of Tyburn she runs a flat roofed pub named the Goat and Crocodile, symbolic of her Egyptian/British origins and calls herself Lulu.

What these supernatural beings have in common is that each does double duty as fleshed out character in the narrative whilst also serving, to a greater or lesser extent, an allegorical, moral or social function. Beverley Brook and Mama Thames sound a warning about poor urban planning and flood risk, whilst actively working to improve the health of their rivers and the city they serve. Oberon illustrates the ongoing legacy of slavery but has a soldier’s moral code and serves as Neckinger’s wise protector. Walbrook is the divine feminine link to veneration of women in the ancient past, who uses her powers to reign in the madness of her father Punch and satisfy her debt to Peter. Mrs Canal represents endangered rain forests and the world beyond London, Crane, Olympia and Chelsea are the epitome of spoilt socialites and Lea embodies open-minded independence. Other key characters also have an allegorical function; Peter’s adaptable urban Starling and Nightingale’s rural embodiment of the past were discussed in the previous chapter, and Mr Punch’s role as trickster will be examined later in this chapter.

6.2.2 Living London

In addition to the literal representations of aspects of London by the *genii locorum*, Aaronovitch also frequently employs imagery to personify the city as a living entity. This invests his descriptions of London with a vitality laid down by repeated layers of metaphorical language. For example, Mama Thames uses the image of a dying man to describe the London of 1957,

> London was still a port back then, dying, but like an old man with a long exciting life, full of stories and memories. And terrified that he was going to be old and frail with no one to look after him. (RL p. 87)

Not content with a simple simile, Mama Thames compounds the description by investing London with a backstory and a physical and emotional vulnerability with fears for the future. Through her elevation to goddess status Mama Thames was able to help the ailing city reinvent itself in a post-imperial, post-industrial era. As the mother archetype she takes on the nurturing role of 'looking after' the old man. Mama Thames may be a failed nurse, but in her second incarnation she is able to reinvigorate the 'old man' by turning London into a vibrant female influenced cultural centre.

Aaronovitch explores another facet of London as Peter in a melancholy mood following the death of the jazz vampire sisters (*Moon Over Soho*, 2011) personifies London as a fashionable, experienced woman,

> London didn't care. She never does when you leave her, because she knows for every one that leaves another two arrive. Besides she was too busy painting on her neon lipstick and dolling herself up in red and gold. (MOS p. 370)

This is a whimsical and uncharacteristically poetic passage from Peter who is mourning the loss of his girlfriend. Under Simone's posthumous influence he envisages London as a sophisticated and jaded but also a hard-hearted woman who cares little for individuals. In this guise London seduces her lovers through artifice and glamour but is essentially pitiless. These two contrasting images of the feeble old man and the indifferent socialite express two of the many personas competing for dominance within the psyche of the city.

As the books develop, so does Peter's personal relationship with the city. Peter experiences time distortions on several occasions where he communicates with Sir William Tyburn, god of the river before his death in the Victorian era. Peter explains these time slips by describing the city as a sentient being and speculates to Lady Tyburn that "I'm tapping into the memory of the city" (LS, p. 190). In accordance with stone tape theory in which it is theorised that hauntings may be explained by historical events somehow imprinting themselves on the fabric of buildings, Peter extends the metaphor to describe "That dangerous half-life memory of the city where gods and ghosts mingled with the stone memory of the architecture" (FV p. 164). This idea of ghosts being contained within the city fabric is a recurring image and traumatic events appear to be the catalyst for the process to occur,

> the accumulated casualties, from the train crashes and the fires and the victims of the hideous suicides […] some, the worst of all the cries, had time to build up a head of hope before the darkness swept them up into the stone and concrete memory of the tunnels." (WUG p. 315)

The London Underground in particular seems to be a repository of sadness and human despair, the screech of the trains somehow giving voice to its "concrete memory" of loss.

As well as having a deep and long memory, some areas of the city are described as possessing a distinct personality such Archway which Peter describes as an "awkward spot",

> Archway is where the post-war dream of the urban motorway died in the teeth of local opposition […] the Archway Tavern stood proudly like a combination tank trap and brick shithouse in the way of progress. Famously the planning inquiry got so unruly that the Planning Inspector fled through a fire escape to escape the protestors. (HT p. 166)

This passage is dense with imagery; although Archway does not possess a *genius loci* of its own, it has a wayward personality which Peter speculates may be sacred to Mr Punch on account of its unruliness and lack of respect for authority. It is proud of its truculent and uncompromising opposition to so called "dream" of "progress" which is used in an ironic sense. The unflattering monosyllabic description of "tank trap" and "brick shithouse" reveals the uncompromising working-class nature of the pub as the heart of the district and its inhabitants, which like the council flats of Notting Hill are heroic defenders against gentrification and destructive infrastructure projects. "Teeth" does double duty as an andromorphic and animal metaphor evoking the bared teeth of an animal and the contrary opposition of the human will. The war time references, in this case to a tank trap are also a common feature of Aaronovitch's London and will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Aaronovitch uses other imagery to create the sense of a vital, but damaged city, such as portraying city buildings with human features such as blind eyes, "The bungalow was blind, with grimy net curtains" (BH p. 256), and even a voice which in an altercation with the Faceless Man, "The front façade of the Goat and Crocodile came screaming across the street and into the side of our car" (LS, p. 244). And when Peter

encounters one of the Quiet People who destroys the platform of Oxford Circus tube station, “Ceramic tiles splintered with a noise like teeth breaking” (WUG p.215). This repetition of damaged body imagery establishes the character of London as a living being that may be hurt or maimed by others. Acts of violence committed against it are recorded in the fabric of the city and may seep into the psyche of the place in which they occurred.

6.3 London as a microcosm of the British macrocosm

As discussed in the previous chapter, the London of Aaronovitch is divided on many levels including class, ethnicity, geography and orientation to the past or the future. In order to articulate the myriad voices within the metropolis Aaronovitch employs the technique of using multiple *genii locorum* to embody the identity of the city. As London is so vast and varied, no single overarching guardian spirit could encompass its diversity, but Aaronovitch’s *genius loci* solution is able to encompass the complicated social and political history of the multi-faceted world views held within the city. As Nightingale says “the first rule of dealing with them in person is to remember that every single one of them is different. ‘They are after all […] spirits of a specific locality. It’s only logical that they will be somewhat variable’” (FS p. 96). Attebery (2022, p. 15) described the “distributed selfhood” of a single individual represented by several characters and this concept can be usefully extended to the distributed selfhood of a place such as the personified London of Aaronovitch.

The individuality of each guardian spirit reflects the unique features of London localities, and this can be extrapolated out beyond London. The fractures between the competing elements of the city reference many of the issues facing the country as a whole, so that London becomes a microcosm of the British macrocosm. Peter’s struggles with the differing world views of Mama and Father Thames, the powerful opposition of Tyburn representing vested interest and the cruelties of the Faceless Man reflecting bureaucratic indifference and abuse of power are universal themes within the nation. Similarly, his concern for the disenfranchised and overlooked, and his sardonic commentary on “ghastly architectural mistakes” (RL p. 269) which are recognisable across the British Isles. The first novel *The Rivers of London* was written in 2011, and the latest at the time of writing is *Amongst Our Weapons* written in 2022. At

first very London focussed, the novel cycle has gradually extended to cover other parts of England including Herefordshire (*Foxglove Summer*), and Manchester and Derbyshire (*Amongst Our Weapons*). The next as yet unpublished novel *Stone and Sky* is set in Scotland. As the series develops issues which were present in the first novel including immigration, social cohesion, housing, the environment, crime, police budgets and national security continue to develop as themes. These are issues of relevance across the British Isles and speak to the state of the nation, making the novels relevant beyond London, and indeed beyond Britain as their worldwide popularity attests.

To briefly set the novels in a socio-political context, the UK has weathered a number of national storms in recent years including the effects of 15 years of austerity policies following the 2008 GFC, the 2014 Scottish independence referendum, the Brexit debate from 2016 to 2020, the Covid pandemic, the revolving Prime Ministers and the death of Queen Elizabeth the Second in 2022. The sovereignty of Britain has also been undermined by outside interference in internal politics, and as contemporary novels that comment directly on national events, the murky role that Russian security services GRU played in the Scottish independence and Brexit referenda is discussed in *False Value* (2020),

> ‘What would the GRU want with algorithms?’ I said.
>
> ‘GCHQ have some mad theory that they’re going to try to influence public opinion in the West,’ she said.
>
> ‘Perhaps in support of an effort to get sanctions lifted.’ (FV p. 116)

These events have been unsettling, and Hill (2023) opines that at present there is a sense of uncertain identity in Britain as a whole,

> a country’s identity is constituted by the interplay between external views of its status and its domestic self-understandings. At times that identity is stable, at others it seems in flux. The present post-Brexit period is one of considerable volatility at both levels. (n. p.)

The national mood appears to be one of self-doubt and uncertainty when compared with for example the ebullient ‘cool Britannia’ period of the 1990s, or the ‘swinging sixties.’ Whilst this is reflected in some of the key themes in Aaronovitch, such as

concern for the erosion of social cohesion, to some extent this is also a global phenomenon as the world grapples with existential threats which challenge the stewardship of homo sapiens. Oziewics et al. (2022, p. 2) writes “pollution, global warming, biodiversity loss, climate change, and expansion of human populations paralleled by rising racism, exclusion, violence and xenophobia – are primary challenges to our story systems.” By story systems he is referring to the “human supremacist worldview” that humans are entitled by reason of being the top of the evolutionary ladder to exploit the planet for convenience. The dystopian and hopeless visions of many contemporary literary responses to these challenges portray “the futures we dread rather than the futures we want” Oziewicz et al. (2022, p. 5). Fantasy is a key weapon in mobilising the imagination of the populace to demand the future they want, and Aaronovitch’s vision of what Lethbridge (2017) names “cooperative diversity” is a positive counter to the dominant narrative of doom. Although there are numerous reasons to be fearful of the future Aaronovitch retains a positive and hopeful attitude, stressing cooperative communal action, tolerance and humour as a way to navigate difficulties. The *Rivers* novels tackle challenging social issues, but they do not descend into the gloom of dystopia or retreat into nostalgia. Aaronovitch’s alternative, hopeful narrative is that if the multiple, divided Thames and its tributaries can find a way to coexist and even cooperate, then the rest of Britain can do so as well. This optimism is articulated by Nightingale, who despite surviving two world wars “and the loss of everything he holds dear”, tells Peter “Here’s a comforting thought for you […]. However long you may live, the world will never lose its ability to surprise you with its beauty.” (LS p. 345). This tension between concern for social injustice and optimism for the future is a key feature of the novels.

6.4 Psychogeography and London’s trauma

Aaronovitch’s multi-levelled personification of London resonates with psychogeography which is described by Coverley (2018, p. 1) as “the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place.” The concept of psychogeography draws upon psychology as psychogeographers “seek to uncover the true nature of that which lies beneath the flux of the everyday” (Coverley 2018, p. 14). Coverley’s use of “flux” is apt as the etymology of the word relates to the Latin *fluxus* ‘to flow’, and Aaronovitch’s novels

are concerned with the hidden hydrography and repressed trauma flowing below the surface of London's streets.

The past is ever present in Aaronovitch's London as Peter's preoccupation with history and architecture colour his descriptions of the city,

> The Sephardim, the Jews of the Southern Diaspora […] built a great synagogue in Bevis Marks in Aldgate, which opened in 1701. There it has survived fire, riots and two rounds of bombing by the Germans and the IRA, to become the oldest synagogue in England still in use. (AOW p. 252)

In this passage the peoples, cultures and history of the capital are described through one individual building, and the history and character of the building cannot be separated from the history and identity of its inhabitants. Natural disasters and man-made atrocities of riots, war and terrorism have imprinted themselves into the stones and collective memories of people such as the Bevis Marks synagogue and its worshipers.

The psychogeography of London is a prominent feature of Aaronovitch's writing as he repeatedly links the historical trauma experienced by inhabitants with trauma wrought on the fabric of the city. Houswitschka's (2015) discussion of the psychogeography of London compares the unattractive features of the cityscape with the psychological hurt experienced by Blitz survivors, and later traumatic events such as terrorist attacks and the ideology-driven economic policies of the 1980s that fractured communities,

> The ugliness of the city represents the continuity of the damage and mutilations that were done. On the one hand, it represents the hurt minds of those traumatised during the war. On the other hand, the mutilations of postwar London still form the minds of people walking the streets of London. (Houswitschka, 2015, p.71)

In an echo of the destruction of the past, Aaronovitch's London suffers damage through magical battles with the Faceless Man and other opponents. Shockingly the destroyed landmarks are some of the most familiar and beloved sites such as Covent Garden, the Royal Opera House, Harrods and Oxford Circus Underground station. This assault on beloved buildings mirrors the sense of loss and dislocation within real-world

communities which have suffered physical and bureaucratic acts of violence such as slum clearances and ill-considered planned communities.

Although Aaronovitch inserts a great deal of history into his writing, two periods of history feature most prominently: the aerial bombings of the Second World War, and the post-war rebuild and remodel of town centres in the modern style. The key period of World War Two and especially the Blitz is mentioned in all the novels set in London, and in the London of the *Rivers*, the war has left physical and psychological damage on both the city and its inhabitants. It is difficult for a peace-accustomed person to appreciate the sheer horror of the blitz as almost the entire East End was flattened over 57 terrifying nights in 1940 with the Thames acting as a convenient route marker for bomber crews (Akroyd, 2007). The terror inflicted on Londoners during the Blitz and the V1 and V2 rocket attacks was intense as an estimated 30,000 civilians were killed by 12,000 metric tonnes of ordinance dropped by the *Luftwaffe* (Imperial War Museum, 2023). In addition to wartime atrocities, London has been the centre of bombing campaigns against both civilian and military targets for many decades. The IRA bombings of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and hard-line Islamic terror attacks of the twenty-first century add to the list of brutalities suffered by London residents. Peter casually speculates about what he would do if a fellow tube passenger "opens his jacket and yells 'God is great' will I make it down the other end of the carriage in time?" (RL p. 188). Such events leave psychological scars and are manifested in a residual anxiety carried by Londoners in their journeys around the city.

The Second World War is a central plot feature in the second novel *Moon Over Soho* (2011) where Peter explains that for those who were children during the war the echoes of the trauma lasted long after the bombings ceased, "[Dad] said that growing up in London in the late 1940s, it was like the war was still going on in people's heads, what with the bomb sites, the rationing and the patronising voices of the BBC Home Service" (MOS p.45). Although echoes of the war are evident in all his books, *Moon Over Soho* (2011) explores the lasting impact of war through the characters of the 'jazz vampire' sisters including Peter's girlfriend Simone Fitzwilliam who is revealed to be a survivor of the 1941 bombing of the Café de Paris,

> 9 March 1941 […] SITUATION REPORT […] listed, in order of importance, damage to factories, railways, telecommunications,

> electricity supply, docks, roads, hospitals and public buildings [...] Café de Paris, Coventry Street. Casualties – 34 killed, approximately 80 seriously injured. (MOS p.194)

The starkness of the official report that placed the damaged infrastructure of the capital above the human cost in lives speaks volumes about the level of destruction and desperate fight for survival experienced at that time.

The lasting psychological effects of the war seventy years after the events are explored through Simone and her sisters who live a hazy half existence in Soho. They survived the bombing of the Café de Paris but could only continue to live by feeding off the life essence of jazz musicians, in the same way that those who experience severe trauma may survive, but often in a diminished state. Simone cannot recall many details of her past and is surprised when Peter informs her that she is close to 90 years old. This twin vampire/war metaphor is also applied to developers within the same novel as Aaronovitch employs the image of a stake through the heart to describe the death of a neighbourhood, "In the 1960s the planning department of the London County Council, whose unofficial motto was *Finishing What the Lutwaffe Started*, decided that what London really needed was a series of orbital motorways driven through its heart" (MOS pp. 315-6). Aaronovitch employs the punning image of a motorway "driven" literally and metaphorically through the heart to describe the death of a neighbourhood, ironically linking the LCC with the German Airforce's aim of flattening residential districts and inflicting terror on Londoners.

Aaronovitch is acutely aware of what was lost through the war, where entire communities lost their homes and identities. For example, in this description of St. James's where "a stick of incendiary bombs, back in April 1941 […] destroyed everything except the façade of number 8 King Street, the London home of Christie's since 1823" (BH p. 56). Even in casual references to places such as the Mile End Road, Aaronovitch cannot help but reference how London is burdened by the violence of war, "The Mile End Road. It's where young Richard II signed the peasants' charter with his fingers crossed behind his back and the first ever V1 cruise missile to land in London hit" (HT p. 151). That two such important historical events should happen in the same locality speaks to the dense historical fabric of the city. Aaronovitch also cannot resist a sardonic comment on the privileged King reneging on his promises to

the lowest sectors of society. Although not political novels in the obvious sense, Aaronovitch betrays his proletarian sympathy in many small ways.

The communities that had suffered through the war were subject to further peace-time trauma at the hand of bureaucrats inflicting unsympathetic planning decisions on ancient neighbourhoods such as Southwark and Bethnal Green, ignoring kinship ties and visiting geographical isolation on residents moved to new builds (Young & Wilmott, 2013). After the destruction of the war itself, the botched post-war rebuild is continually referenced as Aaronovitch rails against the style of architecture that replaced older buildings with brutalist designs. To the author's eyes these buildings are an attack on the identity of the area, "When my dad was growing up the city was dotted with bomb sites […]. In the postwar years, these sites were gradually cleared and rebuilt as a series of ghastly architectural mistakes" (RL p. 269). Ekman (2018) refers to this as the era of uglification of London and notes that it is a common feature of London based fantasy texts, "What particular time period constitutes the Era of Uglification differs between texts, but they share the idea that during some period, ugly buildings were constructed or an ugly cityscape brought into being" (Ekman 2018 p. 393). The fact that so many writers refer to these ugly buildings and degraded urban environment indicates the strong negative views of the residents who live and work in these spaces. Aaronovitch describes the resulting urban landscape with a mixture of humour and anger, "As property prices started rising, developers snatched up bombsites and derelict buildings and erected the shapeless concrete lumps that have made the 1970s the shining beacon of architectural splendour that it is" (MOS p.252). He continually questions the bureaucratic decisions leading from "the strange urge to turn the historic centre of British cities into gigantic outdoor toilets" (MOS p.252), and his architectural criticism extends beyond the boundaries of London to incorporate the whole of Britain, "Big cities thin out at the edges […] before you either reach the historic old town or, more usually, what's left of it after the one-two blow of aerial bombardment and post-war planning" (FS p.25). Including this description of the new town planned communities of the 1960s and 1970s, "They were called New Towns only because the term 'bantustan' hadn't been invented yet" (MOS p.252). However, the most severe criticism is reserved for buildings in London, the place that

Aaronovitch most loves, like this description of the since demolished City of Westminster Magistrate's Court,

> a bland box of a building built in the 1970s; it was considered to be so lacking in architectural merit that there was talk of listing it so that it could be preserved for posterity as an awful warning. Inside, the waiting areas maintained the unique combination of cramped busyness and barren inhumanity that was the glory of British architecture in the second half of the twentieth century. (RL p. 92)

Figure *3*

City of Westminster Magistrates' Court

City of Westminster Magistrates' Court, facing south across Horseferry Road. Tagishimon (2007, December 18). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:City_of_Westminster_Magistrates%27_Court_-_October_2007.jpg Creative Commons

Aaronovitch rails against the mean philosophy of the "cramped busyness and barren inhumanity" of the architecture that ignores the needs of people to satisfy the ideology of the architect. The alliterative "bland box of a building built in the 1970s" expresses frustration through its staccato rhythm and repetition of the harsh consonantal plosive 'b'. The grief and trauma experienced by Londoners who have survived threats to their identity through community loss and brutalist dogma are given voice by the humanist Peter and his frequently sarcastic narration. Another example is this description of the Barbican's Shakespeare Tower which employs military imagery of armaments and destruction,

> Designed in the 1960s by adherents to the same Guernsey Gun emplacement school of architecture as those that built my school, it was another Brutalist tower of jagged concrete that had acquired a

> grade II listing because it was that or admit how fucking ugly it was. (WUG p.51)

The very name 'Barbican' refers to a defensive fortification and the reference to Hitler's Atlantic Wall "Guernsey Gun emplacement" suggests that London is still at war. Ironically though, now the threat comes from developers and architects, so in effect London is at war with itself. Aaronovitch is also satirising the process for listing buildings for preservation, which in Britain is decided by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, "Listed buildings are graded to reflect their relative special architectural and historic interest" (UK Government, 2018, para. 7). Amongst the long list of features that make a building suitable for protected status, "awful warning", or to avoid admitting "how fucking ugly it is" do not appear in the official document. The irony that this ugly piece of architectural vanity is named after Britain's greatest poet, famed for his love of the natural world contributes to the satirical criticism. Aaronovitch is adamant that the "shapeless lumps", "barren inhumanity", "outdoor toilets" and "ghastly architectural mistakes" of the brutalist school have compounded the trauma of communities already reeling from the war and terrorist attacks that followed.

6.5 London's monstrous architecture

The section above articulated a link with psychogeography and explored how the maimed historic sites of London are used as a metaphor for the damaged psyche of their inhabitants. This section will further discuss how ugly, monstrous buildings dehumanise the inhabitants of London and how the concept of monstrosity is employed to satirise poor architecture and urban planning as Aaronovitch answers the questions asked by Cohen (1996), why have these monsters been created and what do they represent?

Monstrosity is a central theme in Aaronovitch, and the image of the damaged face is a recurring motif, both in characters who are othered by facial disfigurement, and also in the damaged architectural face of the city of London. Alongside detailed descriptions of the 'real' London, Aaronovitch creates the "defamiliarized" (Nikolajeva, 2003) "horror London" (Hutchings, 2009) of the othered and the disfigured. Aaronovitch critically engages with the concept of otherness and in particular the interplay

between ugly brutalist buildings and the damaged faces and bodies of key characters. This juxtaposition of the monstrous face and the monstrous architecture of the damaged buildings in Aaronovitch's London establishes a commentary on environmental degradation and faceless bureaucracy.

Kirk (2008) reminds us that architecture has come late to the debate about the human relationship with monsters. In architectural terms the epithet 'monstrous' is usually employed as a criticism, used to dismiss "anything big, ugly, out of place, or dysfunctional" (p.7) which to many people is the majority of modern architecture which reached an apotheosis of odium in mid-century brutalism. The brutalist school was hugely influenced by Le Corbusier, whose idea of housing as 'a machine for living in' (1927) was embraced by Britain's post-war architecture schools. Post-war planning and rebuilding of London was "self-consciously progressivist" and "the most systematic attempt to reorder London's physical and social environments since Wren's grandiose vision" for the city after the Great Fire of 1666 (Mort, 2004, p. 120). Driven by post-war Labour politicians concerned by slum living conditions, the progressive architecture of the modern London skyline juxtaposed with the winding alleys and historical survivors mean that the city is simultaneously futuristic and mediaeval with often jarring contrasts between architectural styles.

The degraded urban environment of community-unfriendly modernist buildings forms a monstrous architecture that mars the otherwise beautiful historic buildings and surviving parks and wilderness areas of the city. Aaronovitch frequently employs the image of horror and the monster to critique the appearance and social ideology behind the production of twentieth century modern architecture, "Few buildings can evoke the sinister horror of 1950s municipal architecture more strikingly than the flat roof pub. Thrown up in their thousands wherever the working class were being rehoused" (LS p.78). The dark imagery of "sinister horror" is intertwined with social commentary on the casual way in which working class communities were uprooted and rehoused in brutalist, planned communities set apart from community hubs, shops and jobs.

In 1984, Prince Charles famously described the proposed extension to the National Gallery as a "monstrous carbuncle on the face of a much-loved and elegant friend." His anthropomorphic criticism was applauded by many Britons who held the view that

'modern' architecture had wounded the beloved old cities and inflicted torment on inhabitants of post-war new builds. Anyone who has experienced the misery of an open plan office or shared communal concrete spaces smelling of urine will likely concur with the King's description of the concrete excrescence. Some buildings have been so hubristically ill-conceived that they become a source of danger and sickness for the inhabitants (Burge, 2004; Greer, 2007; Tombs, 2020) or barely-credibly, in the case of London's popularly named Walkie-Talkie building at 20 Fenchurch Street, able to produce a life-threatening concentrated heat ray sufficient to melt the plastic on cars and produce a wind tunnel effect at street level at the same time. On opening in 2015, it was awarded the Carbuncle Cup by *Building Design* magazine for the ugliest new building in the UK (Lane, 2015). In contrast sympathetic designs seem to be thin on the ground, "Coin Street Community Builders whose unofficial motto was *Building houses that people might actually want to live in.* It was revolutionary stuff." (BH p. 103). Aaronovitch as a London resident is well versed in the contentious issues of architectural dogma versus practical living considerations, and he allows himself free rein to satirise the idealogues who permitted such unpopular radically non-traditional designs.

In *Broken Homes* (2013) the fate of the brutalist Skygarden, described by Peter as the "original sink estate" (p. 94) and "Stromberg's infamous poem of concrete and deprivation" (WUG p. 51) closely parallels the real history of London's Heygate Estate which was eventually demolished by Southwark Council in 2014 after a lengthy fight with residents (Lethbridge, 2017). Aaronovitch's description of the bedroom of a Skygarden flat illustrates the inhuman dogma of the brutalist school where the needs of inhabitants take second place to design ethos,

> The width of the end wall was taken up with a sliding patio door and the length precisely calculated so that you could have a wardrobe, but only if it blocked access to either the patio or the rest of the flat. (BH p. 317)

The cramped proportions which are "precisely calculated" to provide maximum inconvenience to inhabitants are contrasted with the Georgian Folly bedroom which is actually designed to meet the requirements of the occupant,

> It was twice the size of my room at the station house, with good proportions and a high ceiling. A brass double bed was shoved into one corner, a Narnia wardrobe in the other and a writing desk was between them, where it could catch the light from one of the two sash windows." (p.82)

The 'Narnia' wardrobe evokes a large sized and ornate antiquity that complements the generous space, completely at odds with the Sky Garden flat which precludes the very presence of a wardrobe. Lethbridge (2017) points out that the roof gardens of the real-life Walkie-Talkie are also named Sky Garden, as a further comment on the parallels between the monstrous design of the two constructions. In *Broken Homes* the design of the Skygarden turns out to be a magical battery storing the energy of inhabitants, literally taking their life essence for the use of a morally bankrupt, psychopathic magician, "Planning to extract magical power out of the everyday lives of council flat tenants" (BH p. 229). The political and social allegory is clear, that poorly designed modernist buildings dehumanise the inhabitants. The building is monstrous in appearance and intent, but Peter manages to prevent the misuse of the magical reservoir through precipitating the collapse of the building complex which as Lethbridge says, frees the stored energy for the use of ordinary people for whom the building was originally designed. Here Aaronovitch is combining allegoric urban fantasy with social commentary and architectural criticism that is rooted in real-world settings.

In the case of Skygarden/Heygate, one monstrous building is destroyed, but many other monstrous buildings remain. Through Peter's scathing assessments of their architectural merits, Aaronovitch is performing a cultural act of bringing repressed outrage and grief to the surface and expressing concern for the lost and damaged identity of London and its fractured communities. If, as Cohen (1996) posits, monsters are the children of society and pose the question of why they have been created, Aaronovitch answers that they are "ghastly architectural mistakes" (RL p. 269) and questions the cultural assumptions that politicians and architects know best how to house the populace. On the level of individual grief, Hamilton (2020), Kearney (2005) and Kristeva (1966/1980) argue that story has the power to heal and comfort through understanding the unconscious drives within the human psyche. Aaronovitch articulates anger and pain but also offers the gift of humour. We may have to live with these monsters in our midst as a constant reminder of lost heritage, but at least we

can laugh at them, and shared laughter offers comfort and healing. Humour is also a powerful form of protest and helps to articulate opposition and develop collective identity (Hart, 2007).

6.5.1 Monstrous faces

The sections above articulated a link between monstrosity and psychogeography by exploring how the maimed identity of London is represented through repeated imagery of monstrous or damaged buildings. Aaronovitch uses the injured face of London as a metaphor for the damaged psyche of its inhabitants, and this section will discuss the dehumanising effects of facial damage and how the damaged faces of characters reflect the scars inflicted on the physical material of the city. For example, Peter's police partner Lesley's deformed face is described in architectural imagery,

> There's been severe damage to [Lesley's] maxilla, nasal spine, ramus and mandible […The surgeons] put in a temporary scaffold to allow her to breathe and ingest food, and there was a chance that she might benefit from a temporary face transplant – if they could find a suitable donor. (MOS p.3)

The medical scaffold holds her face together in the same way that scaffolding supports a building, and the image of a crumbling building is used repeatedly to describe Lesley's face, "Up close the ruin of Lesley's face was even harder to deal with" (RL p. 241). "Lesley's ruined face" (WUG p.87). "Her face was still ruined" (BH p. 28). The architectural image is extended to other unfortunate characters who are possessed, or sequestrated by Mr Punch, "The mouth opened and I could see the red ruin of the jaw […]. His face slumped like wet papier-mâché" (RL p. 120). In this horrific description the broken bones of the face evoked by the alliterative "red ruin" of the mouth is compounded by the lack of structural integrity suggested by slurry of wet paper.

Aaronovitch also employs marine and cooking imagery to accentuate the non-human appearance of the victims of Punch and the Faceless Man, his "face flopping open like a starfish" (RL p. 121), the "boiled lobster face" (BH p. 77). "What bare skin showed on his face, neck and hands was a horrible pinkish brown like well cooked pork. His mouth was wide open and stained a sooty black and his eyes were a nasty boiled white" (BH p. 75). One victim of the Faceless Man had "the skin of the face […] neatly removed to reveal the dried-meat coloured muscles and tendons beneath" (HT p. 221). The use of

culinary terms, boiled, well cooked, dried-meat and sooty emphasise the loss of human identity inflicted by facial damage as victims are turned into mere pieces of meat.

Because of the close relationship between Peter and Lesley and her central position in the narrative, her injuries are described in excruciating detail,

> It was worse than I had imagined. So bad that my mind couldn't accept that it was a face at all. The chin was gone. Instead, the skin below a grotesquely full lower lip slid away in a series of uneven lumps until it reached the smooth undamaged skin of her throat. The nose was shapeless, flat, a twisted knob of pink flesh that sat at the centre of a series of ridged white scars that crawled across cheek and forehead. I flinched. (MOS p.372)

The compounding similes intensify the horror, "grotesquely full", "uneven lumps", "shapeless", "twisted knob" and recalls Aaronovitch's criticism of the amorphous "shapeless concrete lumps" of 1970s architecture (MOS p.252). The image of crawling scars also suggests an insect or other non-human creature, as if Lesley has been made less than human by her injuries. Aaronovitch later makes explicit the link between appearance and human identity, "Because she lost her face, man. Because that had to be like having your identity ripped away. Because you're looking in the mirror and a hideous stranger is staring back" (FS p.149). When later in the series Lesley learns to magically change her face Aaronovitch returns to the marine imagery, "The skin on her face rippling like some undersea creature settling into the seabed" (AOW p. 374). Lesley's face is motile and settles into the seabed in a non-human method of propulsion that recalls the crawling scars of her original injuries. "Each fold rolled and merged, rolled and merged. It looked painful" (AOW p. 374). The undersea realm is populated by bizarre inhuman creatures who inhabit an abject space where the boundaries between inside and outside are ill-defined (Kristeva, 1966/1980). This imagery further excludes Lesley from normality, relegating her to an amorphous position somewhere between human and alien. She may be able to repair her face through magic, but her ability to change her facial appearance has made her something different and othered from humanity.

Many victims of Punch and the Faceless Man either have their faces damaged or their heads removed in the ultimate act of removing their human identity, "From the chin up there was nothing but a pulped red mass flecked with white bone" (BH p. 18).

Decapitation is a running theme in the novels and occurs frequently in the first novel as the preferred method of execution by Mr Punch, “Well then second, murdering gent he puts on a cap and a red jacket and he brings out his stick … and knocks his head clean off” (RL p. 6). This of course mirrors the real-life puppet play featuring Punch, his abused wife Judy and their baby, the police constable who tries to arrest Punch and the hangman who may or may not succeed in hanging Punch for murder.

The most gruesome example of decapitation is the unfortunate Larry the Lark, the victim of the first Faceless Man who in turn was dispatched by the second Faceless Man Martin Chorley. Larry is kept alive by magical means as a disembodied head in a circus booth, “Underneath [a silver salver lid] was the head of Larry the Lark as fresh as the day it was cut off” (MOS p.243). “The head rested directly on a pole of clear glass reinforced with bands of brass. Protruding from the truncated neck were two leathery bladders looking unpleasantly like lungs” (MOS p.256). The fate of Larry the Lark illustrates the ultimate abuse of power. The image of a headless torso indicates a loss of identity, but a torso-less head is truly horrific, especially when forced to recite a speech of welcome to visitors. This obscene act is designed to turn the identity of a person into a grotesque puppet and speaks to a complete loss of humanity by the perpetrator.

As the face is inextricably bound to self-identity, the masked nature of the Faceless Men one and two illustrate their lack of humanity as they abuse their power by torturing their victims and terrorising the community. Their lack of respect for human rights both dehumanises their victims and also turns the perpetrators into faceless monsters. In this way they resemble the faceless bomber crews, terrorists, bureaucrats and architects who decapitated and ruined the face of London through acts of intentional and unintentional harm.

6.6 Masks and Puppetry

The interplay of masks and identity is a key theme in the novel cycle; the arch villain is named the Faceless Man as his identity is concealed for six books. Other characters commonly suffer life changing facial injuries or are the victims of chimeric experimentation. Lesley May, Peter’s former police partner is forced to wear a mask due to the horrific injuries inflicted on her by Mr Punch, and appearance and normality

are explored through what it means to be othered from societal norms. In Aaronovitch masks and changing faces are a metaphor for hidden and shifting identities as Lesley hides her betrayal literally and figuratively behind a mask of loyalty to the Metropolitan police and the Folly, and the Faceless Man wears a mask to disguise his identity and cruelty. The Faceless Man is later revealed as Martin Chorley, but his original nickname is fitting; not only does he conceal his identity behind the combination of a mask and a spell, "his face was hidden by a plain beige coloured mask that covered his whole head" (MOS p. 350), but he also carefully conceals his business interests. One of his assets is building maintenance contractor County Gard, which is described by a Skygarden resident as "lackeys of the capitalist class […] designed to keep the working class in their place" (BH p. 210). When the resident attempts to discover the true owner of County Gard he found instead "a whole series of nested shell corporations it takes ages to work through […]. All part of the tax avoidance merry-go-round" (BH p. 210). Terry Skinner, the tech billionaire in the appropriately titled *False Value* (2020) also hides his wealth,

> funds are shunted around from company to company to offshore account to financial instrument, and then filtered through a fine mesh of shell companies whose only purpose is to disguise where the money comes from and who has their snout in the trough. (FV pp. 113 - 114)

Aaronovitch is offering social criticism of the obfuscation and secrecy surrounding business tax avoidance as the beneficiaries hide behind the mask of shell companies to avoid being good corporate citizens and shouldering a fair share of the tax burden. Aaronovitch's mask metaphor may also be extended to individuals hiding behind faceless bureaucracy, offering indifference in the face of suffering. The victims of the Faceless Men one and two, and the victims of the well-meant but ill-conceived post-war housing schemes all suffered from powerful oppressors they could neither see nor fight.

The symbolism of the mask is most thoroughly explored via the character of Lesley May. Lesley's betrayal of Peter and Nightingale is a key plot feature and her switching loyalty from the Folly magical police to the Faceless Man comes as a surprise to both Peter and the reader. Because of the damage to her face caused by Mr Punch Lesley wears a mask for the large part of four books, and in a prescient passage Peter

comments that the Faceless Man's "tan featureless mask reminded me disturbingly of Lesley's" (BH p. 307). Again, before learning of Lesley's betrayal Peter encounters magical statues in a gallery and comments that the artist's manikins had "their facial features ground down until they presented smooth faces to the world. It reminded me uncomfortably of Lesley's mask or the head of the Faceless Man" (WUG p.83). The inability to read facial expressions is a key feature of masks, as Isis describes a masquerade full of "Lords and ladies […] thinking wicked thoughts while safe behind their masks" (RL p. 140). The mask wearer may experience some sort of social advantage by suppressing their tells, but again Isis comments that "The thing you have to remember about a masquerade is that at the end of the night the masks have to come off" (RL p. 141). Secrets and deceptions cannot last forever, and Lesley's betrayal of the Folly is once again presaged prior to her removing her figurative mask. Lesley finally reveals the duplicitous nature of her switched allegiance to the Faceless man by tasering Peter in the back at the end of *Broken Homes* (2013).

Lesley learns magical techniques to repair and change her face from the Faceless Man, but at the cost of no longer being quite human as she becomes monstrous in a psychological as well as a physical sense, "The pale skin of her face rippled and her features changed. It started at the bridge of her nose, the skin bunching up and the flopping down horribly, like the wings of a manta or the shroud of a squid" (HT p. 334). She has lost her one true face along with her original identity of police officer and is able to conceal her new identity behind a series of organic masks. In another telling passage Lesley's magical signature comes to resemble the Faceless Man's which Peter describes as a razor strop "like the flat of a blade running up the skin of my face" (LS, p. 252). The imagery of the razor indicates danger, which is placed in opposition to Nightingale's measured tick tock signature, but the image of the blade touching a face adds a visceral element of sadistic pleasure in inflicting pain and terror on the victim.

Puppetry is another major theme in the novel cycle with Mr Punch remaining a key force throughout until Peter forces a form of truce by preventing Punch's death in *Lies Sleeping* (2018). The character of Punch is derived from the murderous puppet from the ancient children's entertainment which is still popular in the British Isles, particularly in seaside locations. Windling (2019) traces the origin of Punch to the trickster figures of ancient narratives who represent the "archetypal spirit of

contrariness and cheeky anarchy" (para. 5) who delights in knocking authority figures and violating societal norms. According to Russo (2008, p. 255) Jung's trickster archetype embodies the infantile, unsocialised aspect of the shadow self, on the one hand tending towards unrestrained gluttony, libido and cruelty, on the other hand offering "the joy of release and freedom from the confines of order" through laughter (Russo, p. 257). The counter to Punch is the authority figure of the beadle or the policeman as the modern equivalent. In the *Rivers* novels, though, Punch is a very dark figure whose antics elicit no laughter from spectators. He creates his own human puppets through sequestrating their minds and forcing them to do his bidding. Lesley is one of the two sequestration victims to survive, although at the expense of huge physical and psychological trauma. The other survivor could not come to terms with his disfiguring injuries and committed suicide.

Aaronovitch reworks the Old Father Thames myth to reflect modern London, and in another literary repurposing, Punch is updated from comic trickster to a malignant repository of hurt and anger. Stripped of his comic appeal Punch becomes a dark shadow villain to Peter's hero. This process of splitting is common in mythologic literature (Meyer, 2003) with many dark and light pairs including Endiku and Gilgamesh, Cain and Abel, Sauron and Gandalf, Voldemort and Harry. By contrast doubling is where opposites are contained within a single vessel such as Smeagol and Gollum, and Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Whilst sequestrated by Punch Lesley appears to be an exemplary police officer, but in reality she lacks free will, her consciousness is suppressed whilst being puppeted by Punch in an extreme form of coercive control. The sequestration of Lesley is described in sexual language, "He's in your girlfriend's head, having carnal knowledge of her brain" (RL p. 280). Initially Lesley is unaware of her possession, much as Gothic female victims, such as Dracula's Lucy Westenra, and Mina Murray are sexualised and are made spectral "even to themselves" (Kohlke, 2012). In consequence Lesley must come to terms with the violation of her mind as well as the psychological and physical consequences of her injuries.

Post-sequestration Lesley undergoes a doubling in which her heroic police officer/apprentice persona vies with her shift of allegiance to the Faceless Man, eventually leading to her betrayal of Peter and Nightingale. Doubling offers a more subtle way to explore competing impulses other than pitting polar opposites of dark

and light against each other as “doubling allows us to view shadows as extension [of personality] rather than shadows as ‘other’" (Meyer, 2003, p. 521). Positive aspects of Lesley’s personality such as her determination, resourcefulness and endurance are employed to repair the damage to her face, but in the process she must also use aspects aligned to the shadow such as ruthlessness and duplicity. Later in the series she attempts to protect Peter from Martin Chorley in *False Value* and helps Nightingale and Peter to capture the murderous angel in *Amongst Our Weapons*, displaying very human complex and competing impulses.

Jung himself envisaged the interplay of shadow and light to be a dialectical process, rather than simplistic opposites, “Anyone who perceives his shadow and his light simultaneously sees himself from two sides and thus gets in the middle” by freeing oneself from polarity the subject is “no longer at the mercy of the opposites” (Jung, CW10, para. 872 as cited in Perry & Tower, Introduction, n.p). When Lesley is freed from Punch she remains altered by her injuries which are the outward manifestation of her otherness, but with a greater awareness of her shadow self. Lesley’s complex character is motivated by a crisis of identity engendered by the loss of her face and her internal struggle between competing desires. She is presented with the agonising choice of wearing a physical mask to hide her grotesque appearance and maintaining her integrity as a police officer or accepting help from an evil source to repair her face at the cost of betraying her friends.

The Faceless Man also employs a lesser form of puppetry, forcing his victims to act against their will and tries to make Peter jump off a rooftop in *Moon Over Soho*. He does not succeed with Peter, but a non-practitioner victim, Richard Lewis is forced to jump to his death in front of a subway train in *Broken Homes*. As the spirit of riot and disorder Punch has enormous power which he demonstrates by holding “over two thousand in thrall” (RL p. 234) at the Royal Opera House. The Faceless Man’s magic is not as powerful as Punch, though and instead of direct possession it involves a form of influence named *seducere* which is akin to the glamour, a strong control exhibited by *genius loci* who are not above forcing others to obey their suggestions. The characters of Mama Thames’ servant Uncle Bailiff and Beverley’s Russian acolyte Maksim are men who are unable or unwilling to escape the thrall of their goddesses. Peter narrowly avoids being enslaved by Lady Tyburn early in his apprenticeship as she tries to force

him to drink water from her fountain which Peter speculates is the source of the Tyburn stream.

These references to puppetry and the malignant use of influence are a commentary on the dehumanising influence of power. The casual use of magical control offers a challenge the concept of free will which is unsettling to the modern mindset that champions self-autonomy and the sovereignty of the individual. It is possible that Aaronovitch is referring to modern slavery, although this may be drawing a long bow. However, slavery is a theme in the novels as previously articulated through the character of Oberon, and the fate of vulnerable fae. Molly and fellow-fae Foxglove were traded by their Queen and kept in slave conditions in the early twentieth century "somebody put them in a pit […] and left them in it for, I estimate, about fifteen years" (LS p. 316). The chimeras were kept as sex-slaves in the original Faceless Man's club after being made the subject of magical experiments. Larry the Lark was also enslaved in the form of an animated head.

Like the imprisoned fae and the chimeras, Lesley's sense of self is undermined by physical and psychological abuse. The destruction of her face shatters her outward persona of police officer and attractive woman and precipitates an internal crisis. As her metaphorical mask is replaced by a literal mask her identity begins to shift from hero towards villain as she becomes the Faceless Man's apprentice and betrays the Folly in exchange for forbidden magical techniques. At this point Lesley slips from being a 'good' citizen, a police officer sworn to defend the realm, to a 'bad' citizen aligned with the Faceless Man. In an even greater act of betrayal she actively helps Chorley to enact a new Arthurian age. Lesley's injuries force her to turn to her shadow impulses of ruthlessness and duplicity, even calling into question her human status. With the ability to change her face at will Lesley eventually comes to inhabit an ill-defined moral grey zone akin to her changing physical appearance and hybrid identity.

6.7 Marginal identity and the *demi-monde*

Aaronovitch uses the term *demi-monde* to refer to the inhabitants of a hidden world of magic. Peter explains that the term,

> is French for half-world and, according to Abigail, is an abusive misogynistic term coined in nineteenth-century France. For us in the

> Society of the Occasionally Wise, it refers to the subculture that exists amongst the magical, the supernatural and others who have drifted into their orbit. (AOW p. 136)

Many of the inhabitants constitute a strange or magical underclass which may be seen as a metaphor for disenfranchised poor and vulnerable communities in modern Britain. These people live on the margins of society with insecure housing status and low social capital and are often very visible to visitors to London whilst simultaneously being invisible to residents (Ball, 2004). The post-war rebuild and mid-twentieth century slum-clearance planning policy created vast council estates which were condemned in a 2009 report by the Fabian Society as "social apartheid" (Dugan 2009 para. 1). Worryingly social cohesion in Britain is breaking down along housing status with a perceptual gap between private homeowners, and those living in council estates. Dugan (2009, para. 6) reports that "a third of those polled felt people living on council estates had 'nothing in common with them', and 60 per cent of those believed that mixed housing would be a bad idea." The correlation between disadvantage and housing has helped widen the social divide leading to an underclass of under-employed social housing residents who are alienated from mainstream society. This social phenomenon is paralleled in the *demi monde* of Aaronovitch which consists of an outgroup of monstrous others who have been forced literally and figuratively underground.

In Aaronovitch's *demi monde* this collection of disenfranchised misfits is more accepting of difference and plurality than those in the more privileged spaces of the city. To the conventional world view Lesley's facial injuries make her irretrievably damaged. Detective Chief Inspector Seawoll describes her as broken, "She was the best of your generation … and you broke her" (WUG p. 138). Lesley is an excellent police officer, but her masked face precludes her from being a conventional officer. As Peter explains "police work is all about "face" and "presence" and […] going towards the scream" (RL p.10). Lesley's appearance precludes her from doing the job that she loves, literally because her face no longer fits. Peter is repulsed by Lesley's face, but Zach, the "not entirely human" demi-fae (WUG p. 105) becomes Lesley's lover, chastising Peter for his shallowness, "Some of us look beyond the superficial" (WUG p. 104). Likewise, the doorkeeper to the hidden goblin market easily accepts Lesley's unmasked face, commenting "I'll just bet you're glad to get out of that [mask]" (WUG

p. 117). This indicates that the inhabitants of the *demi-monde* are less concerned with appearance and less judgemental than the inhabitants of the 'normal' world. In Aaronovitch's London, the underclass has a different set of cultural assumptions, and ironically a more humanistic attitude to difference than the mundane, perhaps because of their own lower, non-human status.

Aaronovitch often places marginalised figures under the city, in heterotropic spaces such as hidden goblin markets or places of transition such as railway sidings and bridges. Mama Thames describes Hungerford Bridge as a place where denizens of the *demi-monde* and human rough sleepers share a space, "All sorts of things used to live on that bridge; tramps and trolls and goblins" (RL p. 86). In this image the magical community of the not quite human live together with the marginalised down and out human rejects. Peter makes a similar juxtaposition when Nightingale asks Peter what he expects to find in recently discovered tunnels,

> "I don't know, tramps, trolls, sentient badgers – you tell me."
>
> "Not trolls," said Nightingale. "They prefer riverbanks, particularly spots overshadowed by stone or brick." (WUG p. 173)

Employing underground tunnels to represent forgotten communities, Aaronovitch devotes a large portion of *Whispers Underground* (2012) to exploring the fate of the Quiet People. Descended from Victorian navvies employed to tunnel the first underground railways, they are led by the magical Matthew Ten-Tons and make unbreakable pottery from London clay. Symbolically, the entrance to their tunnels are fake houses that consist of only a narrow half room façade, "false houses in Bayswater that concealed not only the unsightly gash of the Circle and District Lines, but one of the hidden entrances to the clandestine tunnels that were the domain of the secret people" (LS p. 45). Appearance and reality are recurring themes in the novels, and like masks worn by the city, the Bayswater houses hide what lies underneath.

When Peter discovers this thriving underground community keeping pigs and powering their homes and factories from the methane from the manure, he realises that should they come to the attention of the authorities, their unique community would be destroyed, "The Quiet People would be swept away as quickly and with as little fuss as a pygmy tribe living in an inconveniently mineral-rich part of a rain forest" (WUG

p.277). Aaronovitch employs the image of a colonising power, or rapacious company overpowering an indigenous minority to illustrate their vulnerability. Despite being led by a *genius loci*, "or something almost as powerful" (WUG p. 271), this anachronistic community is endangered by modern capitalist society. Like the orangutan Mrs Canal, the Quiet People are allegorical representations of habitat loss and the ravages of modernity on unique ecosystems.

The presence of the Quiet People poses a problem for the London establishment, and Zach points out the absurdity of trying to integrate this magical community into modern society, "They've been minding their own business for hundreds of years […] you going to call in the Social Services, do them for truancy, living underground without a license?" (WUG p. 255). Zach is also a denizen of the *demi-monde* and part fae, and as such is a marginalised figure himself, "My dad was a fairy … and by that I don't mean that he dressed well and enjoyed musical theatre" (WUG p. 102). Lady Tyburn, on the other hand, as representative of political power and vested interests argues for their assimilation into 'normal' society, "If there are people living in the sewers, wouldn't it be better to bring them into mainstream society?" (WUG p.238). Tyburn's call for integration into the mainstream recalls the political debate about teaching 'British values' to immigrants and the way that language can be mobilised for ideological purposes (Ilott, 2015).

The ever-astute Peter realises that this would mean the death of the underground community's distinctive way of life and successfully argues that their existence should remain a secret. However, once freedom of choice is granted to the Quiet People, some of them demonstrate their adaptability by electing to learn to live in the mainstream, and Zach helps to set up a school for the children on the surface. Their unique tunnelling expertise is recognised by industry, and with Zach as intermediary they become contractors for the Crossrail project.

Zach's evolution from a reluctant police informant to an influential contract broker is another illustration of Aaronovitch's concern with what constitutes good citizenship. Zach, like Peter stands up for the vulnerable and becomes actively involved in helping the Quiet People preserve their unique differences whilst contributing to the good of society. In reality the Crossrail line was dogged by delays and overspend, but with the

fictional help of the Quiet People it was finally opened in 2022. This happy compromise between retaining their identity and financially benefitting from partial integration into the real-world is a hopeful scenario. Peter says, “Even the very strange can leave the demi-monde if they put their mind to it. There’s definitely at least one bridge troll that I know of teaching PE at a comprehensive in Reading” (LS p. 69). Some members of the *demi-monde* can pass as human, although others such as the chimeras appear so different that they will always be marked by humans as othered.

In the same way that Lesley is made monstrous by magic, Aaronovitch’s chimeras are people who have been magically altered by the first Faceless Man, “his poor little cat girls and tiger boys” (WUG p. 217). Some of these “victims of illegal medical experiments” live in a safe house (AOW p. 209). In classical literature the Chimera was a monster made from disparate parts of other creatures, usually depicted as a goat headed lion, with a snake for a tail. This fusion of disparate identities speaks of cultural hybridity which is another recurring theme in the books. Under the influence of psychological theory, late twentieth and early twenty first century critics have reclaimed monsters as figures of fear and hatred and repurposed them as representatives of the non-normative and misunderstood whose outward monstrosity reflects societal intolerance, more likely to inspire compassion rather than repugnance in a modern readership (Erle & Hendry, 2020). The shift from human to monster is often portrayed as a positive transformation and a metaphor for diverse themes of disability, gender, sexuality, adolescence, and race.

Aaronovitch’s chimeras undergo a similar transformation from objects of fear, such as the Tiger man who fought with Peter in Soho (MOS) to ladies who knit (AOW p. 218). Aaronovitch appears to be saying do not fear the obviously monstrous, rather fear the monster that hides its face behind the mask of mundanity. However, the chimeras are unable to mix with characters in the real-world as their appearance would cause dismay. Midgley (2003) identifies mixed, partially human monsters as evoking a “special kind of fear and disgust” (p. 139) because of the taboo of maintaining clear barriers between species. Also, the chimeras find it difficult to integrate the disparate human and cat parts of their identity, “while sleeping, eating and watching soaps were the ladies’ primary activity, a couple of them liked to go out at night and prowl around the forest” (AOW p. 215). Their appearance and nature make integration into society

impossible, although they may find a place within the *demi-monde* with the other outcasts and rejects and those too strange to exist within conventional society.

The theme of shifting identities as illustrated by the Quiet People's partial integration into the mainstream can also be seen in the talking foxes. Hitherto, homo sapiens, the bonobo apes and pachyderms are thought to be the only species to have self-domesticated (Morrell, 2023), although other species have changed their behaviour to live alongside humans. Parsons et al. (2020) found that British populations of urban foxes show behaviour consistent with "domestication syndrome" (para. 1). To what extent British red foxes will progress down this evolutionary path is unknown at this stage but encounters with semi-tame foxes is a common London experience. The talking foxes in Aaronovitch, like their real-world counterparts, are changing their behaviour in order to adapt to habitat change and their presence in the narrative is part of Aaronovitch's eco-criticism. He challenges anthropocentrism through giving voice to non-human species and by highlighting the plight of the urban foxes who have found themselves in the midst of the city as their habitat has been replaced by urban sprawl.

Typically, Aaronovitch introduces a humorous twist by portraying the foxes as spies. One of the recurring fox characters Sugar Niner says they learn about the opposition "in training so we can keep an eye on our human allies" (AOW p. 304). They are aligning themselves with people in some sort of covert operation, but unfortunately the foxes are unclear as to the purpose of their mission, Sugar Niner admitting that "We don't know who or what the opposition is" (AOW p. 306). Perhaps the opposition is the intolerant group of humans who persist in maligning foxes. In Britian foxes were traditionally seen as vermin and were routinely killed by landowners, and their presence in urban areas is still a source of tension between fox lovers and haters. Midgley (2003) comments that coexisting with wildlife requires a cooperative attitude which clashes with the "competitive individualism" (p. 174) that has been a prominent part of human social and political life since the Enlightenment. The role of the foxes in the narrative provides a humorous diversion and also a key plot driver, particularly in the Abigail-centred novella *What Abigail Did that Summer,* but their presence may also be a commentary on human disruption of the natural world. As the foxes lose their habitats to the built environment, they are forced into liminal spaces such as railway

embankments, parks and suburban gardens. These are heterotropic spaces that are both part of and removed from mundane spaces. It is natural therefore that Aaronovitch welcomes them into the *demi-monde* as creatures that are touched by otherness.

As the *demi-monde* is a metaphor for those othered from society, Aaronovitch explicitly links rough sleepers and the inhabitants of the half-world,

> "I'm just going to have a word with this troll," said Nightingale.
>
> "Sir," I said. "I think we're supposed to call them rough sleepers."
>
> "Not this one we don't," said Nightingale. "He's a troll." (RL p. 79)

Likewise, Peter's description of the Purley vampires as resembling the homeless, "They looked like tramps, old fashioned tramps, the kind that dressed up in in ragged layers of clothes and growled at you from the shadows" (RL p. 100). On first meeting Zach, Peter is alerted to his less than respectable status by the rank smell of his bag "what my dad would call tramp smell" (WUG p. 36). A large proportion of the inhabitants of the *demi-monde* are classified, dismissively as 'fae' and Peter realises the British class system is at the root of the assumption of inferiority, "To them [the wizards of the Folly], fae basically meant anyone who was vaguely magical who hadn't gone to the right school" (LS p. 29). Nightingale admits the pejorative connotation of the word, "'Fae' is just a term like 'foreigner' or 'barbarian,' it basically means people that are not entirely human" (WUG p.105). Peter baulks at the description of any race as being lesser than any other. Molly and her fae sisters were sold into slavery by their Queen, and Peter understands that the classification of sentient beings into categories is fraught with moral and historical dangers. In the following passage the allusion to the middle passage of the Atlantic slave trade, and other human right abuses is made explicit,

> There are people who have been touched by, let's call it for the sake of argument, magic to the point where they're no longer entirely people even under human rights legislation. Nightingale calls them the fae but that's a catch-all term like the way the Greeks used the word 'barbarian' or the *Daily Mail* uses 'Europe.' I'd found at least three different classification systems in the Folly's library, all with elaborate Latin tags and, I figured, all the scientific rigour of phrenology. You've

> got to be careful when applying concepts like speciation to human beings, or before you know what's happening you end up with forced sterilisation, Belsen and the Middle Passage. (FS p.18)

There is a running joke in Aaronovitch about the *Daily Mail*, a tabloid newspaper in which anti-Europe and other xenophobic points of view are frequently expressed. Aaronovitch uses it as a shorthand for sensationalist news stories and right-wing politics. The *Daily Mail* frequently runs stories on immigration, calling it a 'migrant crisis' and social security fraudster 'benefit cheats.' The ability of language to be utilised for ideological purposes was discussed by Ilott (2015) who outlined how 'diversity' and 'Britishness' have been used to promote a political agenda that supports the privileged and further marginalises minority groups. Peter is ever alert to this type of semantic manipulation and part of his many policing roles is to call out pejorative language and pseudo-scientific justifications for dehumanising non-normative sectors of society.

Peter articulates how judgemental language is complicit in the othering of outgroups, "when I'd looked into the literature, the most common terms started with 'un-' – unfit, unsuited, undesirable – and behind them came the terms starting with 'sub-'" Leading him to the conclusion that "it was clear that 'incomplete' people like Molly were vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by their more powerful supernatural brethren, and practitioners with no moral scruples" (MOS p. 215). The fae are the supernatural equivalent of the underclass of unfit mothers and uneducated, unemployed, undesirables who inhabit the metaphorical subterranean spaces of modern Britain: the council estates, homeless shelters, squats, garages, cars and cardboard shelters.

Peter further demonstrates his sensitivity to the way that language can dehumanise, objecting to Nightingale's use of the term "black magician" (RL p. 126) which Nightingale agrees to change to "ethically challenged practitioner." Peter is even reluctant to use the word 'ghost' when describing Nicholas Wallpenny, calling him instead "Nicholas the corporeally challenged", although this description does also adds to the comedic nature of the narrative. Perhaps surprisingly for a police officer, Peter's respect for human rights (even for the not quite human) also extends to the criminal underclass, many of whom he describes as "pathetic - in the proper sense of the word. *Arousing pity, especially through vulnerability or sadness*. Recently I'd learnt the Greek

root: *pathetos – liable to suffer*" (LS pp. 321-322). Peter runs through the list of people who do not thrive in the 'normal' world,

> The addicts, the runaways, the men who were fine unless they had a couple of drinks. The ex-squaddies who'd seen too much. The sad fuckers who just didn't have a clue how to make the world work for them, or who had started so beaten down they barely learnt to walk upright. The people who shoplifted toilet paper or food or treats for their kids. (LS p. 322)

On one level these individuals may be viewed as unproductive citizens, but Peter sees them as victims of a socio-political system that sets them up to fail. In contrast to the fallen princess of Skygarden, they do not begin life with economic and social advantages, and it is consequently much harder for them to thrive within a neo-liberal system. The more collectively oriented *demi-monde* that accepts difference rather than punishes is presented in Aaronovitch as a potentially better way of organising society.

Aaronovitch weaves social satire through his narrative, just as the Quiet People and the fae are vulnerable to exploitation by more powerful individuals, the real-world societal subclass is frequently exploited by the media and politicians promising improved housing and a 'level playing field,' but instead are relegated to being the scapegoats of society, responsible for their own poverty, and blamed for a myriad of societal ills from crime to obesity (Burn, 2022). Aaronovitch's social conscience is articulated by Peter's compassion for the downtrodden and wretched. People who for whatever reason are unable to negotiate the intricacies of life and fall into the criminal justice system. The detritus of modern Britain who are only one step removed from the *demi-monde* and who may find themselves sleeping rough alongside trolls and goblins.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the rich subtext of social and ecological criticism in Aaronovitch relating to the theme of identity. The disparate character of London is represented by the *genii locorum* who embody the city's vast "distributed self-hood" whilst delivering allegorical social commentary. London is also personified as a being that has been maimed through human acts of violence, war and terror, compounded

by poor planning decisions resulting in displaced and dislocated communities living amidst monstrous buildings. The monstrosity of the architecture is mirrored in the monstrous faces of victims who bear the visible scars of London's traumatic past. The frequent references to puppetry and masks represent the hidden identities and concealment of Martin Chorley and Lesley May, but they also embody the inhuman face of bureaucracy and the abuse of power of those with cultural capital over the less well resourced. The Quiet People, chimera and foxes represent cultural hybridity and adaptation forced by the encroachment of humans into the natural world. Finally, the misfits and monsters who inhabit the *demi-monde* living a marginal identity in underground or other liminal spaces are emblematic of the real-world societal underclass who are unhoused or inhabit the council estates of modern Britain. Peter's compassion for those forced into a marginal life of addiction or petty crime demonstrates his humanity and embodiment of the term policeman, or 'man of the city'.

Chapter 7 Policing the Magical City

7.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters discussed Aaronovitch's observations on conflict and identity in contemporary Britain, whereas this chapter focusses on policing and non-ecological threats to public security, using as a guide the sub-question 'How is the hybrid genre of fantasy police procedural used to explore contemporary concerns related to social justice and policing?' A repeated theme in Aaronovitch is good citizenship and how to maintain order in a multicultural and multiethnic society. The othered who inhabit the fantastic *demi-monde* represent those who do not fit into mainstream society, and the Folly is tasked with maintaining order within these groups. The plots of the *Rivers* novels revolve around solving supernatural crime as Police Constable Peter Grant offers commentary on social concerns whilst undertaking the archetypal hero's journey (Campbell, 1949; Vogler, 2007). The hero's journey bears deep synergies with Jungian psychology where in order to reach their full potential, the subject must balance conflicting aspects of the self into an integrated whole to achieve self-awareness (individuation). Peter's personal journey of individuation occurs as he navigates his various roles of son, police officer and magical apprentice.

This chapter will first focus on Aaronovitch's individual approach to the crime novel and the central position of Peter Grant as hero and narrator. It will then address three main sub-topics relating to policing the magical communities of London and how non-ecological threats to the city are managed. Firstly, the issue of mob violence and riots as represented by the figure of Mr Punch is examined as both a historical and a present-day phenomenon. Secondly, the spectre of terrorism and the exploitation of civilian soft targets is examined. This section also explores xenophobia and the role that UKIP and the media have played in perceived threats to the country from asylum seekers and migrants. The third sub-theme examines toxic police culture and the effects of policing cuts and austerity Britain on public safety. This becomes a growing theme as the book cycle progresses, as under-resourced police have to weigh up budget constraints against operational demands.

7.2 Aaronovitch and crime fiction

Aaronovitch's distinctive approach to crime fiction involves weaving elements of police procedural and satirical social commentary with mythopoeic urban fantasy. Lethbridge, (2017, p. 252) agrees that the *Rivers of London* novel cycle is a hybrid genre containing elements of urban fantasy and police procedural, with "a notable political agenda." Ekman (2017, p. 48) describes how hybridisation can enhance both genres, and that an important contribution of crime fiction to urban fantasy is how it facilitates commentary on social issues. However, the mythopoeic elements in Aaronovitch have hitherto been underexplored; they include the reworking of the Father Thames myth and the supernatural communities of the *demi-monde* as well as the familiar monomyth of Peter's story arc as the untried young officer is initiated into the dangerous world of magical crime. The myth of the hero teaches that personality is formed through struggle and sacrifice as the ego strives towards individuation against the regressive unconscious (Kalsched & Jones, 1986).

Despite dealing with universal themes of psychological growth and finding meaning, fantasy is frequently dismissed as escapist. Crime fiction is similarly often described as light reading, however crime fiction can provide deep insights into the society represented in the narratives. For example, a wealth of social and political detail about Victorian and Edwardian London may be gleaned through reading Conan Doyle, or late twentieth and early twenty-first century Edinburgh from Ian Rankin. More importantly, crime fiction, as a manifestation of popular culture can provide not only a critique of the status quo, but also "offer possibilities for transformation" (Weldes, 2003, as cited in Mcleod, 2014 p. 520). Furthermore, writers with an intimate knowledge of their corner of the world represent the zeitgeist in a manner that can at times be almost prescient. Lawson (2012) cites the example of Nordic crime noir explaining the processes that led to Anders Breivik's atrocities, commenting that "crime fiction is a magnifying glass that frequently reveals the fingerprints of history before they become visible to politicians or journalists" (Lawson, 2012, para 6). The thesis of this research is that Ben Aaronovitch is one such writer whose work deserves detailed attention as it offers scrutiny and critique of contemporary issues, simultaneously identifying areas of tension whilst offering a potential path forward towards tolerance and inclusion. Aaronovich's observations on manipulation of the mob have never been so relevant,

given the 2024 riots in Britain sparked by a false piece of social media speculation. Likewise, his modelling of creative compromise in a world that appears to become more dangerously polarised with every passing day.

As the novels involve teams of police officers working together under the aegis of the Metropolitan Police (the Met) the series contains many elements of the police procedural. This genre is described by Scaggs (2005, p. 147) as,

> A sub-genre of crime fiction which foregrounds the actual methods and procedures of police work in the investigation of crime. The police procedural usually features a team of police officers, often pursuing a number of different cases at the same time, and the procedures of modern police work, including forensic technology, the interviewing of suspects, and records searches, are emphasised.

In Scaggs' (2005) definition forensics is a key factor in crime solving, and the Folly has its own pathologist the Muslim Abdul Haqq Walid, "a spry gingery man who spoke with a soft Highland accent" (RL p. 52). Aaronovitch's characters reflect the diversity of modern Britain although in this case Walid does not confound Young's (2015) "habits of whiteness", but he does confound habits of religion that equate Scots with Presbyterianism.

As a police procedural series, there are also numerous references to the mechanical features of policing and the frustrating repetitive nature of the job. Peter engages in a great deal of routine police work such as writing reports, data entry, stakeouts, and interviewing suspects, and these basic tasks also apply to the work of the Folly, "policework is all about systems and procedures and planning – even when you're hunting a supernatural entity" (RL p. 200). Ekman (2018) opines that, providing historical and factual details from the 'real' world in fantastic fiction blurs the boundaries between fictional and actual. Certainly, Aaronovitch is careful to establish correct procedures and terminology, so the policing aspect reads as an authentic procedural despite the fantastic elements,

> 'At least we can start with a comparative victimology. I want you to call Belgravia, get the case number and port your nominals to our inquiry,' she said.

> A ‘nominal’ is a person who has come to the attention of the investigation and been entered into the HOLMES major inquiry system. Witness statements, forensic evidence, a detective’s notes on an interview, even CCTV footage are all grist for the inquiry’s computerised mill. (MOS p. 81)

The method of investigation is likened to a machine and there are frequent mentions of grinding leads to solve a case through the mechanistic following of processes. Police jargon such as “comparative victimology” the HOLMES computer system and “nominals” are used with effect to set the action firmly within the policing world. The fantastic world of myth and magic and the mundane procedures of police work are blended with comedic elements injected for the most part by Peter’s sardonic narration. For example, the frequently changing jargon is satirised, “Officially I belong to ESC9, otherwise known as ‘The Folly’ […]. There’s not point trying to remember ‘ESC9’, because the Metropolitan Police has a reorganisation once every four years and all the names change” (MOS p. 25). Peter’s hyperbolic allusion to an ever-shifting lexical landscape may be amusing, but it also indicates an instability that hints at deeper problems within the Met.

Aaronovitch can be very critical of the police, particularly the Metropolitan Police which was described as “institutionally racist” by the 1999 Macpherson report (Lawrence, 1999). Poor police culture is frequently mentioned by Aaronovitch, with Punch-possessed Deputy Assistant Commissioner Folsom asking Peter, “How long do you think you’d have lasted back then [1980s]? A locker full of excrement” to underline “just how unwanted you were” (RL p. 247). Folsom also refers to police corruption, “fuck me, were we bent? We weren’t even that expensive, we’d let some scrote go for two pints of larger and a packet of crisps” (RL pp. 264-267). Aaronovitch does not gloss over the murky history of the Met and Peter is aware of the disadvantages of being mixed race within the police. For example, he fears that the institutional racial profiling of the Met may mean that he is sent to work on Trident, the unit dealing with gun crime in the black community, “Trident was always on the lookout for black officers to do hideously dangerous undercover work and being mixed race meant that I qualified” (RL p. 9). Peter’s reluctance to join Trident may be partially due to the dangers of the work, but he repeatedly proves himself to be physically brave. His antipathy towards the section is more likely due to his dislike of working undercover. Subterfuge does not

come easily, and he prides himself on being honest. Whilst imprisoned he even rejects telling a lie to facilitate his release, asking “What would Lesley do? I wondered. She’d lie, or at least mislead” but Peter’s principles do not permit him to even stretch the truth “I’m not Lesley, or Nightingale, or even Neblett am I?” (LS p. 322). Peter has a deep insight into his own psyche, and he rejects the easy option in favour of what he perceives to be the morally correct course of action.

The MacPherson (1999) and more recently, the Casey (2023) reports exposed endemic racism and misogyny in the police, and it is against this background that Peter works. Peter experiences racism both inside and outside the police, and an interviewee references the Macpherson report whilst simultaneously racially profiling Peter as an academic underachiever, “god knows, after Macpherson they’d be desperate enough to recruit you to overlook any educational deficiencies” (HT p. 72). Typical of the optimistic nature of the books, Peter is able to overcome this climate of racism and emphasise the positives of his mixed heritage. He cannot ignore racism in the police service, but he does not allow himself to become cynical or angry. He greatly admires hijab wearing Somali officer Sahra Guleed’s ability to use her gender and ethnicity to her advantage, “[Guleed had] pioneered the use of intersectionality theory as an interview technique” (LS p.56) as she encourages interviewees to underestimate her intelligence and view her appearance and gender as weakness. Guleed, like Peter is able to exploit aspects of her identity to improve her police work, thus transcending racial bias within the institution. Aaronovitch’s hopeful approach sees Guleed transform a negative to a positive through transcending her ego and focussing on the interview outcome. This intellectual alchemy is also employed by Peter in his ability to use his mixed heritage to bridge the gap between the two Thames factions.

In addition to racism, past policing failures are also referenced in the following passage, “Every police station in the country has at least one HOLMES suite […to]. avoid the kind of cock-up that made the hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper such an exemplary operation” (RL p. 16). Aaronovitch assumes a high level of historical and general knowledge from the reader, but most adult Britons with any interest in current affairs will be aware of the infamously mis-handled police investigation with its misogyny and incorrect assumptions that led to the blighting of lives and unnecessary

deaths of women in West Yorkshire. Aaronovitch returns to this traumatic case in *Moon Over Soho*,

> The original [HOLMES] was developed as a direct result of the Byford Inquiry into the Yorkshire Ripper case. The Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe, was interviewed several times before he was caught, by accident, by a routine traffic stop. The police can live with looking corrupt, bullying or tyrannical, but looking stupid is intolerable. It has a tendency to undermine people's faith in the forces of law, and it is deleterious to public order. (MOS p. 81)

The Yorkshire Ripper case has cast long shadows into the present and Peter is cognisant of the past failures of the police, acknowledging corruption and bullying within the service. Although in keeping with the positive tone of the books Peter is able to apply these historical lessons to his police work. He embraces the complex technology employed by the modern service whilst simultaneously satirising the speech patterns of senior officers, "deleterious to public order" being a typical piece of police verbiage. Peter describes 'police-speak,' as "that strangled mixture of cop-speak and management-ese that has proved the modern police officer's friend when he wants to talk a great deal and say nothing" (FS p.67). Peter frequently satirises senior officers, lampooning their pomposity and the absurdity of their language. Aaronovitch through Peter also takes aim at other aspects of police culture such as its residual machismo, "Quite simply, to be police is to drink" (WUG p. 136). This is presented as an essential element of police behaviour and even the teetotal Sahra Guleed attends drinking sessions in the pub to maintain bonds with her colleagues. Despite these many criticisms though, Aaronovitch is essentially on the side of law and order, and the police are portrayed as mostly benign public servants who uphold the Queen's peace to the best of their ability although their capability to carry out their task is eroded by budget cuts in later novels.

In keeping with many police procedurals, there is also a dark, horror element to the books apparent in the grisly descriptions of crimes which often involve damage to characters' faces. Szanter (2020) writes that the dark, subversive elements of the crime fiction satisfy the readers' desire for the thrill of the unexpected, "those new, sometimes terrifying elements of life far removed from the monotony of work, appointments and child-rearing" (p. 2). Aaronovitch's victims are indeed dispatched in

unexpected and horrifying ways and Punch and the Faceless Man are sadistic serial killers who flamboyantly mutilate their kills. Perversely these elements are satisfying in a world accustomed to true and imagined crime dramas that dominate popular entertainments. It is Aaronovitch's choice of villains though that contribute towards making his work so distinctive. Punch combines the traditional grotesque British homicidal puppet with the mythological force of trickster chaos and will be examined in more detail later in the chapter. The Faceless Man as representative of anonymous corporate violence and immorality was explored in the previous chapter. At the same time as being thrilling, the format of the procedural is also comfortingly familiar, even "inherently soothing" because of its predictable structure (Szanter, 2020, p. 2). Aaronovitch's ability to reproduce the familiar police procedural format with its dark subject matter whilst maintaining a comically optimistic tone is a delicate balancing act.

Aaronovitch has a distinctive approach to the crime novel as he blends mythopoeic urban fantasy with detailed descriptions of the minutiae of police procedure combined with satirical comments on past policing failures. Peter is simultaneously the supporter and critic of the institutions he serves; he has an irreverent approach to the Met and castigates it for its cultural foibles whilst admiring it for upholding Peelian principles of public service. Aaronovitch's blend of macabre horror, playful fantasy and the predictability of the police procedural format may be comfortingly familiar but there are many deeper layers below the surface content. Peter's monomyth journey and his struggle towards individuation depict psychological growth and the novels may be read variously as a search for meaning in a complex world, a discussion of modern police culture and a satirical criticism of societal ills.

7.2.1 Peter Grant the archetypal hero

The *Rivers* novels are narrated by the first-person colloquial voice of Constable Peter Grant, "When I'm considering this I find it helpful to quote the wisdom of my father, who once told me, 'Who knows why the fuck anything happens'" (RL p. 3). A great deal of the humour stems from Peter's intelligent and sardonic world view and the character of Peter permeates the novels as well as driving the action, as the reader experiences the story through his eyes. Peter's homodiegetic narration particularly lends itself to the monomyth as he is clearly the star of the entertainment. Criticisms

of the hero's journey are discussed in the literature review chapter, but the fantasy police procedural nature of the books and the centrality of Peter lend themselves to this narrative paradigm. The portrayal of Peter Grant is a celebration of the police officer as hero, and his story arc in the first novel closely follows the 12 stages of the hero's journey identified by Vogler (2007). The following outline is not intended as a detailed analysis of Peter's journey, rather as further evidence of the mythopoeic elements in Aaronovitch's work.

Like many heroes Peter's origins are humble, in his case a council estate, and his life as a probationary constable in the ordinary world is outlined before he is called to action by the supernatural event of meeting a ghost. Peter is brave and curious, so he does not refuse the call and enters willingly into the special world of the supernatural. He is subsequently initiated into the unseen magical community of the Folly and the *demi-monde* by Nightingale, the archetypal wise mentor. Having crossed the threshold by taking his oath as an apprentice Peter is tested by Nightingale who demands long hours of magical and language practice as well as continuation of his policing duties. During the ordeal stage the hero traditionally battles against shadow antagonists which may be internal aspects of the psyche such as addiction or other negative personality traits, and/or an externalised character representing the antithesis of the hero. Peter's chief nemeses are Mr Punch the embodiment of anarchy and mob violence, and the Faceless Man, representative of selfish ego and indifference to suffering. During the first novel he reaches an abyss of despair when he discovers Lesley has been possessed by Punch, and Nightingale is shot in a botched attempt to further the case. Peter has failed in his duty to protect both his partners, and he returns home to the ordinary world of his parent's flat to recover his resources. However, he embarks on the road back and overcomes these setbacks. With the help of Molly, who brings him close to death, he is resurrected, prevails over his nemesis and is eventually victorious in vanquishing Punch and saving Lesley's life, if not her face. Taking his new knowledge back to the ordinary world of policing, Peter visits Lesley and offers her the elixir of magic as potential to heal her emotional wounds. As the *Rivers* novels are serial, Peter undergoes the cycle repeatedly, being tested afresh in each book, every time progressing towards reaching his full potential as fully fledged magician and police detective (the latter finally realised at the beginning of *Lies*

Sleeping, 2018), and with each iteration growing in maturity and gaining fresh insights into his own strengths and weaknesses.

Peter's story arc is essentially one of developing adulthood which can also be seen in his relationship with his father. Early in the first novel he ironically quotes the gnomic "wisdom of my father" or lack thereof, and after becoming an apprentice wizard, his father's powerless nihilistic philosophy of "who knows why the fuck anything happens" is contrasted with Nightingale's proactive public service. Campbell theorised that in the heroic narrative the father figure is a threshold guardian, "whether he knows it or not […] the father is the initiating priest through whom the young being passes on into the larger world" (Campbell, 2004, p. 136). So, as he grows in experience the young hero must reassess his relationship with his father as his journey advances. As the novels progress Peter becomes more compassionate towards his heroin addicted father and actively supports his efforts to resume his jazz career by financing a new set of teeth (THT). Gradually Peter begins to inherit Nightingale's mantle of wise mentor to new recruit Danni Whitford (AOW) and becomes a father figure to Abigail Kamara. The ending of the latest novel (AOW) sees Peter become the parent of twin daughters as he takes on the mantle of fathership himself.

Peter's maturing relationship with his father is only one aspect of his psychological growth, and as he undergoes individuation, he gains greater insights into himself and also a greater understanding of others. Rowland (2019, p. 81) points out that "individuation means a growing connection to the archetypes as embodied in other people, as well as society as a whole, and the natural world; as a permanent connection to what is other." Peter's growth as an environmentalist and his expanding appreciation of the world outside metropolitan London was discussed in previous chapters. Beverley as archetypal wise child also undergoes her own journey towards motherhood and wisdom.

Aaronovitch's portrayal of police officer as hero is reminiscent of depictions of police in post-World War Two police procedurals such as Dixon of Dock Green (BBC, 1955-1976). Peter often puts himself in danger to protect others, confronting the Faceless Man at the top of a soon to be demolished Skygarden, but not before first ensuring that all the residents had been evacuated. He also offers himself as hostage in

exchange for a missing child in *Foxglove Summer*, "So I did it. Because I'm a sworn constable and it was the right thing to do" (FS p. 314). Macleod (2014) asserts that these post-war crime narratives enact a social function to "reassure the reader that serious crimes do not go unpunished, and that society can count on the police to ensure its security" (p. 515). The *Rivers* novels contain a similarly hopeful message as the highly moral Nightingale and Peter battle against forces of chaos and self-interest to protect all members of society regardless of social status, race or species. However, Aaronovitch's message is more nuanced than simple good versus bad as Peter struggles with moral dilemmas. Both Peter and Nightingale embody Sir Robert Peel's principles of applying ethical behaviour to policing in order to maintain public support. According to Tudor (2023) Peelian policing can be summarised as policing by consent of the public, which is maintained "by applying the law fairly, impartially and by using minimal force" (n. p.). For example, Nightingale prevents the river Neckinger from extracting summary justice on the men responsible for the murder of the tree nymph Sky by insisting that the matter should be handled by the Folly, "We will find them and we shall bring them to justice, […]. That is the agreement" (BH p. 246). The less cut and dried case of the jazz vampires, though engenders an ethical argument as Peter reminds Nightingale that monsters too deserve ethical treatment, "we can't pretend the law doesn't exist" (MOS p. 361). Peter objects to Nightingale's plans to kill the vampire sisters and argues that unless the letter of the law is followed, policing can descend into vigilantism, as even vampires deserve 'human' rights. Nightingale counters with "I estimate that between them, Simone and her sisters have killed or mutilated almost two hundred and twenty people since 1941. […]. These people also had their human rights" (MOS p.361). This exchange illustrates the dilemma of balancing the rights of offenders and victims in a society governed by the rule of law and is an ongoing source of tension in common law jurisdictions (Drake & Henley, 2014).

A counter to the police hero narratives are the moral ambiguities of the noir procedural in which the police detective may be forced to compromise his or her values to obtain results. The noir protagonist detective is "nearly always a middle-aged loner who cares little about respecting the chain of command" (Macleod, 2014, p. 525) whereas Peter and Nightingale work collaboratively with the Murder Team and other

colleagues (LS p. 43). Despite the horrors he witnesses, Peter remains untarnished and idealistic. However, the *Rivers* novels do share some similarities with noir series in that they permit the evolution of the characters, and also, crucially "the social conditions within which these novels take place" (Macleod, 2014, p. 516). Peter grapples with issues of social deprivation and inequity especially in the *demi-monde* as a metaphorical representation of Britain's underclass, and there are increasing references to police cuts and immigration in the later books.

As homodiegetic narrator and principal actor the character of Peter Grant is central to the narrative as his personality shapes the reader's perception of the world contained within the books. Peter's identity is based around three key facets: his role as police officer, his status as magical apprentice to Nightingale, and the fact that he is a Londoner. He refers to these in describing himself to Mama Thames' Court,

> "I am a sworn constable," I said. "And that makes me an officer of the law. And I am an apprentice, which makes me a keeper of the sacred flame, but most of all I am a free man of London and that makes me a Prince of the City […]. No double first from Oxford trumps that." (RL p. 274)

It is interesting that Peter identifies his status as a "free man of London" as superior to his other roles, and this speaks to Aaronovitch's deep love of London. It may also be a reference to the sub-theme of slavery running through the narratives. The centrality of London as a source of tension in Britain is discussed in chapter 5, and Peter's braggadocio is in part exaggerated on Nightingale's advice to emphasise pride in representing the Folly (RL p. 269). However, his jingoistic pride in the superiority in his birthplace is evidence of his youthful ego which will be tempered by ordeals throughout his journey.

Another core part of his personality is his status as a police officer, "a police constable is never off duty, even when he's not wearing his underpants" (MOS p. 346). Being police colours the way he observes the world, and it is a central part of his identity, "we did start outside Bow Street Magistrates' Court and I could no more have not chased him than I could have stopped breathing" (RL p. 280). In this description being a member of the police force is likened to an autonomic function of the nervous system, as essential to his sense of self as respiration is to the body. Peter's motivations are

idealistic and when asked by Lesley why he wanted to join the force he replies, “Because I want to help the community […] catch bad guys […] Maintain the Queen’s Peace […]. Bring order out of chaos” (RL p. 12). This compulsion towards serving the community by maintaining peace and order means that Punch as spirit of riot and disorder embodies the very antithesis of Peter’s ethos. Punch also provokes Peter into confronting his own shadow impulses during his night sea journey in the tube, thus playing a significant role in Peter’s process towards individuation. Punch therefore makes the perfect shadow to Peter’s police officer persona.

7.3 Punch and mob violence

Mob violence is a theme running through the *Rivers* novels, and it is explored primarily through the comic figure of Mr Punch. The Punch and Judy puppet show is a fixture of British culture and 2024 marked the fiftieth Covent Garden May Fayre and Puppet Festival, celebrating the 362nd anniversary of the first recorded Punch and Judy show in Britain. Appropriated from Pulcinella of Italian commedia dell’arte, Punch and Judy shows are ubiquitous, particularly at seaside resorts. The acutely non-politically correct script involves family violence, hanging and sausages and it is loved by children and adults alike. Punch is believed to derive his anarchic nature from the trickster figures of mythology (Radin, 1956) which Jung identified as an archetype embodying the psychologically infantile aspect of the individual prone to ungoverned rage, libido and gluttony (Russo, 2008). Jung theorised that the trickster is a manifestation of the shadow archetype which “pokes holes through the ego’s inflation” and “although he is not really evil, he does the most atrocious things from sheer unconsciousness and unrelatedness” (Jung, *CW* 9i, p. 473). One of the functions of the trickster is to call out pomposity and self-importance through his subversive undermining of authority figures.

Peter clearly fits the heroic archetype, and Punch represents Peter’s shadow side in the guise of the trickster. According to Rowland (2019, p. 102) “detective fiction inevitably summons the trickster” as the successful criminal disrupts societal rules and often trades roles of hunter and hunted with the detective. By definition criminals are bad citizens because they break societal rules that others agree to abide by in order to maintain societal order. Punch not only transgresses the law, but he does so with

gusto whilst exhibiting a grotesque carnivalesque presence (Bakhtin, 1941/1984) which iterates his puppet origins. In *The Rivers of London* (2011) novel, the script of *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy, of Punch and Judy* by Giovanni Piccini is played out by London residents who have been possessed by Punch and driven to act out the script in its gruesome details. Punch is derived from the trickster of which laughter and irony are key facets, but in Aaronovitch he is a very dark character prone to murder and cruelty. The magical signature left behind by Punch may be "violence and laughter" (RL p. 29), but his antics evoke no genuine humour. This portrayal of Punch bears synergies with comic Gothic, and Kędzierska, (2019) claims that the theatrical and exaggerated elements of comic Gothic distance the reader from crime and makes the murders "disquietingly, more fun" (p. 98). Brandon Coopertown's wife relates an incident where Toby the dog bites her husband as a comic Gothic scene, "I went to get something for the blood and when I got back Brandon was laughing." When the police arrived, "Brandon showed them his nose and they started laughing. Everyone was happy, even the nasty little dog was happy" (RL p. 37). Mrs Coopertown mistakes laughter for happiness and is unaware that the false mirth is inflicted upon the participants through compulsion rather than choice. The reference to blood and the "nasty little dog" elicits an underlying air of menace which gives the lie to the apparent amusement of the disquieting scene. This is compounded by the fact that several pages later Mrs Coopertown and her baby are murdered by her Punch-possessed husband.

Another element of comic Gothic, according to Kędzierska, (2019) is its intertextuality, in the first novel this is exemplified by the puppet play involuntarily performed by characters within a book which is itself a work of fiction. Punch is also aware that Peter and he are acting out their archetypal roles, as Lesley sequestered by Punch tells Peter, "We are playing our roles. […] We are Mister Punch the irrepressible spirit of riot and rebellion. It is our nature to cause trouble just as it is your nature to try and stop us" (RL p. 241). It is interesting to note here that Punch refers to himself as "we", a clue to his fractured selfhood as the trickster spirit of riot and rebellion is legion and cannot be contained within a single vessel. The reference to roles also evokes the archetypal characters embodied by the trickster and the hero. As Peter and Punch represent polar opposites a clash between them is inevitable, and at the end of the first novel Peter

prevails over Punch pinning him to the wooden planking of the original London Bridge. Punch is sacrificed to the Thames and simultaneously punished for his wrongdoing as Peter embodies the mythic spirit of law and order. However, Punch continues to haunt Peter throughout the next six books until *Lies Sleeping* (2018) when we learn his tragic history, driven insane after witnessing his family being tortured to death and then suffering the same fate (LS p. 385). This does not elicit Peter's forgiveness, although he pragmatically comes to an arrangement with Punch, freeing him from London Bridge as Punch describes himself, "the lesser of two evils" (LS p. 389) when compared to the Faceless Man. Peter finally realises that Punch is not entirely evil and that as Jung posited, "he does the most atrocious things from sheer unconsciousness and unrelatedness" (*Collected Works* 9i, p. 473). In this symbolic scene Peter comes to terms with his trickster shadow, unleashing Punch from his prison whilst simultaneously accepting the darker trickster part of himself. In the following novel *False Value* (2020) Peter goes undercover to infiltrate a tech business. This involves using subterfuge and untruths, practices employed by Punch as a matter of course but formerly rejected by Peter as dishonest.

Punch is described as "the ghost of a god – literally the spirit of riot and rebellion" (HT p. 310), and Lesley defines his archetypal shadow nature as "the manifestation of a social trend, crime and disorder, a sort of superyob. The spirit of riot and rebellion in the London mob" (RL p. 192). Thus, Punch is defined by the effect he has on others as his essential self lacks substance, it is a "ghost", a "spirit" and a "manifestation". He does not have a corporeal presence and does not appear in his own form until the end of the first book when Peter pursues him through time to his origins in Roman Britain. Until then he manifests through others by sequestrating his victims and taking up residence in their minds. When Peter attempts to communicate with Punch through Lesley, "I was struck suddenly that I wasn't talking to a complete personality […]. This wasn't Henry Pyke, or even Mr Punch, this was like a patchwork, a personality cobbled together from half-remembered fragments" (RL p. 242). The shifting centre of consciousness of Punch from Henry Pyke to Lesley May and the other possessed victims is another example of fractured identity, or the distributed selfhood of London, but in this case a dark, shadow aspect of the city.

Aaronovitch's "superyob" Punch represents a general sense of disorder and chaos that lacks a centre or even a focus beyond creating disruption. A parallel may be drawn with recent disorder in August 2024 in Britian which was sparked by incorrect assertions on social media that three schoolgirls had been murdered by a Muslim asylum seeker. The irruption of violence originated with speculation over a falsehood, had no leader, no organisers and no clear goals other than an amorphous feeling of hostility towards asylum seekers, migrants and the police as representatives of the state (Holden, 2024). The disorder spread across the country in a series of riots that inexplicably seemed to turn ordinary people into violent looters, some even attempting to burn down hotels housing asylum seekers, including children (Taylor, 2024). Much as Aaronovitch's Covent Garden riot in *Rivers of London* was perpetrated by conventional people attending the opera, the circumstances of the 2024 riots are bizarre and grotesque with many who have been charged expressing remorse whilst their solicitors claim they had no prior history of offending before this inexplicable lapse in behaviour (Halliday, Brown & Vinter, 2024). Whitely (2024) claims that evidence indicates that the riots occurred in areas of social deprivation with populations who feel left behind and this in turn can create discontent and resentment against the organs of the state. Aaronovitch's discussion of fractures within the polis discussed in chapter five warned of dire consequences if social chasms are left unbridged.

Riots are not a new phenomenon in Britain where the proclivity for mob violence has been a historical feature for many centuries. This is reflected in the recurring motif of mob violence providing a challenge to the justice system. In the first novel, the ghost Nicholas Wallpenny wears a dancing skeleton badge which Peter later identifies as the mark of the Skeleton Army, formed in the Victorian era as a bloody-minded counter to religious groups working in the deprived areas of London, "Driven by gin, boneheadedness, and growling resentment […] the Skeleton Army broke up Salvation Army meetings, disrupted marches and attacked its officer corps" (RL p. 279). Aaronovitch describes the mob as a "growling" animal that articulates its anger through violence against innocent targets. The parallels with the 2024 riots include the drivers of social deprivation and misinformed 'boneheaded' actors taking vengeance

with no clear agenda, philosophy or leadership other than giving vent to their resentment through violent disorder.

The psychology of civil disorder is illustrated in Peter's late-night tube journey following the Covent Garden riot. This was previously discussed in relation to its underground setting and Peter's testing through his night sea journey, but it is also relevant to the connection of Punch with mob violence. As passengers break social taboos a "ranting drunk" is shouting,

> 'I'm the demon drink,' [...]. 'I'm gin lane and your local crack house. I'm a follower of Captain Swing, Watt Tyler and Oswald Mosely. I'm the grinning face at the window of the hansom cab. I made Dickens long for the countryside and I'm what your masters are afraid of." (RL p. 260)

The (Punch) drunk explicitly links historical and contemporary symbols of social poverty and dysfunction "gin lane", "crack house" with mob leaders and civil disorder. Poverty, as Whiteley (2024) reminds us, can ferment disorder if left unaddressed for too long. The drunk lists historical figures associated with working class violence: Wat Tyler who led the Peasant's Revolt in 1381, Captain Swing the mythical 'leader' of agricultural workers in 1830 protesting loss of livelihood through the introduction of the threshing machine, and Oswald Mosely the face of British fascism who provoked violent clashes with oppositions groups in the 1930s. Conflating these diverse figures together indicates that the cause is irrelevant, and the leader need not even be an actual person. What the groups represent is the power of the dispossessed to voice their anger through violence and this is what the "masters" of the ruling class fear.

The "grinning face at the window" also evokes the trickster Punch, provocateur and disruptor of the status quo. Peter the Londoner understands that "there's a point where a human being will lose it, just lash out at everyone around them." However, Peter, the professional police officer retains a clear head and refuses to succumb to the unconscious shadow impulse to join the mob. He acknowledges the temptations, "I get it … lots of frustration – but that's everyone in the big city, ain't it Mr. Punch." After successfully confronting his fears and mastering his rage, Peter comes to the important realisation that anger and frustration are an everyday part of life in the city. Peter points out that most people, even when fearful or provoked, resist the urge to break

the social contract, asking “what percentage actually let you in? I bet you’ve got a piss poor success rate” (RL p. 261). In his distinctive vernacular he is articulating that law and order may break down from time to time in Britain, but the vast majority of good citizens are able to contain their anger and unconscious desire for chaos as an expression of helplessness and despair. Instead of giving vent to feelings of unfairness and rage, people go about their business in peace, respectful of the legal and social obligations expected of them. In Britain ‘civilised’ people suppress the urge to lash out and agree to policing by consent to help maintain a peaceful society.

The breakdown of law and order in other historical periods is also referenced, such as looting during the blitz (MOS p.196). There are also references to the unpredictable, dangerous mood of football crowds potentially being influenced by Punch, “He’s a mercurial figure, our Mr Punch. As changeable and as dangerous as an away crowd on a Saturday night” (FS p.1). London experienced riots in summer 2011 and these are referred to by Patrick Gale a rogue practitioner who performs a Bacchanalian magic ritual which “keeps London from falling into riot and disorder” commenting that “it seems a great deal more effective than the police in this regard” (LS p. 159-160). The Metropolitan Police’s response was heavily criticised in a Police Federation Review conducted shortly after the riots (Townsend, 2011). Senior officers failed to anticipate the disorder, and then did not open a dialogue with protestors, allowing the situation to escalate to widespread property destruction and looting. By explaining painful recent events as magical in origin, Aaronovitch is able to offer an alternative psychological commentary. He suggests that the riots were provoked by the “vengeful evil spirit that had plagued London since the Romans” (LS p. 144) aka Punch, aka the unexamined unconscious in opposition to the psyche. Aaronovitch points out that law and order can break down in dark times such as the Blitz, or the 2011 riots, but it has always been so. The spirit of Punch is constantly alive, waiting to provoke crowds of commuters or football fans, or social media users and it behoves us all to be vigilant of these impulses within ourselves and our communities. One effective way to oppose the destructive power of Punch is to rectify the worst effects of social disadvantage, a task more easily articulated than achieved.

Through the use of the comic grotesque Mr Punch, Aaronovitch creates a commentary on the psychological and social causes of mob violence. Punch is the shadow trickster

archetype pitted against Peter's hero, but the shadow is after all merely the unexamined part of the self. By learning the origins of Punch Peter is able to access parts of himself such as his capacity for trickster behaviour which he had previously rejected. Integrating the lessons of Punch allows Peter to spend a prolonged period of time undercover with a false identity. Ultimately Peter as representative of the forces of law and order is able to triumph over chaos. This is a reassuring narrative that reaffirms the public service role of the police and recalls the post-war golden age police hero as a counterpoint to the dystopian landscapes of the noir detective.

7.4 Immigration, xenophobia, terrorism and the role of the media

The second theme of this chapter is the role that immigration, xenophobia and terrorism plays in the *Rivers of London* novels. Terrorism and the media have been included with immigration and xenophobia because the issues are unfortunately interlinked. Discontent and radicalisation amongst second-generation Pakistani Britons led to the London bombings of July 7, 2005 which killed 56 people including the terrorists and injured over 700 more. Reasons are complex, but at least one of the bombers, Mohmmad Khan (2005) complained about media rhetoric against Muslim people. Field (2007) found that non-Muslim hostility towards Muslims increased during 1988 to 2006. This coincided with anti-Muslim discourse in the media and amongst politicians (Hussain & Bagguley, 2012) which was exacerbated by public debate over Brexit and undermined social cohesion by alienating disaffected groups such as second-generation Muslim migrants (Fernández-Reino, 2020).

London resident Aaronovitch is sensitive to the psychogeography of London, and he repeatedly references past acts of violence that haunt the city. The Second World War destruction and post war rebuild was discussed in chapter six, but he also mentions the July 7, bombings which occurred in four simultaneous suicide attacks, "the victims of the hideous suicide of the Bradford boy who didn't want to work in his father's chip shop no more" (WUG p. 226). This is a reference to suicide bomber Shezad Tanweer aged 22 at the time of his death. Three of the bombers were second generation British Pakistani migrants and at the time of releasing the first *Rivers of London* novel in 2011, the 2005 bombings were still raw in the minds of Londoners. The attacks were particularly shocking because of the youth of the men and the fact they had chosen

soft targets of tube trains and a bus which were designed to cause maximum civilian casualties. There was also a public sense of betrayal that British citizens could enact such atrocities against fellow Britons. Peter's compassionate attitude to the terrorist is perhaps prompted by the fact that these young men had been manipulated and groomed by unidentified (faceless) men within Al Qaeda, operating online and outside the country.

Aaronovitch makes many references to terrorism in his work, as due to its long history and political and cultural importance London has been the site of many acts of terror, "Counter Terrorism Command have an institutional memory that goes all the way back to Guy Fawkes" (LS p. 184) who famously failed to blow up Parliament in 1605. The IRA bombings of the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and attacks by the Real IRA opposed to the Good Friday agreement of 1999 who continued to attack civilian targets up until 2001 have left a psychological scar on London residents, "There hasn't been a camera blindspot outside a London rail terminus since the IRA declared them legitimate targets in the 1990s" (RL p. 221). Britons, especially Londoners have had to learn to live with the ever-present threat of terrorist attacks and in order to move about the city they have been required to adapt their behaviour in a number of ways. This ranges from living with the inconvenience of lack of litter bins in train stations which were hitherto a handy receptacle for IRA bombs, to suppressing anxiety generated by the constant potential to be killed or maimed. This existential threat permeates into the psyche of London residents and since attacks can occur anywhere at any time, tube commuters can become hyper-vigilant of other passengers, "It's a myth that Londoners are oblivious to one another on the tube; we're hyper aware of each other" (RL p. 188), constantly weighing up the odds, for example "If he opens his jacket and yells 'God is great' will I make it down the other end of the carriage in time" (RL p. 188). Like most Londoners Peter does not dwell on the dangers, but Aaronovitch articulates the largely unspoken sense of unease that ordinary people going about their everyday business must contend with, "constantly weighing up the odds" of survival. There is a marked contrast here between the 'good' citizens going about their peaceful lives and the 'bad' citizens plotting violence. Unfortunately for the police and security forces there is no easy way of telling one from the other.

Other groups such as the far-left Angry Brigade, the Ulster Defence League and Scottish Nationalist have also considered civilians legitimate targets for their causes. "The City of London Police and CTC have spent great deal of the last thirty years waiting for the next big truck bomb – be it IRA, IRA classic, various varieties of cryptofascists or jihadists" (LS, p. 343). Islamic groups have been responsible for the majority of post 2000 terrorist attacks in London and they are the current 'bogeymen' in much the same way militant suffragettes were at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Irish groups were at the end of the century. An MI5 officer tells Peter how overstretched the security services are, "What with all the new Islamist franchises springing up […] not to mention the hardy perennials on the far right and the unrepentant Fenians, we're a bit too stretched to spare much attention for our closest allies" (HT p. 204). Whether the terrorists are Islamic fundamentalists, far right ideologues, Irish independence, or loyalist Ulster paramilitaries, London is a city constantly under attack from internal and external threats.

The character of Martin Chorley the Faceless Man embodies the threat of domestic terror, and he is eventually labelled as a potential terrorist by the Met, a memo stating that "Martin Chorley represents a serious and immediate danger to the Queen's Peace on a scale that could, conceivably, match that of the 7/7 bomb attacks" (LS p. 3). His initial faceless appearance reflects the lack of individualisation of 'terror' as an abstract concept. As his reign of terror progresses he begins to acquire the legendary aura of a figure such as 'Jack the Ripper' and his namesake the 'Yorkshire Ripper', a person simultaneously human and super-human in his capacity to induce fear. Awful punishments dealt to people who oppose him such as laminating a victim's face to a tree or cooking another from the inside increase the power of his legend. Later when his identity is uncovered Peter remarks that "Chorley was a man who liked to walk in the shadows and stand beside the throne – not Arthur. Never Arthur. Not the king of Camelot" (LS p. 288). By invoking the Arthurian legends Aaronovitch is referencing another deep vein of British myth, that of the wizard Merlin. Like Merlin Chorley prefers not to be a figurehead, his natural inclination is to operate from the sidelines, hidden from view exerting his power over people by inducing terror. 'Terrorism' as an abstract noun cannot be seen or grasped; it can only be defined by the effect it has on the lives of citizens whose lives are diminished through fear. Those Londoners who

take the tube but are constantly vigilant for bombs are victims of terror, so too are those who fear to go on trains or busses and whose everyday lives are curtailed by the actions of extremists. Chorley, like Punch is a shadow counterpoint to Peter's hero. He hides his identity behind a mask and his wealth behind shell companies that comprise his "shadowy commercial empire" (HT p. 202). He conceals his true nature behind the normal father mask of Martin Chorley much as terrorists hide themselves in normality.

In *Lies Sleeping*, Chorley's plot to kill Punch and bring back an Arthurian golden age is thwarted by Peter and Nightingale, but his racial rantings echo the views of far-right groups. For example, Chorley describes Lesley in racial terms whilst referencing Shakespeare,

> Lesley is a proper Brit … That wonderful blend of Romano-Celt and Anglo-Saxon with a flavouring of Dane and a pinch of Norman French. That happy breed that conquered the world and could again if all their children were kind and natural. (HT pp. 358-359)

The reference is to the prologue to *Henry V* Act 2 which acts as a warning of treachery,

> O England! model to thy inward greatness,
> Like little body with a mighty heart,
> What might'st thou do, that honour would thee do,
> Were all thy children kind and natural!

Chorley seems to be inferring that many of England's children are not kind (of good stock or lineage), or natural, meaning that they are incapable of having proper feelings of affection. This is likely a reference to the British Pakistani terrorists who clearly did not have Lesley's favoured genetic makeup. Again, Aaronovitch is making the distinction between good citizens, or "proper Brit[s]" and bad citizens who do not possess Chorley's list of required ingredients. Ironically Chorley himself is pointing out that Britons are a mongrel race made up of a blend of cultures. These are the very factors that Akroyd (2002) claims form the basis of English creativity.

Peter's other nemesis, the rabble rouser Punch also gives voice to some popular racist views. When sequestrated by Punch Lesley exclaims to a captive audience, "Why is it that men of good quality pay their taxes while foreigners pay naught and yet expect the liberties that are our Englishman's hard-won prerogative" (RL p. 239). Lesley

parrots more popular anti-migrant, and anti-poor sentiments about the abuse of the welfare state,

> "Who is more oppressed," exclaimed Lesley. "Those that seek nothing but entitlements for themselves or those that claim for everything, social security, housing benefit, disability and pay for nothing." One thing I did do in history was the reform of the poor laws so I knew that Henry Pyke must either be using stuff from Lesley's memories or else had been reading the *Daily Mail* for the last two hundred years […]. "And are they grateful?" she asked. The audience muttered in response. "Of course they are not […]. For they have come to look upon such things as their right."

In Britain the majority of the traditional print media are politically right-leaning, *The Guardian* being a rare example of a left-wing newspaper, and the *Daily Mail* is used by Aaronovitch as shorthand for sensational neo-liberal popularist press. The tired story of migrants 'taking' jobs and/or bleeding the welfare state and living the good life on benefits are common tropes within the press and reality television shows and Peter is pointing out that these "folk devil" stereotypes (Cohen, 2002; Barton & Davis, 2016) have been a feature of British public discourse for centuries. Aaronovitch's running joke about the tabloid *Daily Mail* as a source of less than quality journalism features in a review of the newspapers, "ILLEGALS ATE MY SNOWPLOUGH headlines from the *Daily Mail*" from *Whispers Under Ground*, (2012, p. 116). The shouty capitals satirising the nonsense that is frequently consumed by the British public under the guise of news.

Aaronovitch is concerned about the power of the media to shape public opinion and references to newspapers become more frequent as the novel cycle moves towards the 2016 European Union referendum, commonly known as Brexit. The fifth novel *Foxglove Summer*, released in 2014 followed Prime Minister David Cameron's 2013 promise that if the Conservatives won a majority in the 2015 general election, he would initiate an in-out referendum on Britain's EU membership. This caused immigration to become a pressing national issue as the UK Independence Party (UKIP) leveraged voter fears of being overrun with migrants to campaign for a yes (leave) vote. In a poll of European countries conducted prior to Brexit, the country most concerned about immigration was Britain. According to Gibson (2016), the reason being "'even though there are differences between the BBC and the *Express*, during

the EU referendum campaign they all have driven a narrative of conflict, which inflates fear and creates the feeling of "us against them'" (Gibson, 2016 cited in Notaro, 2020, p. 74). It appears that even the supposedly balanced BBC allowed the vocabulary of division to seep into its coverage of the Brexit debate, thus contributing towards an erosion of societal coherence and exacerbating the existing rifts in Britain which were discussed in chapter five.

The role of sensational journalism in fuelling racial based stereotypes is satirised by Peter,

> [The journalist] wrote of the existence of a network of temporary camps frequented by new age travellers, migrant labourers, gypsies, asylum seekers and Romanians who were, allegedly, responsible for the shocking increase in rural crime, unemployment and, some said, spreading foot and mouth. (FS p. 251)

Referencing the animal disease Foot and Mouth parodies the absurdity of some commentators who dehumanise outgroups (alternative lifestyle travellers, migrants in low paying jobs, traditional travelling communities, asylum seekers) and blame them for all kinds of social problems. Peter makes light of the issue, but xenophobia experienced by Polish migrants (Rzepnikowska, 2019) and Roma (Breazu & McGarry, 2024) have been well documented as minority populations were scapegoated by the popular press and came to embody the perceived problems of the European integration project. The low value placed on accuracy, and an obsession with blaming outgroups for criminality by tabloid journalists is satirised, "The broadsheets led with the war in Syria, but the tabloids were having way too much fun with the idea of child-stealing gypsies to let the mere lack of facts get in the way" (FS p. 275). In *Foxglove Summer* the press is described as a "scrum," "pack" or even a "herd" (FS p. 44) as if individual journalists had lost their humanity along with their sense of perspective.

When *Amongst Our Weapons* was released in 2022 Aaronovitch seems to be despairing of journalism as a profession, the chief consideration of reporters being "would it [a story] get clicks or sell papers? More importantly, would it fit the news agenda their organisation worked to?" (AOW p. 326). The political partiality of the papers has always been an issue of concern in Britain, but now there are other economic forces at work. In these days of declining newspaper sales and increased

online consumption of bespoke newsfeeds, public interest journalism has become a rare commodity because "journalists are mostly freelance and only campaign when they're on the clock" (AOW p. 326). Gone are the days of well-funded newsrooms with large pools of staff reporters, consequently the role of the free press as a fourth estate providing balance in reporting and holding the powerful to account is under threat in the modern era.

Despite the gloomy prognosis for the free press, and the fractures induced by Brexit, Aaronovitch maintains an optimistic view of humanity. Racial tensions in Britain were undoubtedly exacerbated by Brexit the as the right-wing Eurosceptic UKIP pursued a leave campaign that denigrated non-white migrants and asylum seekers (Stewart & Mason, 2016). Notaro (2020) describes the "xenophobic billboards of the Leave campaign" (p. 75) that played an active role in stirring up racial tensions and deepening racial divides by creating fear of the other. Notaro (2020, p. 71) quotes Seidman's (2013) argument that, "The concept of the Other must be analytically distinguished from that of 'difference' […]. Otherness is fundamentally about cultural denigration and exclusion […]. The Other inhabits an existential space between the human and non-human." This recalls Cohen's (1996) discussion of representations of the monstrous other in popular culture that reflect the fears of society. In Aaronovitch the monstrous others are accepted or even celebrated as different and they are able to take their full place in society, whether it be in the mainstream, or in the *demi-monde*. They include those of other races and colours: Beverley, Peter, Guleed, Kumar, Abigail; or other religions: Walid, Guleed; or other sexualities: Stephanopoulos, Fleet; or other non-human races: Zach, Molly, the chimera, the foxes. Peter embraces his own diversity and is comfortable enough to make a joke of it, "Now I'm the son of a professional cleaner, but I'm also blessed with enough pre-school cousins to cause your average UKIP voter to relocate to Spain" (LS p. 18). By normalising difference Aaronovitch reclaims his characters from being othered and offers a model for politicians and others with influence. The Faceless Man attempted to weaponise the myth of Arthur to justify a racist ideology, but in place of a narrative of fear and exclusion, Aaronovitch offers an alternative mythology of diversity.

The concept of the good, moral citizen as a counter to bigotry, terrorism and mob violence is a key theme running through the novel cycle. By examining the link

between media rhetoric, immigration and terrorism Aaronovitch blends political commentary and satire whilst offering a more enlightened way forward by providing a model of diversity within the police and other communities. The hopeful tone of the novels provides a counterbalance to the national mood of despondency and the dystopian turn in modern fantasy texts (Martin, 2023).

7.5 Police cuts and austerity Britain

The Global Financial Crisis (GFC) of 2007 – 2009 continues to cast a shadow on the British economy. In response the coalition government implemented a series of austerity measures from 2010 to 2019, and again, as a response to the rising cost of living the Conservative government implemented austerity measures from 2021 to their loss of power in 2024. Consequently, there have been social implications as beneficiaries and those on low incomes tend to suffer the most from cuts to the welfare state (Hall, 2023). Cuts also adversely affected police budgets and impacted other aspects of the justice system including legal aid and the courts. According to Facchetti (2023) since 2010 central government has reduced police budgets by 20% in real terms, closed two thirds of English police stations and 75% of London police stations which Facchetti concludes has led directly to "a deterioration in the police's ability to investigate and collect the evidence necessary to clear up crimes" (Facchetti, 2023, para. 7). One solution to the lack of public access to the police is the establishment of drop in or pop up events named 'contact points' where members of the public may talk to a police officer, report crimes and raise community policing concerns. It is within this economic landscape that the *Rivers of London* novels are set, and Aaronovitch makes a pointed comment about the vanishing police stations, "A contact point is what you get when you keep making 'savings' to a police budget until the actual police stations start to disappear" (FV p. 249).

Aaronovitch first references the GFC in *Moon Over Soho* (2011) and starts making references to police budgets in the same novel,

> "'Keep some people on standby,' I said. 'Just in case.'
>
> 'Easy for you to say […]. It's not your overtime budget.'" (MOS pp. 251-152)

In *Whispers Under Ground* (2012) budgetary constraints weigh on the minds of senior police officers including Detective Inspector Stephanopoulos who "looked abstracted. She was thinking about her budget – I could tell from the way she bit her lip" (WUG p. 162). Stephanopoulos solves the problem by making the case fall under the ambit of the Folly. Later in the novel Stephanopoulos, Nightingale and Seawoll discuss the timing of a police raid,

> "I suggest we hold off until after Christmas," said Nightingale.
>
> "If only because of the overtime," said Stephanopoulos.
>
> "You know CO19 and TSG will be covering the likely target list until after the new year. They'll make us pay if we want them, and I don't think we should go down there without some bodies." (WUG p. 257)

As in the real-world, budget considerations impinge directly on tactical decisions as senior officers debate whether they can afford the services of the Tactical Support Group (TSG) and Specialist Firearms Command (CO19) officers. British police, of course are not routinely armed. By the time *Broken Homes* was released in 2013 the police cuts were beginning to bite[2]. The Folly, like the rest of the police service has limited funds and Nightingale "did baulk at the chunk it [deployment of TSG] took out of our operational budget" (BH p. 99). The pressure upon the police to balance budgets and meet oversight requirements results in a certain amount of avoiding responsibility for cases,

> A full-scale murder inquiry is going to set you back a quarter of a million quid minimum. If [Detective Chief Inspector] Manderley could dump it on the Met then it would be our budget and our problem, not to mention it would improve his crime counting at the end of the year." (BH p. 9)

Not only are the 43 police forces in England and Wales responsible for maintaining their own budgets but they must publish crime statistics including clear-up rates leading Lesley to complain that the supernatural nature of their work means that "no one's going to want to work with us. We're clear-up rate poison" (BH p. 139).

[2] "And what with the Met currently being seriously mullered by spending cuts, nobody was in a hurry to find an excuse for more work" (BH p. 59).

The same theme features in *The Hanging* Tree (2016), along with references to expensive reinvestigations of historical abuse allegations, "The AC would be asking whether this particular suspicious death was worth the resources, what with the current government cutting budgets and the sudden proliferation of expensive historical abuse investigations" (HT p. 123). The issue of the reinvestigation of historical cases is developed in *Face Value* (2020) with a dig at the conservative press, "The *Telegraph* who blamed the rise in murders on police resources being diverted to historical sex crimes" (FV p. 189). This is a reference to the 2012 Operation Yewtree investigation launched by the Met into Jimmy Saville which unearthed a number of historic sexual abuse cases by media personalities and MPs. In 2015 the Independent Inquiry into child Sexual Abuse was established which required the police to investigate a large number of allegations, thus putting their resources under more strain.

The theme of reduced police budgets develops in *Lies Sleeping* published in 2018, "'They' were mostly Police staff […] analysts and data entry specialists – who'd got the boot when the government decided that in the light of an increased security threat what London really needed was a smaller police force" (LS, p. 37). Even the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCC) are under financial pressure, "Contrary to what you might think the IPCC, being understaffed and poorly resourced, try to avoid being assigned cases" (LS p. 85). By the time *False Value* was published in 2020, Aaronovitch makes numerous references to the parlous state of police budgets, with Peter noting "I'd been out of normal operational policing for over three years, but I'd noticed that things had definitely got tighter" (FV p. 35). Peter also complains that "These days response officers were as rare as hen's teeth" (FV p. 46) and there is wistful remembrance of the good days before austerity measures,

> Before our Lady Theresa of the Wheat Field hacked up the Met's budget, you used to be able to just ask a Borough Command to send a couple of uniforms round. These days response officers were thin on the ground and you generally had to bribe their shift commanders with externally sourced overtime payments to get any help." (FV p. 64)

The reference to 'our Lady Theresa' is to former Home Secretary and Prime Minister Theresa May's 2017 revelation that the naughtiest thing she did as a child was to run through fields of wheat. Theresa May draws Aaronovitch's ire as chief instigator of police budget cuts and in *False Value* Peter sets up a blog entitled

"F**kTheresaMay678" (p. 121) to establish his bone fides as a disgruntled ex-police officer for his undercover role. In the same novel Alona Silver from the National Crime Agency states that she needs "a Judicial Disposal – a prosecution or some other recordable outcome to justify her expenditure" (FV p. 233). Peter goes on to explain that "You weren't supposed to take that into consideration when planning operations, but then response officers were not supposed to continuously work double shifts" (FV p. 233). Aaronovitch is articulating public fears that the police cuts are having deleterious effects on both operational decisions and on officer welfare.

False Value continues to stress the urgency of the police staffing crisis and the impact on the police of cuts to other services such as mental health facilities, and legal aid, "the lack of secure mental health places and the fact that the police were always expected to fill in for the gaps in social care" (FV p. 122). This issue has become so acute that in May 2023 the Met Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley announced that police officers would no longer attend mental health incidents that were better suited to response from health staff (Dodd, 2023). Austerity measures also affected the funding of other elements of the justice system such as legal aid budgets, and the canny Peter is not above using it to his advantage, "You can always get on the right side of legal aid lawyers by having a mutual moan about austerity. It's one of the many ways that adversity helps bring people together" (FV p. 327). The latest novel *Amongst Our Weapons* published in 2022 indicates that the situation has not improved, "the government were in their sixth year of trying to cut crime by reducing the number of active police officers" (AOW p. 49). Aaronovitch's gentle satire has been replaced with acidic sarcasm, and it is tempting to read this as reflective of the public mood of exasperation.

7.6 Attempts to reform the Met

The canteen culture of the Met which encourages shared workplace prejudices is mentioned in *False Value* and *Amongst Our Weapons,* "Being made responsible without proper ownership is the sort of thing that causes dissatisfaction amongst the rank and file. Although I admit closing half the canteens in London probably ranks higher" (FV p. 131). This reflects the increasing unhappiness of rank-and-file police officers who are increasingly under resourced whilst facing public criticism for

ineffectiveness in preventing and investigating crime. The quote also presages the findings of the 2023 Casey Report which documented that the Met is institutionally racist, misogynistic and homophobic. The report was prompted by the 2021 abduction, rape and murder of Sarah Everard by a serving police officer, but Peter explains that closure of canteens is a double-edged sword, "Senior management have decided to reduce the influence of 'canteen culture' by closing all the canteens. I can live without the racism and the misogyny, but I miss the food – and the camaraderie, of course" (AOW p. 222). Peter is articulating the sense of frustration amongst police whose working conditions are deteriorating along with the disappearing stations and canteens.

The Metropolitan Police has had a number of well publicised problems and attempts to reform the institution are underway, although hampered by a lack of funds (Bentham, 2024). The reform of the Met is parallelled by the efforts of The Folly to become fit for purpose in the modern era. Originally established as "the official home of British wizardry since 1775" (LS p. 6). The Folly had become outdated under Nightingale's solitary command. Although an official police station leased to the Met (LS pp. 35-6), it is an anachronism "it was a typical British mixture of archaic tradition, handshakes between gentlemen, and a stubborn refusal to engage with anything that might smack of dangerous continental legalism" (AOW pp. 146 - 147). Existing in a very British liminal zone, much like the ambiguous status of the United Kingdom itself, the Folly undergoes modernisation under the influence of Peter. Physically, Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) compliant cells, showers and internet are installed and new recruits Lesley, Abigail and others from diverse backgrounds are admitted. It becomes a much more female-friendly world, shedding its gentleman's club exclusivity whilst retaining its eccentric links to the past such as the excellent catering service supplied by Molly. This is an idealised model of reform for the Met which itself has a long and distinguished history. Formed in 1829 by Robert Peel, it is one of the oldest police services in the world and retains a glamour which contrasts with its many operational failures. It features in numerous popular entertainments from Conan-Doyle to *The Sweeney* to *The Bill*, often under the nickname of Scotland Yard. The institution is in dire need of rejuvenation to serve the needs of Londoners in the twenty first century.

In summary, cuts in police budgets and other austerity measures in Britain have had a major impact on police numbers and morale. This, coupled with the Casey Report's damning assessment of the culture of the Metropolitan Police has led to a "loss of public trust and confidence in the police" (Tudor, 2023, n. p.). The idealistic and humane Peter Grant is a counter to these negative narratives and a return to the police officer as hero, but through Peter, Aaronovitch also articulates public concern about the erosion of police effectiveness. Despite these challenges Peter, Nightingale, and colleagues adhere to the Peelian principles of policing by consent and of using the minimum amount of force necessary to ensure public safety. The diverse range of characters in Aaronovitch's Metropolitan Police also serve as a model for excellence, tolerance and diversity within the police force. Although problematic social issues are addressed in the *Rivers* novels, the tone is one of optimism and respect for the difficult work of the police and gratitude for their service to the public.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined Aaronovitch's approach to the crime novel and the centrality of Peter Grant in dictating the tone and themes of the work. Peter's identity as apprentice, police officer and Londoner shapes the novels as his distinctive voice gives rise to social commentary on policing, terrorism, the position of those othered by society and the role of the media in shaping the public response to immigration. As fantasy fiction enables the use of extended metaphor, the issue of mob violence is explored through the character of Mr Punch, and the ethically challenged magician, the Faceless Man enables discussion of terrorism and racism within Britain. Through the medium of the police procedural, Peter's frequent references to policing cuts reflect public concerns about the effect of austerity policies on public safety. However, the idealism and dedication of the fictional police in the *Rivers of London* novels provide a counterpoint to narratives of corruption and criminality within the real-world police. The rejuvenation of The Folly may provide a template for reform of the Metropolitan Police, and Aaronovitch reminds the reader that the vast majority of police personnel are dedicated professionals, sworn to protect the public from crime and violence. He also points out that most citizens are law abidingly peaceful, respectful of difference, and grateful for the police for their public service. This

provides a counter-narrative to dystopian fears for the future of Britain whilst simultaneously critiquing government policy.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Contribution to the field

In this thesis I aim to explore to what extent, and how Aaronovitch's representation of London reflects the socio-political environment of modern Britain. I conclude that these novels are deeply rooted in the post-GFC United Kingdom and closely reflect the anxieties of the age. The intersection of urban fantasy and real-life concerns relating to austerity policies and divisions within the United Kingdom are under-explored in the literature, and one of my intentions is to contribute to understanding in this area. By focussing on how fractures within the books mirror geographical and social divisions within Britain the thesis concludes that Britian is undergoing a difficult period of economic readjustment that has corroded social cohesion. Like the distributed consciousness of London as represented by the *genii locorum*, Britain may be viewed as made up of a large number of disparate groups with very different competing needs and interests.

There appears to be a widespread anecdotal feeling within Britain that the country has lost its way and has been badly served by its leaders in recent years (Taylor et al., 2024) with almost three quarters of poll respondents believing that the country was worse off than it was 14 years ago. The Scottish referendum and Brexit have exacerbated existing fault lines and there is a yearning for stable and principled governance following the messy end to the Conservative Party's 14-year rule. However, Aaronovitch's vision of rejuvenation and concern for the vulnerable and the othered offers a hopeful counter narrative. If individuals, and more importantly leaders can learn to better manage conflict by integrating new ideas into old institutions, a new synthesis may occur. A model of enlightened self-interest, Father Thames shows wisdom and humility by honouring the past, whilst simultaneously embracing the new and different as represented by Mama Thames.

This work also aspires to go some way towards filling the gap in the literature of speculative fiction addressing the relationship between damaged faces, damaged or ugly buildings, and historical trauma. Aaronovitch's repeated descriptions of ruined or ugly buildings and ruined or ugly faces speaks to a national trauma of loss. The

psychogeography of London has received critical attention, but there is a dearth of literature on the metaphorical treatment of facial deformity in speculative fiction. To address this gap, I specifically focus on how the character of Lesley May illustrates the complexities of identity and belonging when one is othered by monstrosity.

The concept of good citizenship and the role of the police in maintaining public order in the age of austerity is another key concern of the texts. The real-life struggles of the Met to maintain its public service ideals and reform itself as an institution fit for purpose in the twenty first century is mirrored by the attempts of the Folly to maintain its relevance. Riots and civil unrest are dissected in the books via the character of Mr Punch. The character of Punch has received some critical attention, for example Means-Shannon (2012) uses Jungian theory of light and shadow to investigate Punch in Neil Gaiman and Dave McKean's visual narratives as a way of psychological exploration. And Saunders (2021) explores how Mr Punch is used by Harold Pinter to promote a political message. Hume (2022) specifically addresses Punch in Aaronovitch but limits her analysis to an exploration of power and empire. The link between Punch, mob violence and social disadvantage is under theorised and to address this gap I focus on Punch as archetypal trickster. The thesis concludes that Punch is the antithesis of law and order, and by assimilating his opposite, the police hero Peter is able to access a darker part of himself and progress his journey towards individuation.

The sub-text underpinning these arguments is that fantasy matters, that fantasy is a genre that deserves to be taken seriously, and that comic urban fantasy police procedurals can achieve anything that 'great' literature can do and do it in a more entertaining manner than most. I am aware that academic giants have already made that very point in a far more scholarly way (Clute, Attebery, Manlove, Mendlesohn, Le Guin) but raised eyebrows from friends and acquaintances when I explained the topic of my thesis caused me to realise that many people still consider fantasy as escapist light weight nonsense. This thesis is my humble contribution towards reiterating that literature can be weird, silly, sweary, funny and still be profound and worthy of study. Peter's journey towards maturity, and Nightingale's process of adaptation to modernity are universal themes discussed in great literature from Shakespeare to Dickens to Stephen King.

A strength of the fantasy genre is that when produced with skill, the reader is drawn, perhaps unwittingly into a subversive realm of metaphor that works on the unconscious. We find ourselves sympathising with the often very bizarre and initially threatening other, and by the very act of reading, we must necessarily consider alternative viewpoints because, other than abandoning the book, the author leaves us no choice. In the hands of an expert, fantasy can be educative and is able to perform important cultural work by dragging uncomfortable truths into the light. Aaronovitch addresses slavery, homelessness, class, environmental disruption, erosion of public services and trauma without the reader necessarily being aware that this is what they are enjoying reading about. I certainly did not on my first reading.

8.2 Limitations and areas for future research

On a practical level, the *Rivers of London* novels presented two key problems for this researcher, firstly the size of the corpus, and secondly the multi-layered richness of the subject matter. In short, Aaronovitch produces a lot of words, and a lot of ideas. Upon devouring the books for the first time I came away with the feeling that I had only scratched the surface of what the author had to say. After multiple re-readings more and more strands came to the fore, and just as I thought I had explored most of the data, yet another theme emerged. I suddenly realised for instance how central fatherhood is to the book series. Likewise, the concept of good citizenship, once noticed becomes an important theme that runs throughout the novels. Eventually I had to call a halt on adding new strings and I certainly do not claim to have uncovered all there is to be explored within the corpus. There is plenty of material for future scholars to mine: the theme of faith and worship is there to be unravelled, as is the influence of big corp and AI, Peter's exorcism of the wartime ghosts and the cargo cult children of *All Our Weapons* deserves analysis and the frequent references to food and "refs" led me to muse on the role of Greggs and Costa Coffee as British soul food perhaps? However, at the heart of the books, at least for me is a critique of government policies that exacerbated existing divisions within Britain. Given the social and political climate of the time of writing it is no small feat that Aaronovitch manages to make the books uplifting and funny. No matter how many times I read them, they never fail to make me laugh.

After identifying the areas that I wished to explore, next came the problem of critical interpretation, and after a period of floundering in a night sea journey of abandonment I had my own epiphany that Jung could be my guide to the profundities. Jung's work on the unconscious and individuation assisted me to reach deeper into the meanings of the books. Like all great literature the books address big themes and in many ways Peter's journey mirrored my own search for wisdom and mature understanding of "why the f… anything happens." (RL p. 3). Jung's theories of the shadow and individuation have been seized upon by New Age philosophies partially because they are flexible enough to allow numerous applications. It was with joy that I discovered Susan Rowland's *Jungian Literary Criticism* (2019) which helped me clarify intuitions about the texts into a coherent argument. The archetypes of the magician, the wise ruler, the young untested ruler, the trickster and the hero permeate our culture, not least in the realm of fantasy where they appear as recognisable old friends. By working with these archetypes Aaronovitch offers a new way of approaching old problems. I have by no means completed a comprehensive analysis of archetypes with the books. There is, for example a connection between the trickster archetype, the character of Reynard and the foxes that begs for further exploration. Molly is also a puzzle, a combination of the monstrous feminine and nurturing mother.

8.3 Final remarks

By recognising and teasing out the mythopoeic strand in the novels this thesis articulates how Aaronovitch reinterprets archetypes to make sense of the current culture, and crucially, offer a potential path forward to managing societal conflicts. The two factions of river gods are central to the narratives, and Mama Thames and daughters offer a new creation myth for London, and by analogy for Britain. The Thames is the most important river in Britain with Akroyd (2007) linking it to the fertility of the nation, and Schama (1995) claiming that it is metaphorically the bloodstream of Britain. By forging an alliance between two competing interests, the power of the Thames is envigored with new blood without loss of respect for its old guardian. Ancient traditions are a key feature of British life and Aaronovitch reminds us that embracing new cultures and peoples does not erase the past, nor should it as Britain, especially London has been a nexus of cultural exchange for at least two thousand years and likely long before (Akroyd, 2001; 2002). Institutions such as the

Folly and the police service can evolve to meet the demands of modern Britain without loss of pride in past achievements. Indeed, they must as change is necessary for growth and survival.

Myth critic Northrop Frye commented in the 1960s during a time of social upheaval and civil unrest that literary critics interpret such times of social anxiety by examining "the emotional values attached to metaphors" (Frye 1969 cited in Hart, 2009, p. 40). Post-GFC austerity has been a difficult era for Britain, but the emotional value attached to the divided Thames metaphor is not one of despair, instead under Aaronovitch's vision it becomes one of hope and compromise. The river may be divided, and a source of conflict, but conflict need not necessarily be a bad thing. If instead of defensiveness it is approached from a position of mature understanding, positive outcomes such as creative solutions and stronger relationships may be formed (Rumore, 2023). Basic conflict resolution teaches us that if conflict is approached as a threat, or through a scarcity lens that programmes us to see winners and losers, defensive behaviour leads to further damage in relationships and/or disengagement as witnessed by Father Thames' self-imposed exile to the upper river. Considering the problem from the perspective of another is a difficult skill which necessitates the removal of the ego. Father Thames' ability to relinquish some of his power and welcome a new era of cooperation is a model for Britain to follow. Beset by increasingly fractious debates about immigration and nationhood, and suffering from social policies that have widened the existing faultiness of have and have nots, the novels remodel conflict into an opportunity for growth.

Again, using Frye's concept of metaphoric "emotional value", the prevailing national view of ugly and damaged buildings is one of loss and sorrow, but by some alchemy Aaronovitch allows us to laugh at the "monstrous carbuncle[s]" so despised by the King. Meditation on the images of damaged buildings and mutilated faces drew me into an exploration of psychogeography and how monster theory could be applied to explain public reaction to the odious mid-century architecture that was hastily erected throughout the realm. British people on the whole are conservative with a small 'c' and respectful of the past. They do not take kindly to gratuitous modernism, especially when it is foisted on them with no consultation. Aaronovitch's excoriating architectural commentary is a joy to read as it echoes so many comments heard whilst living in

Britain. Short of bulldozing our town centres, schools and shopping centres and beginning again, Britons are forced to tolerate the concrete lumps whilst mourning the architectural heritage that was lost. Trauma cannot be easily mended, but literature can provide comfort, and shared laughter as Ilott (2018) asserts, can create new communities linked by commonalities. As Hart (2007) states, and as Aaronovitch demonstrates, humour can also be a powerful form of protest.

YOU NEED TO BELIEVE IN THINGS THAT AREN'T TRUE. HOW ELSE CAN THEY BECOME?

—Terry Pratchett, *Hogfather,* 1996

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Appendices

Appendix A

Appendix A: The divided city

Criteria for inclusion – conflict, fractures between city and country, geography, generations, class, housing status, ethnicity. Also flooding caused by urban expansion versus conservation.	
Sub-theme: The divided Thames Tidal/urban/black versus rural upstream/white Father Thames' antipathy to the city	"Downstream, the Thames was the sovereign domain of Mother Thames; upstream, it belonged to Father Thames. The dividing line was at Teddington Lock (RL p. 81). "They both have genuine power […]. But it feels different; hers is from the sea, from the port and all that. His is from the earth and the weather and leprechauns and crystals for all I know" (RL pp. 144-5). "a group of IC1 [white] males dressed in jeans and donkey jackets fighting with an unknown number of IC3 [black] females on Riverside Road" (RL p. 96). "exciting intergenerational and ethnic conflict that makes life in the big city worth living" (BH p. 121-2). "The Old Man has never loved the city, not since it killed his sons […]. Ty and Fleet and Effra. All drowned in a flood of muck and filth and finally put out of their misery by that clever bastard Bazalgette" (RL p. 142). "When he [Father Thames] was a young man he stood where I stood, on the bridge, [London Bridge] and made the same promises I did. But he hasn't been below Teddington Lock since the Great Stink of 1858. He never came back, not even after Bazalgette put the sewers in. Not even for the blitz, not even when the city was burning." (RL p. 88). "since he [Father Thames] couldn't be bothered to step up for the Festival of Britain, let alone the Blitz, he can't just arrive and demand to sit at the head of the table" (BH p. 122).
Father Thames as link to past and upholder of traditions	"Verica wasn't a Latin name, I suspected it was British," (RL p. 275). "Tiberius Claudius Verica. […] help me, Father Thames" (RL p. 283). "The Old Man remembers everything" (LS p. 115). "The showmen […] have a strong connection to the old traditions and the old wisdoms" "remembering to propitiate the Goddess of the River Fleet every

	midsummer, the whole area could easily go back to being a malarial swamp" (FV p. 26). "Most people thought the little rituals they performed – the occasional bottle of beer left out in a riverside garden, the champagne broken on the bow of a boat, the odd bit of bank work or rewilding … these were harmless little superstitions. Others entered directly into a pact because the blessing of the Old Man of the River could raise wild flowers out of season and cause HSE inspectors and bank managers to let things slide until the business picks up" (LS p. 108). "There was no internet or other electronics, which goes some way to explaining why Bev had been so vexed with me about her erstwhile sabbatical on the upper Thames" (LS p. 110). "Oxley drove a Triumph sidecar combination, and on the rare occasions that Father Thames drove himself, it was in a Morris Minor Traveller estate" (AOW p. 39). Cf Beverley's new mini, Peter's Ford Asbo vs Nightingale's Mark 2 Jag. His throne is made from haybales covered in embroidered horse blankets "near the priory in the shade of an ancient yew tree" (RL p. 296). Trewsbury Mead "it's the source of his river […]. Where else is he going to go in the spring?" "He'll have arrived there around about the Spring Equinox, which was last week, and he'll stay until All Fool's Day" (RL p. 135). "beer and skittles […] the smell of horse manure and walking home from the pub by moonlight, a warm fireside and uncomplicated women" (RL p. 138). "Around him were arrayed his sons, their wives and his grandchildren" "arrayed in all their donkey jacket and sideburned glory" (RL p. 297).
Mama Thames represents the tidal river, commerce and the city	"For a moment it was as if I stood high up on the middle cowling of the Thames Barrier looking east over the mouth of the river. I could feel the towers of Canary Wharf rising triumphantly at my back and beyond them the docks, the White Tower and all the bridges, bells and houses of London town. But ahead of me over the horizon I could feel the storm surge, the fatal combination of high tides, global warming and poor planning, waiting. Ready to drive a wall of water ten metres high up the river and bring down the bridges, towers and Uncle Tom Cobley and all. 'Just so you understand,' said Mama Thames. 'Where the real power lies.'" (RL pp. 274-275)

Mama Thames is inexperienced and opinionated verging on racist	Her throne is the "finest of the executive armchairs. Her hair was braided and threaded with black cotton and tipped with gold so that it stood above her brow like a crown" (RL p. 84) "there were too many Igbo in my class," (RL p. 86). "because of those stupid patients I failed my exams." (RL p. 86). "my beautiful Robert" who jilted her in favour of "a white bitch Irish woman" (RL p. 86).
Tyburn shares her prejudices	"Ty is just stuck-up, lives in Mayfair, goes to posh people's parties, knows people that matter […] fixes stuff with the politicians" (RL p. 115). As eldest daughter of Mama Thames, Tyburn shares Oxley's role as chief fixer for their respective parents. "the Pikeys" (RL p. 183).[Tyburn's description of Father Thames] "Not the sort of people one wants one's sister associating with" (RL p. 183).
Mama Thames' daughters are modern and forward-looking	Beverley is doing a degree in Environmental Science and "thinking about going into flood management" (LS, p. 234). > They would have cut down the ancient woodland and planted western hemlock or Douglas fir, probably. […]. Then in the late sixties, it began to occur to people that perhaps there was a bit more to afforestation than just planting a ton of trees. By the early 1980s someone had invented the word biodiversity and rural landowners, who up until then had cheerfully been industrialising the landscape, were told to start putting it back the way they'd found it. (FS p. 142). Effra runs under Brixton, and Peter describes her as an "underground river who was obviously moonlighting as the Goddess of Brixton Market" (RL p. 272). Effra is a musical influencer, described as "practically the patron saint of UK Grime" (MOS p. 32). "Mum insisted that we all get a degree" (WUG p. 123). Effra says "Effra's accent was shifting up and down the class scale at more or less random intervals" (WUG p. 123). Olympia is described as sounding "Young, female, middle-class but with the clipped vowel sounds that come from having parents who believe in education, or else" (MOS p. 143). The river Fleet runs from Hampstead, running under the traditional home of journalism Fleet Street, before entering the Thames at Blackfriars, therefore Fleet has influence over the arts, journalists and cultural life of the city. Nightingale speculates

	that if Fleet wanted you dead, she would "humiliate you to death in the media" (MOS p. 32). She is described as having a runner's physique (WUG p. 85) Tyburn's course runs from the Hampstead Hills past the ancient hanging tree, the Tyburn Gallows and flows under Regents Park, under Buckingham Palace and the Palace of Westminster. In consequence she wields political power and influence and exudes an air of danger. Her magical aura is "The stink of the sewer and money and the deals done over brandy and cigars. Only Tyburn being modern there was a whiff of cappuccino and sun-dried tomatoes" (RL p. 215).
Sub-theme: Class Father Thames is proletarian Nightingale is upper-middle class Peter and Lesley are working-class	"The Old Man of the River had been stuffed into his best suit and his hair and beard combed until merely scruffy-looking" (RL p. 297). The Thames sons are "arrayed in all their donkey jacket and sideburned glory" (RL p. 297) Oxley has a "large calloused hand" (RL p. 139) Isis' "bit of rough" (RL p. 176) "With his height and good suit Nightingale should have looked like the lord of the manor mixing with the commoners, but there was no deference in the way Father Thames sized him up" (RL p. 138). Nightingale speaks with "a proper upper-class accent, like an English villain in a Hollywood movie" and wears handmade shoes and "a beautifully tailored suit" and carries a "silver-topped cane" (RL p. 21). "The Folly was never that popular with the aristocracy […]. We were all much more proudly bourgeoisie than that. It would be best to think of us as professionals – like doctors or lawyers." (BH p. 35) "Me and Lesley, both being aspirational working class" (BH p. 64) "Your father is a failed musician and your mother cleans offices for a living. You grew up in a council flat and you went to your local comprehensive and you failed your A-levels" (RL p. 273) "You can't be part of this, you're … common. This is the Folly, this place is strictly toffs and monsters" (WUG p. 102).
Sub-theme: London vs rest of country	"the whole north-south thing' (AOW p. 224)

Scathing attitude to provinces	"Most archaeology these days is rescue archaeology – projects designed to preserve as much as possible from the relentless cash-driven redevelopment" (LS p. 45). "Like many of her sisters she [Tyburn] was swallowed up by the city, first serving as an open sewer and then buried out of sight" (LS p. 185). "At the end of the eighteenth century London was well into the mad, technology-driven expansion that would only stop with the establishment of the Metropolitan Green Belt in the 1940s" (LS, p. 34). "London sucks. Sucks the rest of the country dry. You want to get ahead, you have to go to London. You want to get away – go to fucking London. All the jobs, all the money goes to London. The rest of the country gets the leftovers, the bits that London doesn't want" (LS p. 281). Chief Inspector Seawoll "was from Yorkshire or somewhere like that and, like many Northerners with issues, he'd moved to London as a cheap alternative to psychotherapy" (RL p. 30). Compare the vague dismissal of the largest English county with the detailed descriptions of London. "Norfolk where the skies are big, the land is flat and the demographics are full of creamy white goodness. It is … the poor man's alternative to Australia, now that south Africa has gone all multicultural" (MOS p. 224). "Back in civilization" after a trip to the countryside (BH p. 17). "A group of wizards in Manchester, of all places who styled themselves the sons of Weyland would construct them [staffs] to order" [Nightingale] (BH p. 36). "Lucky for you she [Peter's nan] unevacuated us back to Stepney before the end of the war. Or we might have been Welsh – in my dad's eyes a fate worse than being Scottish" (MOS p.44).
Fractures within the union	"Let me tell you something, Constable Grant," said Miss Tefreidiad. "Where you are now is not London – it's not even England." "Yes it is Ma, said Corve. "Only in a political sense," snapped Miss Tefreidiad. (FS p. 98). 'What if he's Welsh?' 'What if he is?' 'Then he's hardly likely to give you back the England you want, is he?' (LS)

Sub-theme: Peter becomes more aware of the world outside London	"Beverely has taught me some basic bird stuff so I recognised it as a corvid" (AOW p. 193). "According to Caroline, Seawoll's accent became more regional during these conversations, see-sawing between Glossop, Bolton and Stockport with occasional pure Manc when he was swearing. To be honest, it all sounded the same to me. But I'm a soft southerner so what do I know?" (AOW p. 222).
Sub-theme: flooding and environmental concerns	"This is the cleanest industrial river in Europe. Do you think that happened by accident? Swinging London, Cool Britannia, the Thames Barrier? Do you think that happened by accident?" (RL) led to a great deal of straightening and culverting which in turn led to a massive loss of biodiversity. And that was before they started pouring semi-treated sewage into them. It was into this environment of neglect that the current crop of river goddesses emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century, and they have been working for improvements ever since (FV p. 235). Life can be tough on London's rivers. Those that weren't turned into open sewers in the eighteenth century were turned into covered sewers in the nineteenth. The suburban rivers that escaped death by carefully engineered brick arch faced that most terrible of fates – flood management (FV p. 234). "Like most of the homes on the street, its generous front garden had been paved over to provide more parking space and an increased flood risk" (BH p. 70). "If you love beside the river, Beverley says, you're going to get flooded … A lot of the London Borough of Barnes sits inside a northern loop of the Thames that stretches from Putney Bridge to where the railway crosses the river. One day, says Beverley, she and her Mama are going to pinch it off at the base and make on big island … There's nothing like having your girlfriend talk in geological time to make you feel insignificant" (HT p. 56). Beverley is studying Environmental Science and her dissertation is on "The Environmental Benefits of Waterway Reversion" (FV p. 8). "Beverley marshalled her new recruits into the cause of river conservation" (FV p. 231). "Life can be tough on London's rivers. Those that weren't turned into open sewers in the eighteenth century were turned into covered sewers in the nineteenth. The suburban rivers that escaped death by carefully engineered brick arch faced that most terrible of fates – flood management" (FV p. 234).

	"quite a large part of our relationship involves me wading hip deep in the river {placing] hurdles which can be carefully placed in the river to promote meandering … which promotes biodiversity and mitigates flash flooding" (FV p. 235).

Appendix B

Appendix B: The city and identity

Criteria for inclusion – London as a character, destruction of London and uglification post WW2, damaged faces, damaged infrastructure and damaged psyche, masks and changing faces, chimera and monsters, magical underclass and marginal identity.	
Sub-theme: London is a character with an identity, memory and scars left from historical events.	Nightingale's friend Walter's theory that complex systems could develop a conscious personality so that "any system, such as an underground railway or indeed the telephone network, could develop genius loci in the same fashion as the rivers and other sacred sites" (WUG p. 173).
Different personas	London was still a port back then, dying, but like an old man with a long exciting life, full of stories and memories. And terrified that he was going to be old and frail with no one to look after him (RL p. 87). London didn't care. She never does when you leave her, because she knows for every one that leaves another two arrive. Besides she was too busy painting on her neon lipstick and dolling herself up in red and gold. (MOS p. 370). "I'm tapping into the memory of the city" (LS, p. 190). "the stone and concrete memory of the tunnels" (WUG p. 315). "That dangerous half-life memory of the city where gods and ghosts mingled with the stone memory of the architecture" (FV p. 164).
Genius loci avatars of parts of London	Beverley Brook rises in Worcester Park in southeast London and flows through a ridiculous number of other parks, recreation grounds and golf courses before joining her mother at Barn Elms. She says that while she averages half a cubic metre of water per second, she's had it up to six cubic metres per second a couple of times. And unless she gets some more care, attention and the occasional bottle of Junipero Gin, she's not going to be responsible for where that surplus water's going to end up (HT p. 4). "the first rule of dealing with them in person is to remember that every single one of them is different. 'They are after all […] spirits of a specific locality. It's only logical that they will be somewhat variable'" (FS p. 96).

WW2 and The Blitz	"[Dad] said that growing up in London in the late 1940s, it was like the war was still going on in people's heads, what with the bomb sites, the rationing and the patronising voices of the BBC Home Service" (MOS p.45). 9 March 1941 SITUATION REPORT "listed in order of importance, damage to factories, railways, telecommunications, electricity supply, docks, roads, hospitals and public buildings." Café de Paris, Coventry street. Casualties – 34 killed, approximately 80 seriously injured" (MOS p.194). "a stick of incendiary bombs, back in April 1941 […] destroyed everything except the façade of number 8 King Street, the London home of Christie's since 1823" (BH p. 56). The mile End Road. It's where young Richard II signed the peasants' charter with his fingers crossed behind his back and the first ever VI cruise missile to land in London hit" (HT p. 151). "It looked like something from the Blitz, with broken floorboards and haphazard piles of brick" (HT p. 189). "The Sephardim, the Jews of the Southern Diaspora … built a great synagogue in Bevis Marks in Aldgate, which opened in 1701. There it has survived fire, riots and two rounds of bombing by the Germans and the IRA, to become the oldest synagogue in England still in use" (AOW p. 252).
Botched post WW2 rebuilding and the uglification	"When my dad was growing up the city was dotted with bomb sites … In the postwar years, these sites were gradually cleared and rebuilt as a series of ghastly architectural mistakes" (RL p. 269). "As property prices started rising, developers snatched up bombsites and derelict buildings and erected the shapeless concrete lumps that have made the 1970s the shining beacon of architectural splendour that it is" "the strange urge to turn the historic centre of British cities into gigantic outdoor toilets" (MOS p.252). The city of Westminster Magistrate's Court is "a bland box of a building built in the 1970s; it was considered to be so lacking in architectural merit that there was talk of listing it so that it could be preserved for posterity as an awful warning. Inside, the waiting areas maintained the unique combination of cramped busyness and barren inhumanity that was the glory of British architecture in the second half of the twentieth century" (RL p. 92). "They were called New Towns only because the term 'bantustan' hadn't been invented yet" (MOS p.252).

	"In the 1960s the planning department of the London County Council, whose unofficial motto was *Finishing What the Luftwaffe Started,* decided that what London really needed was a series of orbital motorways driven through its heart" (MOS p.316). Shakespeare Tower was "designed in the 1960s by adherents to the same Guernsey Gun emplacement school of architecture as those that built my school, it was another Brutalist tower of jagged concrete that had acquired a grade II listing because it was that or admit how fucking ugly it was" (WUG p.51). "Stromberg's infamous poem of concrete and deprivation Skygarden Tower" (WUG p.51). "Coin street Community Builders whose unofficial motto was *Building houses that people might actually want to live in.* It was revolutionary stuff." (BH p. 103). "Big cities thin out at the edges … before you either reach the historic old town or, more usually, what's left of it after the on-two blow of aerial bombardment and post-war planning" (FS p.25). "Archway is where the post-war dream of the urban motorway died in the teeth of local opposition .. the Archway Tavern stood proudly like a combination tank trap and brick shithouse in the way of progress. Famously the planning inquiry got so unruly that the Planning Inspector fled through a fire escape to escape the protestors" (HT p. 166). "Few buildings can evoke the sinister horror of 1950s municipal architecture more strikingly than the flat roof pub. Thrown up in their thousands wherever the working class were being rehoused" (LS p.78).
Sub-theme: Ugly or damaged buildings are a metaphor for damaged face/psyche of modern London.	"One side of the Embankment had suffered from an outbreak of modernism in the 1960s, but I kept my back to its dull concrete façades and instead watched the sun setting fire to the tops of the Millbank Tower and the Palace of Westminster" (MOS p.24). "Ceramic tiles splintered with a noise like teeth breaking" (WUG p.215). "The bungalow was blind, with grimy net curtains" (BH p. 256). "Landscaping is the great cardinal sin of modern architects. It's not your garden, it's not a park – it's a formless patch of grass, shrubbery and the occasional tree that exists purely to stop the original developer's plans looking like a howling concrete wilderness" (BH pp. 183-3). "The front façade of the Goat and Crocodile **came screaming across** the street and into the side of our car" (LS, p. 244).

Damaged faces of characters reflect the scars inflicted on the city. Lesley's deformed face is described in architectural imagery	"I … found myself face to disfigured face with Leslie." "Up close the ruin of Lesley's face was even harder to deal with." "grotesque caricature" (RL p. 241). "Lesley's ruined face" (WUG p.87). "her face was still ruined" (BH p. 28). "She was the best of your generation … and you broke her" (WUG p. 138).
Damaged faces many characters receive disfiguring injuries, in particularly Lesley May Peter's former police partner	"Because she lost her face, man. Because that had to be like having your identity ripped away. Because you're looking in the mirror and a hideous stranger is staring back" (FS p.149). There's been sever damage to [Lesley's] maxilla, nasal spine, ramus and mandible … the surgeons at UCA had been unable to save much of the skin surface. They'd put in a temporary scaffold to allow her to breathe and ingest food, and there was a chance that she might benefit from a temporary face transplant – if they could find a suitable donor" (MOS p.3). "It was worse than I had imagined. So bad that my mind couldn't accept that it was a face at all. The chin was gone. Instead, the skin below a grotesquely full lower lip slid away in a series of uneven lumps until it reached the smooth undamaged skin of her throat. The nose was shapeless, flat, a twisted knob of pink flesh that sat at the centre of a series of ridged white scars that crawled across cheek and forehead. I flinched" (MOS p.372). "I heard the distinct cracking of bone and teeth as it [the cycle courier's chin] jutted forward into a sharp point. The lips twisted into a snarl as the nose stretched until it was almost as long. It wasn't a real face, it was a caricature man-in-the-moon face that no human would have in real life. The mouth opened and I could see the red ruin of the jaw." "His face slumped like wet papier-mâché." (RL p. 120). His "face flopping open like a starfish" (RL p. 121). "What bare skin showed on his face, neck and hands was a horrible pinkish brown like well cooked pork. His mouth was wide open and stained a sooty black and his eyes were a nasty boiled white" (BH p. 75). "boiled lobster face" (BH p. 77).

Also decapitation	Victim of FM "Aiden Burghley's head was a nightmare, the skin of the face having been neatly removed to reveal the dried-meat coloured muscles and tendons beneath. It looked almost surgical" (HT p. 221). "The skin of the face had been fused to the bark" of a tree (HT p. 122). "From the chin up there was nothing but a pulped red mass flecked with white bone" (BH p. 18). "Well then second, murdering gent he puts on a cap and a red jacket and he brings out his stick … and knocks his head clean off (RL p. 6). "Underneath [a silver salver lid] was the head of Larry the Lark as fresh as the day it was cut off" (MOS p.243). "The head rested directly on a pole of clear glass reinforced with bands of brass. Protruding from the truncated neck were two leathery bladders looking unpleasantly like lungs" (MOS p.256).
Sub-theme: Masks and changing faces as metaphor for hidden and shifting identities. Lesley hid her betrayal literally and figuratively behind a mask of loyalty The Faceless man wears a mask to disguise his identity and cruelty	"The pale skin of her [Lesley's] face rippled and her features changed. It started at the bridge of her nose, the skin bunching up and the flopping down horribly, like the wings of a manta or the shroud of a squid" (HT p. 334). Oxley courted Isis at a masquerade "Lords and ladies … thinking wicked thoughts while safe behind their masks" (RL p. 140). "The thing you have to remember about a masquerade is that at the end of the night the masks have to come off" (RL p. 141). "When the unicorn had gone from invisible friend to terrifying predator – the point where the mask came off" (FS p.170). "his face was hidden by a plain beige coloured mask that covered his whole head" (MOS p.350), Ryan Carroll's manikins had "their facial features ground down until they presented smooth faces to the world. It reminded me uncomfortably of Lesley's mask or the head of the Faceless Man" (WUG p.83). Faceless Man's (and Lesley's) signare is a razor strop which Peter describes "like the flat of a blade running up the skin of my face" (LS, p. 252).
Faceless man and Terry Skinner have shell companies to mask their	"Contractors like County Gard" "Lackeys of the capitalist class …designed to keep the working class in their place" "There's a whole series of nested shell corporations it takes ages to work through […]. All part of the tax avoidance merry-go-round" (BH p. 210).

purpose for tax avoidance and accountability	"funds are shunted around from company to company to offshore account to financial instrument, and then filtered through a fine mesh of shell companies whose only purpose is to disguise where the money comes from and who has their snout in the trough" (FV pp. 113 - 114).
Sub-theme: marginal identity The demi-monde Magical underclass as a metaphor for disenfranchised poor and vulnerable communities in modern Britain.	is French for half-world and, according to Abigail, is an abusive misogynistic term coined in nineteenth-century France. For us in the Society of the Occasionally Wise, it refers to the subculture that exists amongst the magical, the supernatural and others who have drifted into their orbit (AOW p. 136). "To them [the wizards of the Folly], *fae* basically meant anyone who was vaguely magical who hadn't gone to the right school" (LS p. 29). "Our targets were the false houses in Bayswater that concealed not only the unsightly gash of the Circle and District Lines, but one of the hidden entrances to the clandestine tunnels that were the domain of the secret people that lived under West London" (LS p. 45). "They were changed by magic, or they were born into lineages that have been changed. And … this leaves them – incomplete." Nightingale, despite literally being a relic of a bygone age, had learned to modify his language around me because when I'd looked into the literature, the most common terms started with 'un-' – unfit, unsuited, undesirable – and behind them came the terms starting with 'sub-' … However with a bit of running translation, it was clear that 'incomplete' people like Molly were vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by their more powerful supernatural brethren, and practitioners with no moral scruples" (MOS p. 215). Nightingale explains "'Fae' is just a term like 'foreigner' or 'barbarian,' it basically means people that are not entirely human" (WUG p.105). "If there are people living in the sewers, wouldn't it be better to bring them into mainstream society?" [Tyburn on the Quiet People] (WUG p.238). "They've been minding their own business for hundreds of years … you going to call in the Social Services, do them for truancy, living underground without a license? (WUG p.255). "The Quiet People would be swept away [by modern bureaucracy] as quickly and with as little fuss as a pygmy tribe living in an inconveniently mineral-rich part of a rain forest" (WUG p.277). "There are people who have been touched by, let's call it for the sake of argument, magic to the point where they're no longer entirely people even under

Link between homeless and demi-monde	human rights legislation. Nightingale calls them the fae but that's a catch-all term like the way the Greeks used the word 'barbarian' or the daily Mail uses 'Europe.' I'd found at least three different classification systems in the Folly's library, all with elaborate Latin tags and, I figured, all the scientific rigour of phrenology. You've got to be careful when applying concepts like speciation to human beings, or before you know what's happening you end up with forced sterilisation, Belsen and the Middle Passage" (FS p.18). "Some of us look beyond the superficial" (WUG p. 104). "All sorts of things used to live on that bridge; tramps and trolls and goblins" (RL p. 86). I'm just going to have a word with this troll," said Nightingale. "Sir," I said. "I think we're supposed to call them rough sleepers." "Not this one we don't," said Nightingale. "He's a troll." (RL p. 79).
The chimera – exploited victims	"'Tell me why you have a house full of illegal medical experiments?' 'Victims … Victims of illegal medical experiments. This is a shelter for them'"
Sub-theme: Talking Foxes as a metaphor for adaptation.	"Abigail says that the foxes think they are, or may actually be in some way, spies" (AOW p. 299). Sugar Niner says they learn about the opposition "in training so we can keep an eye on our human allies" (AOW p. 304). "We don't know who or what the opposition is" (AOW p. 306).

Appendix C

Appendix C: Policing the magical city

Criteria for inclusion – Peter grant's identity as hero, non-ecological threats to the city and the role of the police in maintaining order, Punch, riots and mob violence, domestic and international terrorism, police budget cuts, immigration and xenophobia and the role of the media.	
Sub-theme Peter Grant's identity	"I am a sworn constable," I said. "And that makes me an officer of the law. And I am an apprentice, which makes me a keeper of the sacred flame, but most of all I am a free man of London and that makes me a Prince of the City (RL p. 274). "I don't understand how you can know five types of brick bond," he [Nightingale] said, "but you can't identify the most common of trees."

Peter is at home in London and dislikes the countryside Changing attitude to the natural world	Actually, I knew about twenty-three types of brick bond if you counted Tudor and the other early modern styles, but I kept that to myself. (BH p. 16). A.2.5."It's a sad fact of modern life that if you drive long enough, sooner or later you must leave London behind" (MOS p.1). "Nightingale's starling. Tough and clever, that's what he always said he was looking for in an apprentice" (FS p. 115). "Generations of Cockney geezers on my dad's side were yelling at me that this was a diabolical liberty and he deserved a good kicking" (MOS p.205). 'There's more to life than just London,' said Nightingale.'People keep saying that,' I said. 'But I've never actually seen any proof.' (MOS p. 10). Beverely has taught me some basic bird stuff so I recognised it as a corvid" (AOW p. 193). "wading hip deep in the river" (FV p. 235)
Peter and ethics	"So I did it. Because I'm a sworn constable and it was the right thing to do" (FS p. 314). "What would Lesley do? I wondered. She'd lie, or at least mislead [but …] I'm not Lesley, or Nightingale, or even Neblett am I?" (LS p. 322). "I was trying to do my duty as a sworn constable under the Human Rights Act … To wit, the right to life under article two, which mandates that any use of force must be absolutely necessary, and that any poor bastard we kill had better have it coming good and proper. "'Assuming that you could expand the definition of human rights to vampires and chimerae.' said Nightingale. 'Then let's get a judgement from the courts, or better still, have Parliament clarify the law … but it's not our place to make that decision, sir – is it? We're just coppers." "I estimate that between them, Simone and her sisters have killed or mutilated almost two hundred and twenty people since 1941 …These people also had their human rights" (MOS p.361). 'Historically the constable's attestation mainly concerned his loyalty to the monarch. But the modern version includes a promise to be diligent, honest, respect human rights and apply the law without fear and favour" (LS p. 147).
Sub-theme: Punch and mob violence.	Original name Gaius C. Pulcinella (LS p. 385).

	The vestige left behind by Punch is of "violence and laughter" (RL p. 29). [Lesley says] "We are playing our roles. […]. We are Mister Punch the irrepressible spirit of riot and rebellion. It is our nature to cause trouble just as it is your nature to try and stop us" (RL p. 241). Lesley opines that Punch is "the manifestation of a social trend, crime and disorder, a sort of superyob. The spirit of riot and rebellion in the London mob" (RL p. 192). "What if that was what Punch was – the ghost of a god – literally the spirit of riot and rebellion?" (HT p. 310). London experienced riots in summer 2011 and these are referenced by Patrick Gale a rogue practitioner who performs a Bacchanalian magic ritual which "keeps London from falling into riot and disorder … and I might add it seems a great deal more effective than the police in this regard" (LS p. 159 - 160). "Sometimes he's in a threatening mood, sometimes I hear him as a thin wail of despair in among the wind moaning around a tube train. Or else he's pleading and wheedling in the growl of late-night traffic beyond my bedroom window. He's a mercurial figure, our Mr Punch. As changeable and as dangerous as an away crowd on a Saturday night" (FS p.1). "'I'm the demon drink,' shouted the ranting drunk. 'I'm gin lane and your local crack house. I'm a follower of Captain swing, watt Tyler and Oswald Mosely. I'm the grinning face at the window of the hansom cab. I made Dickens long for the countryside and I'm what your maters are afraid of" (RL p. 260). "Driven by gin, boneheadedness, and growling resentment … the Skeleton Army broke up Salvation Army meetings, disrupted marches and attacked its officer corps" (RL p. 279). "I get it … lots of frustration – but that's everyone in the big city, ain't it Mr. Punch. And what percentage actually let you in? I bet you've got a piss poor success rate – so you can just fuck off out of it" (RL p. 261). "I've often wondered if such 'awkward' spots in London are somehow sacred to Mr Punch – the spirit of riot and rebellion" (HT p. 166). "a report of the shocking boldness of the looters who had streamed through the [Blitz bombed café de Paris] site nicking valuables" (MOS p.196). "the lesser of two evils" (LS p. 389)

	"Back then the gentry lived in fear of the London mob and, to keep the masses in check, made sure that stealing bread or your employer's linen was a topping offence" (HT p. 255)
Sub-theme: Terrorism Faceless man as a metaphor for domestic terror	"If he opens his jacket and yells 'God is great' will I make it down the other end of the carriage in time" (RL p. 188). "What with all the new Islamist franchises springing up … not to mention the hardy perennials on the far right and the unrepentant Fenians, we're a bit too stretched to spare much attention for our closest allies" [MI5 officer] (HT p. 204). "Counter Terrorism Command have an institutional memory that goes all the way back to Guy Fawkes" (LS p. 184). "The City of London Police and CTC have spent great deal of the last thirty years waiting for the next big truck bomb – be it IRA, IRA classic, various varieties of cryptofascists or jihadists" (LS, p. 343). "the victims of the hideous suicide of the Bradford boy who didn't want to work in his father's chip shop no more" (WUG p. 226). "Since the IRA bombing campaigns started in the 1970s, police stations in London have developed a very clear idea of what constitutes inside and outside, and have placed a great deal of reinforced laminated Perspex between the two" (MOS p. 279) "Martin Chorley represents a serious and immediate danger to the Queen's Peace on a scale that could, conceivably, match that of the 7/7 bomb attacks" (LS p. 3).
Sub-theme: Modernising the Folly	"the official home of British wizardry since 1775" (LS p. 6). "Officially it's leased to the Metropolitan Police and treated as a genuine nick" (LS, p. 35 - 36). "if you listened closely you could hear both Nightingale and Seawoll creaking under the strain [of maintaining a professional relationship] (LS, p.43). "The relationship between the Folly, the demi-monde and the other powers, such as the Rivers, was governed by a series of informal traditions and agreements. According to Postmartin, it was a typical British mixture of archaic tradition, handshakes between gentlemen, and a stubborn refusal to engage with anything that might smack of dangerous continental legalism" (AOW pp. 146 - 147). "Community outreach. [At Father Thames' Summer court] This involves meeting people, listening to their stories and memorising their names and faces in case you have to come back and arrest them at a later date" (LS p. 117).

	"Cross-community partnerships" [Isis] (LS p. 118).
The Met's poor reputation	[Possessed Deputy Assistant Commissioner Folsom] And you … How long do you think you'd have lasted back then [1980s]. A locker full of excrement" to underline "just how unwanted you were" (RL p. 247). "fuck me, were we bent? We weren't even that expensive, we'd let some scrote go for two pints of larger and a packet of crisps" (RL pp. 264-267). When two ethnic officers meet for the first time, the first question you ask can be about anything but the second question is always 'Why did you join?'" (MOS p.271). Martin Chorley asks Peter "What I don't understand … is your loyalty to these institutions. The police, the Folly – you swore an oath to the crown for god's sake – institutions with hardly the best track record with regards to you people" (HT p. 290). "Kingston didn't have the same reputation as some nicks that shall remain nameless, so it was entirely possible that Oliver had actually been carrying a knife when he was searched" (FV p. 281). "Quite simply, to be police is to drink" (WUG p. 136).
Met and class	"The Metropolitan Police Service is still, despite what people think a working-class organisation and as such rejects totally the notion of an officer class" (RL p. 7). "A sudden attack of culture snobbery [opera] is a common affliction among policemen of a certain rank and age" (RL p. 210). "Guleed had become ill-disposed towards Mr McKay when she discovered he wrote for The *Spectator*. 'And *The Times*, and T*he Telegraph*,' I said. 'Don't,' she said. 'I may lose my objectivity.'" (AOW p. 232).
Plurality and diversity in the police and the Folly	Abdul Haqq Walid, "a spry gingery man who spoke with a soft Highland accent" (RL p. 52). "[Guleed had] pioneered the use of intersectionality theory as an interview technique" (LS p.56). AOW p. 234 "It's the forbidden fruit thing … They fantasise about us being highly contained bundles of repressed sexuality. The bigger the lecher, the more uncontrolled the fantasy" (AOW p. 234).
Sub-theme: Xenophobia, UKIP, migrants, asylum	"I just wanted to talk to someone who could speak English properly […]. I bring my kids down to the West End and everyone's foreign" (RL p. 68).

seekers and the role played by the media.	"Why is it that men of good quality pay their taxes while foreigners pay naught and yet expect the liberties that are our Englishman's hard-won prerogative" (RL p. 239). [Lesley sequestrated by Punch] The journalist "wrote of the existence of a network of temporary camps frequented by new age travellers, migrant labourers, gypsies, asylum seekers and Romanians who were, allegedly, responsible for the shocking increase in rural crime, unemployment and, some said, spreading foot and mouth" (FS p. 251). "The rolling news networks loved the idea of a shadowy network of cams. It gave them hours of talking heads and a chance to stick a body from Migration Watch or UKIP up against a government spokesman or even better, someone from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants in the hope that they would both kill and eat each other live on air" (FS p. 252). "The Express went with a new Diana conspiracy theory, the broadsheets went with Syria and a side order of fracking, the tabloids with cricket and the Royals" (FS p. 297). "The Express … went with UKIP TO ROCK WESTMINSTER" (HT p. 121). "Now I'm the son of a professional cleaner, but I'm also blessed with enough pre-school cousins to cause your average UKIP voter top relocate to Spain" (LS p. 18). "These days, journalists are mostly freelance and only campaign when they're on the clock" (AOW p. 326). Lesley is a proper Brit … That wonderful blend of Romano-Celt and Anglo-Saxon with a flavouring of Dane and a pinch of Norman French. That happy breed that conquered the world and could again if all their children were kind and natural (HT pp. 358-359).
Sub-theme: Police and Institutional language.	"Officially I belong to ESC9, otherwise known as 'The Folly' […]. There's not point trying to remember 'ESC9', because the Metropolitan Police has a reorganisation once every four years and all the names change" (MOS p. 25). "We police never like to use real words when we can use an incomprehensible bit of jargon instead" (WUG p.29). "that strangled mixture of cop-speak and management-ese that has proved the modern police officer's friend when he wants to talk a great deal and say nothing" (FS p.67). "Senior officers assign their junior officers 'actions' … The police never saw a noun they didn't want to turn into a verb, so it quickly became 'to action'" (FS p. 71). Peter wants to get a list of retired practitioners from Nightingale "If I'd been about four ranks higher up the hierarchy I'd have regarded it as an opportunity to realise additional intelligence assets through enhanced stakeholder engagement. But I'm just a constable so I didn't" (FS p.15).

	The on lone DCI has "adopted a loose collaborative management approach in which experienced officers undertake a lead role in areas where they have the greatest expertise" [Stephanopoulos]. "In other words, he's locked himself in his office and left Stephanopoulos to get on with it. 'It's always gratifying to see senior officers adopting a forward-looking posture in their vertical relationships" (MOS p. 77).
Sub-theme: Policing cuts and austerity Britain.	"The AC would be asking whether this particular suspicious death was worth the resources, what with the current government cutting budgets and the sudden proliferation of expensive historical abuse investigations" (HT p. 123). "And what with the Met currently being seriously mullered by spending cuts, nobody was in a hurry to find an excuse for more work" (BH p. 59). "Once the government pushed through its major cuts in policing, a lot of officers had got the notion that they might be able to unload anything even vaguely weird onto us" (FS p. 70). "'They' were mostly Police staff … analysts and data entry specialists – who'd got the boot when the government decided that in the light of an increased security threat what London really needed was a smaller police force" (LS, p.37). "I'd been out of normal operational policing for over three years, but I'd noticed that things had definitely got tighter" (FV p. 35). "These days response officers were as rare as hen's teeth" (FV p. 46). "before our Lady Theresa of the Wheat Field hacked up the Met's budget, you used to be able to just ask a Borough Command to send a couple of uniforms round. These days response officers were thin on the ground and you generally had to bribe their shift commanders with externally sourced overtime payments to get any help" (FV p. 64). "the lack of secure mental health places and the fact that the police were always expected to fill in for the gaps in social care" (FV p. 122). "The *Telegraph* who blamed the rise in murders on police resources being diverted to historical sex crimes" (FV p. 189). "A contact point is what you get when you keep making 'savings' to a police budget until the actual police stations start to disappear" (FV p. 249). "You can always get on the right side of legal aid lawyers by having a mutual moan about austerity. It's one of the many ways that adversity helps bring people together" (FV p. 327). "You weren't supposed to take that into consideration when planning operations, but then response officers were not supposed to continuously work double shifts" (FV p. 233)

	The government were in their sixth year of trying to cut crime by reducing the number of active police officers. So management were getting shirty about expenses" (AOW p. 49). "Senior management have decided to reduce the influence of 'canteen culture' by closing all the canteens. I can live without the racism and the misogyny, but I miss the food – and the camaraderie, of course" (AOW p. 222).