The Portrait Of A Murderer: An Approach to Eoin McNamee’s *Resurrection Man*

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*Resurrection Man* is based on the deeds of the “Shankill Butchers” in Belfast during the first half of the troubles period, which goes from 1969 to 1992 (when the Peace Process started). This novel, by the Irish writer Eoin McNamee, tells the story of Victor Kelly, the leader of a UVF’s unit (Ulster Volunteer Force - a loyalist paramilitary organisation), who called themselves the “Resurrection Men”. Their counterpart in reality: The “Shankill Butchers” and their leader: Lenny Murphy. We see how Victor starts to get involved in the violence that goes around him. However, Victor Kelly’s predisposition to violence oversteps the rules and requirements of the terrorist organisation and begins to be considered an undesirable element.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse Victor Kelly’s behavioural killing pattern in order to see whether he is a political murderer as he was considered due to his involvement with the UVF or if he is a non-political murderer. Moreover, among the non-political murderers and among those who committed multicide murders, it would be interesting to study whether he could be catalogued as a serial killer. To achieve this task I will first present a summary of a scientific study on this topic: “A Comparison of Political and Non-Political Murderers in Northern Ireland, 1974-84” by H.A. Lyons from Purdysburn Hospital, Belfast and H.J. Harbinson from Downshire Hospital, Downpatrick, both in Northern Ireland, which states that there are significant differences between political and non-political murderers in their stability, the method, the selection of the victims, etc. It is crucial to point out that this study was conducted in Northern Ireland, during the time of the Troubles and the
convicts are thus sample cases drawn from this historical framework. We will contrast these
results with Victor Kelly. Afterwards we will present the main differences between multicide
murderers and the common core characteristics to serial killers, in order to follow the same
procedure of contrasting the theoretical features with those of Victor. Finally, we will
conclude with our psychological judgement on Victor Kelly, taking into account the results of
this study, his proceedings and procedures.

As it has been said the study “A Comparison of Political and Non-Political Murderers
in Northern Ireland, 1974-84” (1986) states that there are significant differences between
political and non-political murderers. The authors decided to do this research when they
realised that very little had been studied about political murders in general and nothing about
the growing average of murder in Northern Ireland and because a large number of these
assassinations were politically motivated. In this study 106 persons charged with murder and
sent to the authors for psychiatric assessment between 1974 and 1984 were examined and a
140-item questionnaire completed. The subjects illustrated in many respects the
characteristics of murderers in general, being mostly male, in their 20s or 30s, with a previous
criminal record, and rarely having murdered a sibling or a parent. (Bluglass 1979:366-77, in
Lyons 1986:196)

The results were that out of the 106 subjects, 98 males and eight females, 47 had
killed for political or terrorist reasons and 59 for non-political reasons. More non-political
murderers were under the influence of alcohol at the time the crime was committed. In fact,
there are other factors, such as the time of day and day of the week when the two groups
killed, which would link non-political murders more closely with alcohol consumption. For
example, the non-political murderers committed their offences late at night and on the
weekends, when most drinking occurs. In this sense Lyons and Harbinson clarify that,

Among the political murderers was a group who seemed to be operating on the fringe of a paramilitary
organization and who were devoid of discipline. They killed in a most sadistic way while heavily
intoxicated. This small group was by no means typical of the rest and raised the figures for those under the influence of alcohol. It included three who used a knife, which is a very rare method of political killing. (Lyons 1986: 197)

It is obvious that they are referring to some members of the “Shankill Butchers” since this was their method.

Other results were that fewer political murderers had a family history of personality disorders. The terrorist kills while the victim is travelling, rather than at home, and they rarely kill females; they also often kill more than one person at a time and are seldom acquainted with their victims. This, and the fact that significantly few of them were found to suffer from a psychiatric illness, took the authors of this study to set the hypothesis that political murderers form a more stable group. This implies organisation and premeditation.

Victor Kelly shares most characteristics of the non-political murderer. He and his UVF unit after having drunk several beers in their meeting place “The Pot Luck” (39), went to a Catholic neighbourhood in the search of a victim, with whom they were acquainted. “They were abducted from their houses at night and found hooded and gagged in alleyways or on roadside verges outside the city.” (69) They did so late at night, usually on the weekends and they killed only one victim at a time, they “must have rid a Taig” (137). Victor’s family is wrecked and has a family history of personality disorder and lack of stability. Therefore, according to this study our fiction character, Victor Kelly does not act as a standard political murderer despite his involvement with a paramilitary organisation.

It would be interesting to investigate whether, being a non-political murderer and perpetrating multicide murders, Victor Kelly could be classified as a mass murderer or a serial killer. For this task we have chosen several second literary sources; first we checked the definition of multicide murder in Falk (1990), then we followed the distinction Hickey (2001) does between mass murderers and serial killers and third we contrasted the common
characteristics of serial killers and the features of a sociopathic personality established by Holmes and DeBurger with those of Victor Kelly.

Falk defines the multicide murder as:

The murder of numerous victims. This type of murder does not always have the same motive, nor are the same methods used in all cases. In addition, it is evident that both the killers and their victims differ by social background, depending on the kind of multicide involved. There are three distinguishable types of multicide: genocide, serial murder and mass murder. (Falk 1990:57-66)

According to Hickey (2001), in both mass and serial murder cases, victims die as the offender momentarily gains control of his or her life by controlling others. But the differences between these two types of offenders far outweigh the similarities. First, mass murderers are generally apprehended or killed by police, commit suicide, or turn themselves in to authorities. Serial killers, by contrast, usually make special efforts to elude detection. Indeed, they may continue to kill for weeks, months, and often years before they are found and stopped-if they are found at all. Victor told his men that the cut-throat murders were to continue in order to throw the police off his track. Second, the mass murderer is viewed as a deranged soul, a product of a stressful environment who is just going to "explode" now and then (but of course somewhere else), the serial murder is seen as much more sinister and is more capable of producing fear. “Man like him keeps the pot boiling, keeps the fear going.”(193) Third, the mass murderer kills groups of people at once, whereas the serial killer individualizes his or her murders. The serial killer continues to hurt and murder victims, whereas the mass murderer makes his or her "final statement" in or about life through the medium of abrupt and final violence. We rarely if ever hear of a mass murderer who has the opportunity to enact a second mass murder or to become a serial killer. Similarly, we rarely if ever hear of a serial killer who also enacts a mass murder.
After viewing Victor as a possible serial killer, it is important to contrast him with the three “distinguishing core characteristics” in the behavioural background of the killer, which distinguish serial killing from other forms of multicide, presented by Holmes and DeBurger in their work *Serial Murder* (1988). The first “core characteristic” is that the killing has a mental origin or causation, “almost always a sociopathic personality pattern has been formed in the process of development that facilitates the individual’s entry to patterns of extreme homicidal behaviour. And, he kills casually, without remorse.” (Blinder 1985:170 in Holmes and DeBurger 1988: 56) This means that the perpetrator has a sociopathic personality and presents sociopathic tendencies and a capacity for “raw violence.” (Haskell and Yablonsky, 1974 in Holmes and DeBurger 1988: 66) Holmes and DeBurger explain that “this sociopathic pattern, originating early in childhood, separates them from the rest of humanity and results in a lack of empathy for it. Yet they are otherwise rational, logical, appropriate, competent, even charming and persuasive” (Holmes and DeBurger 1988: 66). These adjectives define Victor completely. There are instances where the reader sees Victor as an attractive man with a good demeanor, “The first thing she noticed was his black curly hair and dark skin […] She had a weakness for men with foreign looks.” (42) “He had these blue eyes […] He was Mr X-Ray with this good smell off his leather jacket and aftershave […] His personal habits were very good also.” (44) Heather sees a different dimension of a man otherwise considered a criminal:

Victor always had energy […]They moved carefully among the sleeping bodies on the living-room floor. Victor made a game of it, pretending to stumble and put his foot in someone’s mouth, bringing it down an inch to the side of the person’s head. He did this in slow motion so Heather could hardly bear it, choking back giggles. (45)

Other instances where Victor is portrayed as a man with charisma and leadership qualities. Willie Lambe, a member of Victor’s unit, compares his own abilities in carrying out a killing to those of Victor: “Willie Lambe did not at first believe that he could carry out and
operation on his own. It required a sense of timing and control which he did not [...] possessed.” (160) Willie admires Victor and is aware of his effort and that the unit requires a leader like him:

Willie had great sympathy. He knew better than the others who were not overendowed in the understanding department. He saw the strain of command which left a man looking older than his years. He had been at Victor’s right hand since the start and he knew that being given his own mission was a reward for loyalty. (161)

Empathy is often impossible for him because he can’t relate to others’ pain. This is why he is trying to explore different levels of suffering through torture. “Ryan gave it a more ominous meaning. The killer was compelled to form a liaison with the victim. To wear their fear and disbelief like a garment of compulsive desire.” (59) Here the reader perceives a Victor that is cold, precise and indifferent towards his victims. Ryan, the journalist following the case, describes Victor’s murders as, “Petty, Doesn’t give a shit, Gratuitous” (61) However, there is an example where Victor imparts paramilitary justice on the men who on their own rob an old lady. The punishment is mainly for having broken the rules and given the Protestants a bad name. But Victor is truly affected by the thought of his own mother being robbed. This is one of the few instances in which he displays any sense of empathy. He has strong feelings for his mother. On two more occasions he cries; deeply moved by the thought of his “blameless” mother, “It was enough to bring a tear to his eye to think of her walking between the stalls at Smithfield market […] He wished that she was here.” (166-7) Victor also has tender thoughts for Heather although he does not express them to her. We know of them through the work of the omniscient narrator: “He reckoned that Heather was the only woman who ever understood the depth of his ambition. He would always go back to her during the good years.” (12) “He thought fondly of Heather, even if she betrayed him by accident…” (200)
Going back to the first core characteristic among serial killers, which states that the subjects develop a sociopathic personality pattern which leads them to extreme homicidal behaviour, it is interesting to analyse and contrast this description with Victor. The main features of a sociopathic personality pattern are that the subject “is asocial, is driven by uncontrolled desires, is highly impulsive, aggressive, feels little, if any, guilt, has a warped capacity for love, and tends to be cold and passionless, treating people as objects and means for his own desires and goals. Fleeting attachments may be formed, but they lack emotional depth and caring. Lovelessness is often regarded as the core of this syndrome.” (Holmes and DeBurger 1988: 68) Victor Kelly completely fulfils these characteristics since he is unable to socialize not even with his mother. McNamee gives the reader the sense that Victor’s inhumanity is linked to complexes about his own heritage. The question is never resolved and often thrown out as an offense that Victor constantly endures and that is somehow building up in his psyche. “Rumours that your da’s a Fenian, member of the Roman Catholic persuasion?” (105). In this way McNamee implies that Victor’s rage is caused by such provocations but is dubious enough that one can still imagine that Victor is simply alone and thus not connected to society in any manner. And this is why he kills and not because he is Protestant or they are Catholic.

The report on the first knife killing present Victor as impulsive, aggressive and driven by uncontrolled desires: “After death the head had been almost severed from the trunk. There were two depressed fractures of the skull, fragments of glass embedded in the face. The root of the tongue had been severed.” (15) Victor follows these and the rest of the features of the sociopathic personality. He is proud of his assassinations; he lacks any sense of culpability and is wishing public recognition. The media develops a double and opposed role in Victor’s life, it pushes the UVF to stop him and it also pushes Victor to keep on doing it for the recognition he gains “After a job Victor would meet with the others in the Pot Luck to watch
the evening news. It was an early ambition of his to have a job as first item on the news …”

(39) This a feeling common to other members of the gang, “When the unit’s activities were mentioned on television Willie Lambe would give himself over to an uncritical delight. He imagined himself in later years being interviewed in front of the camera.” (40)

Finally, the last feature of the sociopathic personality regarded as the central characteristic to serial killers is that they may have personal relationships but they are unable to deep into them, treating people as objects for their own desires and goals. This is exactly how the relationship between Victor and his lover Heather is presented in *Resurrection Man*. He treats her as an object. Heather’s role is limited to interpreting the male characters in the novel and to falling victim to the harshness of their actions. “When she opened the door he (Victor) walked in without looking at her.”(134) Heather’s relationship with Victor is lonely and impersonal. She is treated like an inanimate object whose only function is to satisfy his sexual needs. Sex is also a way of expressing control, another form of violence. “Looking into Victor’s blue eyes when you were fucking was like watching a televised account of your own death, a disconsolate epic.” (11) Even lovemaking is a lonely act for Heather. “Later in bed…A largesse that they laboured over, watchful and diligent, striving towards the silence afterwards.” (135) She interprets his increasing indifference towards her as him focusing on becoming the famous murderer of Catholics after his prison stay.

The second “distinguishing core characteristic” in the behavioural background of the killer is that there is a natural reason to kill inherent to each murderer, “an intrinsic locus of motives that “make sense” to the killer but which may not be apparent to investigators.” (Holmes and DeBurger 1988: 56) These intrinsic motives differentiate serial killers from political murderers who are guided/drawn by extrinsic motives. Victor reasons to kill, although they might seem political are psychological, an inner feeling of resentment towards
Catholics, not for their past fighting history but because they represent what his father is supposed to be and what he wouldn’t like his father to be regarded as.

The third and last “core characteristic” among serial killers is that the “rewards or gains that reinforce the serial killer’s behaviour are almost always psychological and the homicidal act is expressive of the predominant motives. Even in cases that initially appear to be materialistically oriented, very strong expressive tendencies can often be detected.” (Holmes and DeBurger 1988:56) Since his early years, Victor wanted the plead from the victim: “Victor would stop someone at the school gate […] Victor watched the eyes. It was a question of waiting for a certain expression. You directed a victim towards gratitude. You expected him to acknowledge the lesson in power.” (8)

Although, at some stages in the book Victor Kelly might seem to be a stable political murderer, he fulfils all the characteristics and patterns of a sociopathic personality, which leads him to be a multicide murderer, and more precisely to a serial killer.

There are two especially important sources in the origins of multicidal behaviour. One of these consists of the persisting culture of violence that is accompanied by continuous change in the nature of society-individual relations. The other consists in patterns of early development and interaction in the family setting. (Holmes and DeBurger 1988:64) Victor lives in a society driven by conflict, as A.T.Q. Stewart states “Violence would appear to be endemic in Irish society, and this has been so as far back as history is recorded”; and his family dynamics and functioning situation are not appropriate either. In fact, the book starts stating so:

Afterwards Dorcas would admit without shame that having moved house so often was a disturbance to Victor’s childhood. But a suspicion would arise in each place that they were Catholics masquerading as Protestants. Her husband James was no help in this regard. He was so backward and shy he needed to stand up twice before he cast a shadow. Dorcas would maintain that Victor did not learn bigotry at her knee even though she herself had little tolerance of the Roman persuasion. She believed that all he
really wanted to be was a mature and responsible member of society, loyal to the crown and devoted to his mother. But he suffered from incomprehension. He was in pain because of life. (3)

Victor has in his environment the reasons for a multicidal behaviour. However, this was also the case of many other young Protestants living in those days of the Troubles, who didn’t end up being serial killers. Maybe, because they learnt how to cope with violence. As Cairns argues: “It is possible that the majority of people in Northern Ireland deal effectively with stress generated by the political violence, but do so by denying the existence of this violence around them.” (Cairns 1984:631-5)

In conclusion, with this comparative study between the different psychological definitions of murderers and the fiction character of Resurrection Man, Victor Kelly, the conclusion has been reached that not only does Victor follow the proceedings and procedures of a non-political murderer but he also fulfils almost all the patterns of a sociopathic personality, which derives in a multicide murderer and evenmore, a serial killer. Victor is the portray and the result of a society which has gone through the horrors of the hatred between two differing communities, mirrored in his own family. However, the crucial question is to know whether the social and familiar environment are sufficient causes to create a serial killer or whether these are only precipitating causes, as M. Dillon argues. “That represents the difference between the offender in Northern Ireland who, had it not been for the terrorist war, would have stayed out of the trouble, and offenders who would have offended even had there been no civil unrest. (1990:332) Victor Kelly would fit perfectly into the second type. Therefore, and agreeing with Martin Dillon’s statement on the predisposition of Lenny Murphy to violence, Victor Kelly would have been a serial killer regardless of the place or the time were he had lived. The Northern Irish context only gave him the impulse and disguise to kill.
Works Cited


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Internet

http://www.serialhomicide.com/serial-killers.htm

Notes

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In accordance with Megargee and Bohn (1979) argumentation, defining or classifying mass murderers or serial killers is a controversial task and disagreements arose every now and then among researchers and law enforcement. The traditional definition of serial killer, generally involves the sexual attack and murder of young women, men, and children by a male who follows a pattern, physical or psychological. This definition fails to include many victims and offenders such as “the angels of death” who work in hospitals and kill patients or “black widows” who kill their family and relatives. To include all types of serial killers, the definition of serial murder must clearly be as broad as possible. For instance, Hickey (1986), simply included all offenders who through premeditation killed three or more victims over a period of days, weeks, months, or years. In essence serial murderers should include any offenders, male or female, who kill over time. Most researchers agree that serial killers have a minimum of 3-4 victims and usually there is a pattern in their killing that may be associated with the types of victims selected or the method or motives for the killing. Consequently, as Megargee and Bohn (1979) further explain, depending on the authority one chooses to read, one will find between two and eleven different types of murderers (29-32). I have chosen Holmes and DeBurger’s definition of Serial Killers because they base their description on the background and reasons for to kill. An important parameter to analyse Victor Kelly in order to understand him. Understanding one is the way to detect and control others.

Although this date may seem to be too far back, the killings of Victor Kelly –in fiction- and Lenny Murphy, in real life, were perpetrated in the immediately previous period: 1972-1982. Therefore, it includes some of these murders and is the closest analysis to those days’ context. It would have been interesting to compare this study with an up dated version of it but that hypothetical new edition does not exist.

This study states that before the onset of the civil disturbances in Northern Ireland in 1969, murder was rare and most murders were domestic. The average number for the years 1964-69 was six per annum (Lyons, 1972). Between 1972 and 1982 an average of 58 persons per annum were found guilty of murder and manslaughter (NIO 1983).

The authors admit that this comparison is hindered by the fact that the sample is limited: “not only are we dealing with murderers who have been caught as opposed to those who are at large, but also we are dealing with those who have been referred, for whatever reason, for psychiatric assessment” (Lyons 1986:196). However, and following their line of discussion, “it would seem reasonable to suggest that those not referred for psychiatric assessment are more stable than those who are referred. As a rule, non-political murderers are psychiatrically assessed whereas terrorist Therefore, any significant differences, which emerge in this study can be seen as highly relevant, on the assumption that political murderers are more abnormal than the vast majority of ordinary citizens.” (Lyons 1986:196).

Taking into account that this sample is limited to those murderers who were referred to the authors, as they explained before, and that there were many more assassinations in the ten-year period, this would appear to be a high number. Even higher considering that in the years immediately preceding the beginning of the “Troubles” the average figure was six per annum. This study attributes this increase in domestic murders to the availability of weapons, and the general atmosphere of prevailing violence.