

A Gendered Perspective on Policing Violence in *Happy Valley* and *Fargo*

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ABSTRACT

Portrayal of a police officer determined to fight crime and execute justice in a harsh, isolated environment has become a television and film subgenre, often featuring women facing gender-related challenges. The issues raised in Sally Wainwright's British television series *Happy Valley*, can be made more accessible, particularly to American undergraduate students, via its commonalities with the Coen brothers film *Fargo*. In both, a tough but compassionate policewoman pursues the more sociopathic of a pair of criminals involved in a botched kidnapping attempt instigated by an inept businessman, taking on the case for personal and professional honor, and as a responsibility to family and community. Catherine in *Happy Valley* and Marge in *Fargo* juggle "masculine" and "feminine" roles as they care for family members while policing violence. The women generally succeed in balancing their gender roles, whereas the men around them do not. But they sometimes assume the aggression associated with the male criminals they pursue. *Happy Valley* takes these issues deeper by giving Catherine a more intimate connection with one of the perpetrators and presenting the story more directly through a woman's extra-patriarchal perspective, thus revealing the performative nature of gender roles and the limits of a patriarchal binary view of them. Looking at these issues in relation to *Fargo* paves the way for examination of their more complex and extensive treatment in *Happy Valley*.

Keywords: television, women, gender, police officers, crime, northern England, film, violence, *Happy Valley*, *detective*, *Fargo*

The on-screen portrayal of a police officer in an isolated, unappealing location stubbornly determined to fight crime and execute justice has become an established sub-genre of crime-related television and film. A glance at current Netflix crime-TV offerings yields examples such as *Broadchurch*, *Hinterland*, *Shetland*, and *The Break*, to name just a few. Many feature women as criminal investigators. All of them, according to Tammy Oler, descend partly from the hardworking, cigarette-smoking DCI Jane Tennison, the Helen Mirren character in 1991's *Prime Suspect*. Tennison finally gets her chance to lead a murder investigation only when a male DCI suffers a heart attack, and even then faces hostility from her male colleagues. A recent standout within this category, Sally Wainwright's British television series *Happy Valley*, bears striking similarities to Joel and Ethan Coen's 1996 film *Fargo*, in a correspondence useful for pedagogical purposes. Granted, a two-hour film cannot develop characters to the extent that a multi-season television series can, attitudes about gender have evolved to some extent in the couple of decades separating the two works, and the Coens are noted for over-the-top scenes, whereas *Happy Valley* aims for a higher degree of realism. The intent here, however, is not to undertake a detailed comparison of the two works, but rather to make use of the relatively familiar film to help introduce American students to the probably less familiar television series. In a *New Yorker* review of *Happy Valley*, Emily Nussbaum observes that the plot of the series "superficially" resembles that of the Coen brothers' film, adding that both *Happy Valley* and *Fargo* depict crime as "petty" and "pathetic." I would argue, however, that the parallels between the film and the television series, at least in its first season, run deeper—that the two are "connected," to use the *Fargo* protagonist's term—and that the perpetrators, though both petty and pathetic themselves, commit serious crimes.

Both Wainwright's series and the Coens' film show us the challenges facing a sharp-minded and determined woman fighting crime in a harsh, repressive environment. Furthermore, the strong women leads, admirable as they are, relentlessly pursue the most pernicious villains not only to do justice and re-establish or maintain the social order, but also to take vengeance against threats to their personal values and their commitment to protecting their families, and to expunge from their communities the masculine tendency toward violence and aggression that often leads to and characterizes criminal activity. However, the crime-fighting women themselves must sometimes act aggressively, even violently, to perform their duties and succeed within the male-dominated worlds of both violent crime and law enforcement. By shifting the gaze from the traditional masculinist vantage (and advantage) point to a woman's perspective, Wainwright and (to a lesser but still significant degree) the Coens show us how these cops struggle as they work to subdue the threat of chaotic masculine violence and restore a feminine peace. This effort ironically requires them to adopt some aggressive masculine behaviors themselves and thus rattles the foundations of the masculine/feminine binary. Wainwright further heightens the emotional intensity by making the relationship between the cop and the criminal more personal. Although my analysis focuses primarily on *Happy Valley*, a preliminary exploration of its relation to the widely known *Fargo* can be useful in introducing the lesser known British series, particularly to American students, who are more likely to be familiar with the film. It can also serve to facilitate a comparative analysis of the British and American cultural contexts. Economics, social class, and regionalism figure in both the television series and the film. Race, however, is strikingly absent from both, notable only by omission, with the casts of both almost entirely white—though there are a few exceptions, like the negatively portrayed Native American Shep Proudfoot in *Fargo*. On the one hand, the absence of race constitutes a significant omission, but, on the other, it presents a scenario in which students and scholars can interrogate the other issues mentioned above independently from racial biases (and, thus, conversely, return with a fresh perspective to the critical examination of racial bias as it interacts with other cultural forces).

In both *Happy Valley* and *Fargo*, a tough but compassionate policewoman pursues the more sociopathic of a pair of criminals involved in a botched kidnapping instigated by an inept businessman, taking on the case as a badge of personal and professional honor, and as a perceived responsibility to her family and community. Both women, Sergeant Catherine Cawood (played by Sarah Lancashire) in *Happy Valley*

and Chief Marge Gunderson (played by Frances McDormand) in *Fargo*, are portrayed as stronger than their male counterparts, both on the police force and on the domestic front. Male officers often get in Cawood's way, and Gunderson is obviously far more intelligent than her male sidekick, who doesn't recognize a dealer license plate; Cawood's ex-husband, Richard, seems a bit lost in life; and Gunderson's husband, Norm, is a passive and domestic wildlife artist who makes scrambled eggs. It would be difficult to imagine any of these male characters taking down a criminal or running an investigation. Both of the women, however, are quite capable of doing so, and they immerse themselves in police work, a male-dominated field, despite its challenges and frustrations, because they believe they can make their part of the world cleaner, safer, and more just, in addition to—and perhaps partly because of—their need to care for and protect their families and friends. They juggle the performance of masculine and feminine roles as they mother children, husbands, and in Catherine's case, a sibling.

As Marge needs to keep her region safe for the quiet home life she shares with her husband and their unborn child, so Catherine cares for her recovering-addict sister, Clare, and her effectively parentless grandson, Ryan. To put it another way, Catherine and Marge can take care of their families and friends and view the incompetence of others with compassion, yet they can also kick some ass when a law-enforcement situation provoked by chaotic male violence demands it. What makes Catherine's case more personal, though, and pushes her doggedness toward obsession, is the fact that one of the kidnappers in the case she is investigating also raped her daughter, who died by suicide, presumably as a result of the rape. Moreover, in an excruciating twist, the rapist is the father of the grandson whom Catherine is rearing, and thus a potential influence on the child, Ryan. To accomplish their goals, both women take on the stereotypically masculine traits of toughness and aggressiveness that are associated with the criminals they pursue, and they assume the traditionally male roles of surveillance and control. Violence and the protagonists' response to it—particularly in terms of how personally they take their work—distinguishes *Happy Valley's* Catherine from *Fargo's* Marge. Whereas Marge's necessary aggression is directed primarily at the containment of the perpetrators and their eventual punishment for their crimes, and her desire for vengeance is directed at the presence of crime itself, because it has disrupted her sense of social and personal order, Catherine's need for vengeance is directed specifically at Tommy Lee Royce (played by James Norton), who not only personifies the threat of chaos-producing masculine aggression, but also has torn her own family apart. As *Variety* TV critic Maureen Ryan observes, "the central fact of . . . Catherine Cawood's life is that her daughter committed suicide after being raped. The fallout of that tragedy affects Catherine every day in a number of ways, though she tries hard not to let it influence her brisk approach to her job." Steven Carter has argued that Marge maintains a degree of postmodern detachment from the crimes and criminals she investigates, though that point is debatable, given her obvious sympathy for victims. Detachment, however, is definitely not part of Catherine's game plan. Two further observations are in order here: First, whereas the perspective shifts from that of the male characters to that of Marge as *Fargo* progresses, Catherine is the focus from the first scene of *Happy Valley*, when viewers are brought abruptly down from an aerial overview to Catherine's ground-zero perspective. Second, it is only logical to assume that Wainwright, a woman herself, has a kind of innate understanding of Catherine's position as a woman who is less accessible to the male filmmakers, though, conversely Wainwright's series does more than *Fargo* to disrupt the male/female binary that makes the insider perspective distinctive.

Contextualization of this argument requires brief plot summaries. In *Happy Valley's* first season, a frustrated accountant called Kevin asks his boss, Nevison, for a pay raise because he needs money to send one of his daughters to a posh school. When Nevison initially declines, the angry Kevin approaches Ashley, the local drug trafficker and owner of the caravan park where his family spends weekends, to suggest that Ashley and his sidekicks kidnap Nevison's daughter, Ann, for the ransom money, which all could split so that Kevin could get the money he needs and Ashley would make an easy profit. Ashley, of course, wants a bigger share

than Kevin has in mind. When Nevison then tells Kevin that he has decided to pay Kevin's daughter's tuition and that he wants Kevin to run the company while he, Nevison, takes some time off to be with his wife, who is dying of cancer, Kevin wants to call off the kidnapping, but Ashley says it's too late; his lackeys, Lewis and Tommy, already have the operation under way. The kicker is that Tommy is Tommy Lee Royce, Catherine's daughter's rapist, who has just been released from prison and whom Catherine is determined to "deal with effectively." Catherine ultimately catches Tommy, but not before he kills a young officer and rapes the captive Ann.

The plot similarities to *Fargo* are obvious and will help engage American audiences who have seen the Coen brothers' production; students familiar with the movie will likely begin to recognize links almost immediately. In the film, Police Chief Marge Gunderson, several months pregnant, also pursues a pair of kidnapers. In this case, car salesman Jerry instigates the kidnapping. He has proposed a business venture to his father-in-law's company and expects to get an equal share in the deal but is offered only a finder's fee. Desperate for cash and angered by this demeaning offer, he arranges for the kidnapping of his own wife, Jean, expecting his father-in-law, Wade, to pay out a heavy ransom. It turns out that kidnapper Carl, the Steve Buscemi character, is a run-of-the-mill petty criminal, but his colleague, Gaear, the Peter Stormare character, is a serious psychopath. Marge too gets her man, Gaear, but only after he kills a state trooper, the kidnapped Jean, and the kidnapper Carl.

Besides the similarity of *Happy Valley's* first-season plot to that of *Fargo*, the protagonist Catherine in the series has many traits in common with Marge in *Fargo*. Both women are highly intelligent and strongly determined, both are compassionate to others, and both are running a police station in a mostly-male environment of law enforcement and crime. Their jobs require them to work outside the home, doing dangerous work in traditionally male territory. They have to be aggressive to handle crime and criminals, and they have to take commanding roles over others in running their police departments. But they must balance these masculine behaviors with feminine ones, Marge being very pregnant, Catherine caring for her sister and grandson.

It is perhaps useful here to comment on the relative success of these women—in contrast to the male characters with whom they interact—in balancing masculine and feminine roles. The men seem less capable of balance. We see the violent, hyper-aggressive Tommy and Gaear, who have no limits on what they will do to other people; the more reluctant Lewis and Carl, willing to commit criminal acts but having their limits; the journalist Richard and the artist Norm, both passive recorders rather than active agents. Then we have Jerry the car salesman and Kevin the accountant, both ineffectual, not to mention Marge's sidekick, who is not the sharpest tool in the shed, and Catherine's male superior, who encourages "losing" evidence for political purposes. Even a male viewer can't help seeing that Marge and Catherine are much more capable than the men around them. The women's ability to balance masculine aggression with feminine domesticity contrasts with the tendency of the male characters to gravitate toward the extreme—either active violence or passive domesticity. In a sense, this balancing capability also reflects the leading women characters' capacity for disrupting the masculine/feminine gender binary. The men in the two productions, especially in *Happy Valley*, seem stuck in boxes built by the binary, whereas women like Catherine can break free of it to some extent. This point might seem paradoxical, but the fact that a woman can approach the binary from an outsider's perspective in relation to traditional patriarchal structures gives her an advantage in perceiving and challenging its limitations. From yet another perspective, compatible with ideas from third-wave feminism and queer theory, we see Catherine performing the role that needs to be performed, regardless of its gender association, whereas the male characters in the series seem to be trapped by their inability to break free from an essentialist understanding of their masculinity. It is perhaps appropriate to add here that, although perceptions of gender and gender roles have become somewhat more fluid in recent years and Wainwright

has the advantage of that more flexible perception in presenting her characters, it could also be argued that gender-role expectations and biases have hardly disappeared.

Regardless of the characters' gender, their behavioral tendencies develop within a specific environment, one that is at best harsh and at worst hostile. Speaking of northern England, the setting of *Happy Valley*, Susan Schmid argues that "the predominant image of the North includes . . . bleakness, coldness, industry, decay, social problems, working class, exploitation, lack of serious culture" (qtd. in Gorton 75). Pretty much the same grim description could be applied to the snowy, grimy atmosphere of the American Midwest in *Fargo* (the one element of the Yorkshire setting not particularly emphasized in *Fargo's* depiction of the Midwest being the social devastation wrought by drug abuse), as could Jake Bugg's "Troubled Times," the *Happy Valley* theme song, which claims that "the only thing that's pretty is the dream of getting out." "Pretty" is a word generally associated with femininity, with beauty and order, something that these settings seem to lack. Furthermore, although both Marge and Catherine, Catherine especially, are depicted as attractive women; they operate in an environment in which prettiness is not really an advantage because it could hinder their being taken seriously as cops.

In her *New Yorker* review of *Happy Valley*, Nussbaum argues that the show, like *Fargo*, "depicts crime as something grubby, not grand: these thugs are small-timers, their evil petty, at times darkly comic, but essentially pathetic," and I agree with her up to a point. The show certainly does *not* glorify the crimes or the criminals or make viewers fantasize about emulating them, and it's true that the criminals are basically small fish in small ponds. And the "pathetic" description is fair enough; there's no question that Kevin and Jerry, Lewis and Carl, and Tommy and Gaear are losers. The criminals aren't all equal, however. The viewer has some empathy for Kevin and Jerry, Lewis and Carl, whereas Tommy and Gaear are clearly dangerous psychopaths. My thinking diverges from Nussbaum's when it comes to the actual crimes. Granted, the kidnappings start off as a bit of a dark-comic lark, but the murders and rapes can hardly be considered petty. This observation leads to a further one, that both *Happy Valley* and *Fargo* include significant violence. That violence is mitigated somewhat, though not wiped out, by humor in *Fargo*. *Happy Valley* is certainly not humorless, but its graphic violence, as in Tommy Lee Royce's murder of the young officer Kirsten and in his later attack on Catherine herself, comes across as both real and disturbing, and the series has been criticized for its violence, which Nussbaum describes as "agonizing."

According to Maggie Brown, writing for *The Guardian*, "These violent scenes . . . have prompted criticism of the programme's creator-writer, Sally Wainwright, from Mediawatch-UK, which campaigns for more regulation," and "[s]ome newspapers have also remarked on what they see as gratuitous violence against women." This fact raises a couple of interesting questions: first, how to define "gratuitous," and second, whether violence against women is different from violence against men. Wainwright herself has responded to the criticism, arguing that (a) the violent scenes are relevant to the story, not merely gratuitous and (b) there are plenty of other TV shows with far more gratuitous violence (Brown). Wainwright argues that she considers it "particularly uplifting . . . that Ann, though suffering a terrible ordeal, had the presence of mind to rescue the woman who went to save her," and that, in reference to a close-up of Catherine's bloody face, "If you get your head smacked against the wall, you bleed. It's life. Drama is about the dark side. How bad things happen to good people" (qtd. in Brown). Wainwright also claims that the graphic portrayal of the murder of the young policewoman was necessary to show "how much of a psychopath [the character Tommy Lee Royce] is" (qtd. in Brown). In relation to the same issue, Nussbaum asks whether the show passes the "worth the pain" test and concludes that it does; in other words, that the violence is difficult to watch, but that it does indeed contribute to the story. On the second point, I would argue that violent crimes against women are revolting, but no more so than violent crimes against men. Claiming that crimes against women are worse because women are more vulnerable or less capable of defending themselves is ultimately a sexist argument. And yet, it seems that the

aggressors are predominantly men and the objects of their aggression primarily women.

Although both Marge and Catherine are revealed as admirable and sympathetic characters with their priorities in order and their hearts in the right place, the characters and their situations differ in a couple of significant ways that reveal Catherine's more intimate connection with her work, as well as the more concrete object of her vengeance. The first has to do with the extent to which viewers get to know the characters. We learn a great deal about Marge's values, about her intelligence, and about her dedication, but we don't really see her weaknesses. With Catherine, though, we see that she can sometimes overreact, that she can lose control to some extent when she is angry, tired, anxious, frustrated, or depressed, that she sometimes makes decisions that she regrets, as when she declines to reassure a young officer who feels incompetent after being reprimanded for letting a local councilor intimidate her; it is the same officer later killed by Tommy Lee Royce, and her husband blames Catherine because he believes the officer was trying to prove her toughness in the situation that led to her death. Although Catherine tells the husband she couldn't have possibly foreseen subsequent events and that "being soft" is not always what a rookie officer needs from a superior, she also concedes that she has had the same thoughts he has. Nor is she always a joy at home; her sister indicates that Catherine can be difficult at times, despite all the good that she does for Clare, Ryan, and various other people.

As Maureen Ryan writes, Catherine is "instinctively giving and often selfless, but she can also be stubborn, abrupt and prickly, and can freeze people in their tracks with a bone-chilling glare of suspicion." She can also be tough on those who cross her. For example, in Episode 3, Catherine and her officers are taking a young man who has been causing domestic trouble while high. As they are taking him out of his flat, another young man, hanging out in the parking lot, is mocking the situation, singing "Another One Bites the Dust." Catherine drags him out of the car he is sitting in, tells him he's under arrest, forces him into the back of a police cruiser, grabs him hard by the balls and tells him that she is now going to de-arrest him and note in her report that he "apologized profusely, in tears." This scene might have roots in 19th-century Yorkshire culture. According to Mary Blewett,

Texts carefully positioned in Anglo- American contexts provide new perspectives on the sexuality of working women, not as victims or objects, but as active players in gender and class conflicts. Yorkshire lasses and older women used their sexuality to define their female adulthood through sexual experimentation during courtship, *to discipline male aggressiveness and patriarchy, and to advance their status as working women.* (318, my emphasis)

The *Happy Valley* scene bears a striking resemblance to a specific social ritual that Blewett describes known as "sunning" in which a group of young working women sexually humiliates a young man. English novelist and critic J. B. Priestley references the custom, writing that "it was still the custom, in some mills..., for the women to seize a newly-arrived lad and 'sun' him, that is, pull his trousers down and reveal his genitals" (qtd. in Blewett 325), and some fictionalized accounts suggest that some incidents included physical manipulation as well as display. Catherine doesn't need the reinforcement of a group to humiliate the interfering young man; she can handle him all by herself. She doesn't literally expose his genitals, but she does "discipline his male aggressiveness" as she exposes the vulnerable underside of his attempt to enact masculinity. It is also worth noting here that, as satisfying as this scene is for viewers, it is not entirely realistic. Though hardly as outrageous as some of the wilder scenes in *Fargo*, it still contributes more to entertainment value than to verisimilitude.

Catherine is ultimately a noble character, but she does have a darker side. "At the beginning of the show," according to Nussbaum, Catherine is "a heroine, a sharp-tongued pragmatist who is good at her job, but when crimes pile up on her watch her personality begins to break down, in troubling ways—violent trauma,

from the show's perspective, is a bruise that never quite heals." Nevertheless, as Nancy deWolf Smith points out, viewers can empathize with Catherine, though Catherine "never invites pity." Viewers wince when she makes a mistake, but they don't feel sorry for her because she takes responsibility for her own actions, right or wrong. This viewer response shows how the portrayal of Catherine represents an advance over past portrayals of women in television. In a chapter on femininity in his book *Television Culture*, John Fiske writes that the "desire for feminine power is never simple, because it is a desire born in patriarchy and must contain those contradictions within it" (190). Fiske goes on to discuss the "process of implication-extrications," in which viewers identify with the woman protagonist when she is successful, but back off from that identification to some extent when she fails. Nevertheless, "the pleasure of implication with the character when she is asserting power may well be stronger than that of extrication when she is being punished" (191). As a result, "The difference in what Freud calls 'affect,' in the intensity of the experience, maybe will be great enough to prevent the ideological effectivity of the punishment" (191). My assertion here is that viewers react so positively to Catherine's assertion of power in *Happy Valley*, that they do not retract their sense of identification with her when a male superior suggests that she let a case go or when Tommy attacks her, and further, that this is true whether the viewer is a woman, a man, or a person who does not subscribe to the confines of those categories.

The second distinction concerns the idea of vengeance. Neither woman would be considered a vengeful or vindictive person in normal, everyday circumstances, nor yet both of them can and do seek to avenge particularly egregious crimes. The object and nature of their vengeance are a bit different, however. In *Fargo*, Marge's vengeance can be seen as more abstract. She goes after the criminals relentlessly until she solves the case, apprehends Gaear, and scolds him for committing such vile acts, but her concern is not with Gaear himself, however horrible he might be, but rather with the idea of a criminal element contaminating the community that she serves and in which she lives with her husband and soon-to-be-born child. Marge sees Gaear and his criminal actions as a threat to her community, but not really as a threat to her and her family personally; though she abhors the murders, the victims are not her family members or close friends, nor are the kidnapers local. The situation in *Happy Valley* contrasts sharply in this regard. To Catherine, Tommy Lee Royce is not merely a random criminal. He raped her daughter, killed a young officer who worked for her, and raped his kidnap victim, whose family is well known in town; and, significantly, he is a local—not just a threat to the community, but a threat to it that has risen from within it and is to some extent a product of it.

Catherine is not surprised that Tommy comes back to her beat after his release from prison, because, as she puts it, it would never occur to him to go anywhere else. West Yorkshire's denizens might feel trapped by it, but they're unlikely to break free of it. In a sense, at least for Catherine, Tommy is not merely an evil character; he is a personification or incarnation of evil itself. From one perspective, evil threatens to ravage the valley as Tommy the man rapes the young women. And because he is the father of her grandson, she fears that his genetic influence will have a negative effect on Ryan. By means of rape, Tommy has planted his evil seed in good earth, but how will that seed develop? Will Catherine's positive influence *in loco parentis* overcome the potentially negative effects of Tommy's DNA? Furthermore, because of Tommy's intimate connection with the community and with Catherine's family, I would argue that she sees evil, or at least violence, as something that can arise in anyone, herself included, if it is not kept in check through compassion and ethical values, and that, even then, it can still surface in times of anger. The result is that her vengeance is not abstract; it is directed very specifically at Tommy.

As Nussbaum has pointed out, when her sister Clare asks her to deal with her hatred for Tommy in a rational way, Catherine replies that she has no intention of dealing with it rationally. Instead, she says, her "intention is to deal with it effectively." Catherine's statement conflates traditionally masculine and feminine modes of response. On the one hand, rationality is stereotypically associated with masculinity and irrationality with femininity; on the other, Catherine implies that she will take an active, hence masculine approach to

resolve the problem even if that approach is not the rational one. Her response also reveals her obsession with vengeance against Tommy and with eliminating the threat posed by him and the evil he represents. At one point when Catherine is discussing Tommy with her ex-husband, Richard, she mentions “the exquisite satisfaction you’d get from grinding his severed into the mud,” an observation that is difficult to imagine coming from Marge Gunderson. Her comment also brings to mind Rene Girard’s idea of the scapegoat. In a sense, it seems that Catherine wants to make Tommy a scapegoat for the chaotic male violence mocking the description of her valley as happy, as well as for the demonic influence that could turn Ryan into a replicate of his father, and even for the counter-aggression that has risen within herself.

Maureen Ryan observes that *Happy Valley* “does a fine job of conveying what it’s like to be a small-town police officer whose daily rounds allow her to confront the dumb, silly, and awful things people do to each other, and to wrestle with what she herself is capable of.” In this show, most of those dumb, silly, and awful things are done by men. The fact that Catherine is wrestling with herself is also significant; as Ryan writes, “It’s rare, not to mention refreshing, to come across a female TV character who is not defined by her relationship with a man, and who is so well developed that even when she’s abrupt or making questionable decisions, she’s always fascinating and believable.” I concur, with the one caveat that at some points in the series Catherine verges on being defined by her antagonistic relationship with Tommy Lee Royce.

Just as *Fargo* relies on its northern-Midwest locale for atmosphere, dialect, and, environmental conditions, so does *Happy Valley* depend on its Yorkshire setting. Kristyn Gorton takes up the juxtaposition of “Northernness,” women, working-class society, and the conveyance of social realism via melodrama. She sees *Happy Valley* as deriving at least partly from the tradition of kitchen-sink realism in Britain, but with the twist that it is presented from a woman’s perspective. Specifically, she argues that Wainwright’s work “begins with the anger and injustice resonant with the male protagonists of social realism, but as women, this anger and injustice is worked through in terms of the family and eventually leads to a great sense of commitment to community” (73). Catherine’s working-class environment probably contributes to Catherine’s sense that the higher-ups are keeping her out of the loop, and she might also be experiencing a typical working-class frustration with “the system,” which has allowed Tommy’s release from prison, though she is nevertheless determined to work more or less within the system to eliminate him as a threat. She is willing to bend the rules when doing so is likely to improve her chances of getting results—as when she arrests and de-arrests the young man described earlier and when she breaks into the house where she suspects Tommy has been staying—but she’s not ready to throw out the whole rulebook.

Gorton goes on to argue that “Wainwright’s work shares sympathies and characteristics of social realism, and yet she positions women in the center of this world. But perhaps more importantly, she uses emotion as both a way to engage her audience and as a means to demonstrate the way women, in particular work through the anger resonant with the male protagonists of social realism.” She also goes on to argue, following Linda Williams, that “melodrama,” though often demeaned, can in fact be rich, complex, [and] socially relevant” (78). For Gorton, Wainwright is “conveying a sense of what it is like to be a woman in the North” (78). What *Happy Valley* reveals, in Gordon’s view, “is the way the private and the public are intimately connected,” especially in a community where everyone knows everyone else.

Catherine is a caring and compassionate person, but, like most people, she gets angry, and Gorton suggests that “in using anger instead of sadness or melancholy” as the emotion *du jour*, Wainwright “refuses to position [Catherine] as a victim” (80). Instead, “she is seen as almost physically working through the pain and loss she has suffered and finding a way out of her own emotional entrapment. On the other hand, the emotion is performed in a very physical way which becomes reminiscent of the Northern working-class male reaction to a sense of entrapment and a desire for escape in social realism” (80). Gorton goes on to argue,

The women in *Happy Valley* are far from victims, rather they heroically resolve complex

feelings and find a deeper connection to the communities they live in. Wainwright's use of a Northern landscape is significant as it simultaneously references the Northern, male anger from social realism and yet develops it, both through her use of female protagonists and in ending the story with hope that is tied to the landscape[,] not outside of it. Her narratives work to root and strengthen her characters' place in the North rather than to suggest that leaving or escaping will offer them a better life. (83)

The question of victimhood is an important one to consider in relation to the show. *Happy Valley* certainly suggests that life in the economically depressed, culturally deprived, drug-infested, post-industrial North of England is hard and that not everyone copes with it successfully. Catherine's daughter is a victim, as was Kirsten, the young officer who Tommy murdered, but Catherine can be better characterized as a survivor, as can Ann, who rises above the trauma of her kidnapping and rape, and Clare as well, who is recovering from her heroin addiction.

A pedagogical digression is perhaps in order here. In their article "Pop Culture Pedagogies: Process and Praxis," Julie Garlen Maudlin and Jennifer A. Sandler write that "Popular culture itself has material consequences, as it helps constitute society and social life; through our engagements with popular culture, we learn what the world is, how to see the world, and how to experience and act within the world" (368). Maudlin and Sandler go on to observe that "popular culture has everything to do with difficult knowledge that operates along the lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other circulations of power" (369). As stated earlier, *Happy Valley* and *Fargo* address racial issues only by omission, but both address "class, gender, sexuality, and other circulations of power," with *Happy Valley* pushing the envelope further in relation to these issues." Thus, studying *Happy Valley* in relation to the earlier and more widely known *Fargo* facilitates investigation of important questions: To what extent are small-screen and large-screen popular culture texts products of a "people's culture" and to what extent are they producers of that culture? Do the different time periods and different geographical settings of the two productions have a significant impact on their portrayals of gender, sexuality, social class, etc., or do both productions reveal more similarities than differences between the two situations? To what extent is the behavior of characters in the two screen productions the result of their circumstances and to what extent is it the result of the characters' individual traits and motivations?

To conclude, the first season of *Happy Valley* has significant similarities to the film *Fargo* in terms of plot, setting, and characterization, thus making *Fargo* a useful pedagogical tool for introducing *Happy Valley* to an American audience, with the additional benefit of allowing for productive discussions of cross-genre and cross-cultural comparison. Furthermore, both the Coen brothers and Wainwright bring the audience in line with the woman lead's perspective, though Wainwright does so more immediately and more intensely, in a way that challenges patriarchal assumptions and binary gender categories. Both the film and the television series feature woman cops solving complex cases and apprehending dangerous male criminals that pose a threat to order in her community, and to her own system of moral and ethical values. Whereas Marge in *Fargo* perceives the criminals as outsiders who have brought a relatively abstract threat to her community and family, Catherine in *Happy Valley* takes the threat posed by Tommy Lee Royce much more personally, partly because he raped her daughter and thus fathered her grandson and alienated her ex-husband and adult son, and partly because she sees him as the personification of locally bred evil. She fears not only that Tommy's criminal influence will infect her grandson, but also that Tommy, as a home-grown villain, represents potential evil in everyone, herself included. She might be able to avoid it herself and nurture it out of Ryan, but she must muscle out Tommy as its incarnation. Because he, like many of the other criminals she encounters in her police work, acts out through disruptive violence, perhaps partly in frustration at his dismal socioeconomic circumstances and sense of inescapable entrapment, she must sometimes respond with masculine aggression to contain the male-generated violence that poses a private threat to her family and a public threat to her

community. She realizes, however, that she must focus and contain her own aggression to prevent its escalation to the unbridled violence of a psychopath like Tommy. In her attempt to juggle masculine and feminine roles to create a functional balance, she demonstrates the performative nature of those roles, thus opening up, if not fully escaping, the boundaries of the traditional binary view of gender that traps the Yorkshire men of the series, who are too much encapsulated by a patriarchal society to see its limits. Moreover, by opening up Catherine's perspective to all viewers, regardless of gender, Wainwright not only establishes solidarity with women viewers, but also makes an extra-patriarchal perspective on the limits of essentialist binary views of gender accessible even to men watching the series. Furthermore, by having students analyze a cultural commodity like *Happy Valley*, using another cultural product like *Fargo* as a foil, one can, as Maudlin and Sandlin write, help students "explore the hegemonic aspects of popular culture," as well as its "potential . . . for effecting social change" as they "deconstruct messages" about such issues as class, gender, sexuality (379), and, I would add, any issue that involves the exercise of power and the response to that exercise of power.

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