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The Criminological Imagination:
Mills, Reflexive Analysis, & Richard Wright's *Native Son*

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**The Criminological Imagination:
Mills, Reflexive Analysis, & Richard Wright's *Native Son***

Stephanie Piamonte

Thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Postgraduate and Postdoctoral Studies
In partial fulfilment of the requirements
For the MA in Criminology

Department of Criminology
Faculty of Social Sciences
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Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter One: A Reconceptualization of Criminology and its Object(s) of Study	1
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Criminology: Boundaries, Conventions & Calls for Reflexivity</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Introducing Fiction as a Legitimate Object of Criminological Study</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>The Contributions of Cultural Criminology</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>Previous Criminological Studies on Fiction</i>	<i>16</i>
<i>The Current State of the Criminological Imagination</i>	<i>19</i>
<i>Proposed Criminological Analysis</i>	<i>25</i>
Chapter Two: The Unfulfilled Promise of the Criminological Imagination	29
<i>Introduction to the Sociological Imagination</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>The Sociological Imagination: A Quality of Mind</i>	<i>30</i>
<i>The Sociological Imagination: An Analytic Framework</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Understanding Biography: The Contributions of Katz and Symbolic Interactionism</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>Understanding Society: The Contributions of the Birmingham School</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>The Sociological Imagination: A Method</i>	<i>45</i>
<i>Method: Textual Analysis</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>The Sociological Imagination: A Method of Knowledge Production</i>	<i>52</i>
Chapter 3: Analysis of <i>Native Son</i>	56
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>Introduction to <i>Native Son</i></i>	<i>57</i>
<i>Plot Synopsis</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>An Analysis of <i>Native Son</i> Using the Criminological Imagination</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Analysis One: <i>Ways of the Badass</i></i>	<i>62</i>
<i>Analysis Two: <i>Righteous Slaughter</i></i>	<i>71</i>
<i>Analysis Three: <i>Cold-Blooded, 'Senseless' Murder</i></i>	<i>79</i>
<i>Analysis Four: <i>The Hunt for, and Capture of, Bigger Thomas</i></i>	<i>83</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>87</i>
Chapter Four: The Promise of the Criminological Imagination	93
<i>Introduction</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Contributions: Realizing the Promise of the Criminological Imagination</i>	<i>93</i>
<i>Limitations & Areas of Further Study</i>	<i>97</i>
<i>Conclusion</i>	<i>99</i>
References	101

Abstract

The promise of Mills's (1959) classic sociological imagination for criminology is revisited and assumptions about the adequacy and usefulness of fiction in terms of its analytical and explanatory potential are challenged. The criminological imagination, as a quality of mind, analytic framework and method of knowledge production, provides an ideal meta-framework with which to consider fiction. The theories of Jack Katz (1988) and the symbolic interactionists further develop Mills's concept of biography, while the Birmingham School (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2006) expands on Mills's concept of society; integrating these within the meta-framework of the criminological imagination produces a reflexive analysis of *Native Son*, a classic novel by Richard Wright (2005). In so doing, fiction is demonstrated to be a legitimate object of criminological inquiry that challenges criminological conventions, clarifies and critiques criminological concepts, and creates and communicates criminological knowledge.

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*If you have never spent whole afternoons with burning ears and ruffled hair, forgetting the world around you over a book, forgetting cold and hunger –
If you have never read secretly under the bedclothes with a flashlight, because your father or mother or some other well-meaning person has switched off the lamp on the plausible ground that it was time to sleep because you had to get up so early –
If you have never wept bitter tears because a wonderful story has come to an end and you must take your leave of the characters with whom you have shared so many adventures, whom you have loved and admired, for whom you have hoped and feared, and without whose company life seems empty and meaningless –
If such things have not been part of your own experience...¹*

...then you will probably not understand Ruggiero (2003) and I when we say this work is the result of our pleasure in reading (8)!

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¹Ende, M. (2005). *The Neverending Story*. R. Manheim, trans. Toronto: Firebird. p.11. This novel sparked my interest in the relationship between fiction and reality and their dialectical effects.

Chapter One: A Reconceptualization of Criminology and its Object(s) of Study

Introduction

What fiction, what journalism, what artistic endeavor can compete with the historical reality and political facts of our time? ... It is social and historical reality that men want to know, and often they do not find contemporary literature an adequate means for knowing it. They yearn for facts, they search for their meanings, they want 'a big picture' in which they can believe and within which they can come to understand themselves. They want orienting values too, and suitable ways of feeling and styles of emotion and vocabularies of motive. And they do not readily find these in the literature of today. It does not matter whether or not these qualities *are* to be found there; what matters is that men do not often find them there. ... In the absence of an adequate social science, critics and novelists, dramatists and poets have been the major, and often the only, formulators of private troubles and even of public issues. Art does express such feelings and often focusses them ... but still not with the intellectual clarity required for their understanding or relief today. (Mills, 1959, 17-18)

Although these are not the principal claims contained in C. Wright Mills's (1959) work, *The Sociological Imagination*, they have received little scrutiny to date. In this brief passage, Mills (1959) claims that fiction is inadequate for knowing and explicating both self and society and the relations between the two. My thesis challenges these assertions regarding the adequacy and usefulness of fiction in terms of its analytical and explanatory potential by introducing literature as a legitimate object of criminological study; further, I argue that the sociological imagination (or rather, a criminological imagination) provides an ideal meta-framework with which to consider fiction criminologically. The criminological imagination, as a quality of mind, analytic framework and method of knowledge production, is able to explore and engage with fiction, making sense of its social realities at the level of the individual and the societal as well as the relations between the two. Criminology benefits from the introduction of fiction as an object of study, method of theorizing, and

means of engaging with popular culture because traditional criminology is challenged and new criminological possibilities are demonstrated. In particular, when the criminological imagination is effectively used as a meta-framework, focussing analytic attention on the biography and personal milieu of the individual, the social structure of society, and the relations between them, literature can be used to challenge criminological conventions, clarify and critique criminological concepts, as well as create and communicate criminological knowledge. Therefore, this thesis demonstrates these assertions and utilizes the criminological imagination as a meta-framework, integrating the theories of Jack Katz (1988) and the symbolic interactionists who further develop Mills's (1959) concept of biography, as well as the Birmingham School (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts, 2006) which expands on Mills's (1959) concept of society, in an analysis of *Native Son*, a classic novel by Richard Wright (2005).

First, however, criminological conventions must be illuminated in order to understand traditional resistance to fiction as a legitimate object of criminological inquiry. What follows is a discussion of criminology's conventions, the need for a reflexive criminology, and the assertion of literature as a legitimate object of criminological study. A brief discussion on the disparate approaches used in previous criminological studies pertaining to literature, as well as the influence of cultural criminology, suggests a need for a more systematic approach to the criminological study of literature. The criminological imagination is proposed as a suitable meta-framework for analysis and the current state of the criminological imagination is discussed. What follows, therefore, sets out the greater context within which I locate my analysis of *Native Son*.

Criminology: Boundaries, Conventions & Calls for Reflexivity

If the pursuit of questions within a field constantly leads one beyond its boundaries, this suggests, to me at least, that something must be very wrong. Surely the boundaries of criminology should facilitate not hamper the development of ideas within it. (Shearing, 1989, 171)

It is important to consider claims like these in order to understand possible resistance to the introduction of literature as an object of criminological inquiry, as well as the potential benefits of such an introduction. Shearing (1989) challenges the traditional and conventional view of criminology as a crime-ology, or a discipline concerned solely with the study of crime, criminals and the criminal justice system (170). Similarly, Braithwaite (2000) critiques the apparent rigidity of the discipline of criminology as it continues to focus mainly on police, courts and corrections (229). Kuhn (1970) notes that rigid paradigms have consequences, negating the urgency to build or rebuild a field of inquiry and allowing truth assumptions to stifle a creative science, preventing it from expanding the discipline (19-20). Nelken (1994) and Braithwaite (2000) echo these concerns, suggesting criminology is in danger of irrelevance and/or stagnation.

Their case is perhaps overstated, since the demise of criminology has been regularly predicted since Ferri (Pavarini, 1994, 50). However, in response to Shearing's (1989) claim that criminology needs to redefine its boundaries, Hunt (1990) suggests that rather than trying to escape criminology's preoccupation with "crime-ology," discomfort within the boundaries of criminology in fact leads to interesting and valuable work (657). Similarly, Foucault (1997) suggests that intellectual curiosity is stimulated when the limits of knowledge are discovered (36).

Representing yet another view, Fattah (1997) claims that criminology is a hybrid science and that there is no consensus regarding what constitutes it or its objects of study (167). Likewise, Garland and Sparks (2000) refer to criminology as a problematic and permeable category (190). Rather than maintain a rigidly defined and distinct discipline, they suggest criminology can neither adequately address nor hope to maintain a monopoly on knowledge relating to the complexity of crime and crime control (Garland & Sparks, 2000, 190). They endorse David Downes's conceptualization of criminology as a rendezvous subject or a meeting place for ideas and subjects as they pertain to crime and crime control (in Garland & Sparks, 2000, 193). What can be drawn from these ongoing debates within and around criminology is the idea that "criminology" is a constituted and conflicted concept or category and field of practice.

According to Braithwaite (2000), "[a] key to progress is to keep constructing new paradigms that sweep across disciplines in ways that are responsive to new realities of the world, but that fade ... when those realities change" (235). He is not alone in proposing new or revised objects of study, concepts and categories, paradigms and even disciplines. Garland and Sparks (2000) argue that in the face of a changing world, "to pursue conventional agendas of criminological enquiry in the accustomed way ... would also be to depart from the canons of clarity, perspicacity and relevance" (189). In their attempt to rethink criminology, Garland and Sparks (2000) argue criminology needs to be reflexive about its intellectual assumptions (202). Rather than "a merely modish questing after novelty," they are in favour of a renewal, recovery and reconsideration of traditional criminological thought (Garland & Sparks, 2000, 203). In response to these recent calls for

greater reflexivity and adaptability, there is an emerging space for a different kind of criminology. What follows is what Walters (2004) calls “a space of reflection” (28), in which criminology, its boundaries, conventions and possibilities are critically considered.

Kuhn (1970) reveals and challenges the foundational assumptions inherent within the scientific world: that scientists know what the world is like and that science provides the means for knowing the world (5). The natural sciences are predicated on the basis that repetition and replication make a finding reliable, a standard that seems limiting rather than desirable in the social sciences (Kuhn, 1970, 23). According to Fattah (1997), much of criminology is repetitive to the point of obsessive; in other words, criminological texts offer the same critiques of the same theories that are trying to understand the same things (i.e. the causes of, and/or solutions to, crime) (xiii). Kuhn (1970) makes a similar claim, stating that normal science (i.e. science that is established or accepted, built on scientific achievement and acknowledged by experts) is not interested in conceptual or phenomenal novelties, but is caught up in puzzle-solving or accumulating rather than creating knowledge (10, 35, 52).

Kuhn’s (1970) influential work challenges conceptions of science as a static and ahistorical source of knowledge (1). By positing that science is in fact an historical invention, he introduces the possibility of arbitrariness in the methods and substance of scientific knowledge (Kuhn, 1970, 4). Sayer (1992) echoes this notion, claiming that theories are not monolithic or procrustean and unresponsive to the world (56). Fattah (1997) elaborates on this possibility in relation to criminology, stating that historically, criminology is a biased science. He bases this claim on the fact that in general criminology focusses on “crimes by the powerless, not the powerful; crime in the streets, not crime in the suites;

conventional crime, not white collar crime; crime by individuals, not crime by governments and corporations; disorganized crime, not organized crime” (Fattah, 1997, 67). This is a significant challenge to the idea that criminology is an objective science, suggesting instead that it is an evolving discipline and that the object of criminological study is a matter of choice and debate.

As Foucault (1970) demonstrates, familiar systems of thought can be limiting; they put boundaries around how we make sense of things.¹ The imagery of boundaries is helpful in explaining the traditional resistance in criminology to the study of fiction. Fifty years ago, C. P. Snow (1959) argued there were two polar cultures in the West: a culture of science and a culture of art (10-11). He claimed these cultures were ignorant of, and ignored the contributions of, the other (Snow, 1959, 10-11). More recently, Kelly (1991) and Potter (2001) criticize the intellectual segregation between artists and scientists. This polar legacy lingers as criminology continues to favour a positivist adherence to formal scientific techniques and methods at the expense of exploring creative methods to produce knowledge and to develop criminological understanding (e.g. Sagarin, 1981, 9; Kelly, 1991, 46; Engel, 2003, 346; & Rafter, 2006, 4-5). According to Anderson (1996), “[t]o many, rational, scientific inquiry and imagination are diametrically opposed. Scientific inquiry produces

¹Foucault (1970) recounts a passage from a novel by Borges in which is contained “a ‘certain Chinese encyclopedia’ in which it is written that ‘animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies” (xv). Foucault (1970) demonstrates how taken-for-granted classificatory schemes can seem impossible or at least improbable, and that interrogation of established thinking patterns can be revealing.

true knowledge of events and things, while imagination results in fantasy and fiction” (25). Established or traditional thought purports that science is the way to gain objective knowledge, and that the scientific method is the means to gather and interpret true and objective data (Anderson, 1996, 26). In a provocative statement, Bourdieu (1988) refers to such formal concepts and techniques as magic rituals (774). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) reject dichotomies between theory and research, subjective and objective, real and fictional (3).² Bourdieu (1988) claims that, rather than reflecting reality, these dichotomies in fact construct a social reality (778). In his words, “[t]hey define the visible and the invisible, the thinkable and the unthinkable; and like all social categories, they hide as much as they reveal and can only reveal by hiding” (Bourdieu, 1988, 778).

Sayer (1992) introduces nuance to this discussion, distinguishing between what he calls thought objects, including theory, empirical/observational/factual knowledge, and real objects, or facts as things or states of the world (47). In other words, he challenges presuppositions about “facts,” suggesting that many things classified as real or true are in

²Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) use conceptual and methodological tools that dissolve these distinctions (3). This is not a random, but a unified approach that emphasizes relations rather than differences (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 4, 15). They criticize methodologism, or developing method for its own sake, as well as theoreticism that is not tied to practice, which is a succinct summarization of Mills’s (1959) position (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 28-30). Interestingly, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) move from briefly elucidating these challenges or problems within the social sciences to a lengthy discussion on reflexivity, whereas it is only possible to infer from Mills (1959) that he calls for greater reflexivity. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define reflexivity as thinking about how we think about things, or making a conscious effort to see the boundaries of our thinking (40). The purpose of such reflexivity is to enhance knowledge’s breadth and substance (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 37). Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) conclude that an intellectual curiosity is needed to overcome familiarity to clearly see these boundaries (64), strengthening the links between themselves and Mills (1959), who advocates the use of imagination for similar purposes.

fact only constructed and accepted as such. Sayer (1992) challenges the traditional dichotomy between fact and fiction, theory and practice, subjective and objective knowledge; instead, he posits that often what we classify as fact is actually part of a conceptual framework for seeing, understanding or describing the world (Sayer, 1992, 46-47). Similarly, Bourdieu (1988) challenges us to (re)consider the operationalization of theoretical constructs, cautioning against a tendency to “settl[e] on paper issues that are not settled in reality, where they are the stake of ongoing struggles” (776). In this instance, the conceptualization being challenged is the social reality of crime, criminology’s chosen (and, as Shearing (1989) argues, problematic and yet privileged) object of study. The current understanding of crime excludes or precludes the study of fictional realities.

Foucault (1983) describes struggles against the privileges of knowledge (212); he also discusses attempts to break through some of the traditional barriers or established regimes of thought by resisting what he calls the totalizing and inhibiting effects of science (Foucault, 1980, 80-81, 84). As Ericson (1996) notes, the locus of criminology is the university, which is an institution (14). As an institution, criminology engages in academic knowledge production, which means it is influenced by research funding opportunities, publication outlets and professional associations (Ericson, 1996, 16). This institutional knowledge creates discourses that represent crime, crime practices and criminology in a particular way (Ericson, 1996, 18). According to Ericson (1996), these effects are primarily negative, making criminology highly biased and susceptible to trends (19-21). Garland (1990) suggests that established institutions, such as the university, are responsible for having an obscuring and reassuring effect, leading to a body of thought that seems inevitable

and maintains the status quo (3). Garland (1990) suggests we must question taken-for-granted ways of thinking and doing criminology rather than passively promulgate it, and that any form of “obviousness” deserves greater inquiry (3, 277). This thesis challenges the dichotomy between fact and fiction, introduces a broader ontology into criminology by incorporating literature as an object of study, and demonstrates that the fictional reality is a legitimate representation of social reality. In doing so, the charge that “[c]riminology remains largely a self-referential, self-perpetuating practice that lacks the ability to look outside itself” may be challenged (Barton, Corteen, & Whyte, 2007, 2).

It is important to note that the emergence of a new paradigm, or in this case the introduction of a new object of study, does not make previous knowledges illegitimate or unscientific (Kuhn, 1970, 3). Rather, by critiquing the current restrictive understanding of science that excludes fiction as a valuable and viable source of knowledge, new sources of knowledge are explored. This follows in the tradition of Gramsci (1967), who supports organic rather than traditional thinking and a reexamination of existing truths rather than the more traditional emphasis on original thought or scientific discovery (58-60). By reexamining criminology’s stance toward literature, fundamental concepts or categories are questioned and the potential of the criminological imagination can be introduced. The goal is to overcome barriers to organic thinking, particularly barriers stemming from structures and patterns of authority such as the institution of the university, that discourage deviation from established thought and ensure accepted knowledge is disseminated (Tombs & Whyte, 2003, 15).

Therefore, in considering the traditional boundaries that constrain criminology and

constitute its object of study in a certain way, it is possible to understand the resistance to the introduction of fiction as a legitimate object of study. Criminology is preoccupied not only with the study of crime, as Shearing (1989) suggests, it is also prescribed by the idea that crime is both real and scientifically measurable or reducible. As Pavarini (1994) points out, however, crime is artificial and even fictional because it is not natural, but is a product of convention (44). This understanding of crime suggests that not only is “criminology” a site of struggle in terms of its boundaries, but “crime” is also a matter of debate.

Whether our constructs of crime reflect reality, a significant benefit of introducing fiction as a legitimate object of study is the introduction of greater reflexivity, which can lead to greater criminological understanding. Williams (1984) cautions against the acceptance of competing dualisms which “easily leads to a reduction in understanding because the two parts become opposites, and the richness of the original phenomena is lost” (103-104). Therefore, rather than accepting the dominant categories prevalent in criminology, this thesis attempts to reconceptualize the “true” by acknowledging that both scientific measurement and literary fiction can offer legitimate and valid representations of social reality. I adopt Pavarini’s (1994) hope that it is possible to construct new horizons or adopt different perspectives and accept different boundaries within a discipline, and to encourage the extension of the criminological gaze to look in unfamiliar directions (46-50).

In discussing potential futures for criminology, Nelken (1994) focusses on the need for a reflexive criminology and myriad ways of “representing reality and telling the truth” (7). This thesis is built on the premise that literature is one such means of representing and telling the truth. It therefore builds on an ontology that includes fiction within the realm of

criminological possibilities, departing from a traditional criminology that does not include fiction as a legitimate object of study. Rather than clinging to a narrow vision of social science that causes social scientists like Howard Becker to leave sociology for literature studies, this thesis will incorporate, within the meta-framework of the criminological imagination, both science and art and also demonstrate that fiction is both a useful and a legitimate object of criminological study.

Introducing Fiction as a Legitimate Object of Criminological Study

As an object that is distinctly social in nature, the fictional reality offers not examples of concepts but a complex of relations to be analytically delineated through social science craft work. Layered and complex they lend themselves to being deconstructed and creatively theorised. ... Although the fictional reality is just that, fictional, this does not mean that the objects that are defined and constructed will also be fictional. (Frauley, 2010, 448)

As discussed in the previous section, traditional boundaries limit opportunities to introduce new objects of criminological study while the introduction of these new objects provides opportunities for greater criminological reflexivity. This section discusses specific reasons literature is a legitimate object of criminological study. First, as suggested by the preceding quote, aspects of social realities contained within fiction are real and can be explored criminologically, suggesting that there is shared intellectual territory between fiction and criminology. Second, the criminological study of fiction introduces popular knowledge into criminology, which both deconstructs traditional criminological knowledge and also adds knowledge of cultural relevance. Finally, criminological analysis of crime fiction is lagging behind other disciplines, such as literary and legal studies, allowing other

disciplines to dominate an area where there could be a vibrant criminological voice. For these same reasons, fiction is not only a legitimate object of study, it is a useful one.

According to Potter (2001) and as suggested in the introductory quote, literature has the potential to be much more than an ancillary illustration of a criminological point; its social reality can be explored for the relations and meanings contained within (184, 190). What Frauley (2010) addresses is the concept of verisimilitude, or the appearance of being true or real. He notes that although literature contains a fictional reality, the objects and issues explored within the literature are not necessarily fictional themselves (Frauley, 2010, 448). Further, Sagarin (1981), Potter (2001) and Ruggiero (2003) among others argue literature and criminology share an intellectual territory, offering analysis and interpretation of crime-related subject matter and social realities, and that this is a creative process. Therefore, whether the social reality is considered to be “real” or “fictional,” it can be criminologically explored and analysed. What these social scientists claim is that there are multiple sources of reality and knowledge that have great criminological potential.

Not only does literature have the potential to be explored for its own meaning and knowledge of social realities, it can help deconstruct criminological knowledge. Crank and King (2007) conceptualize social reality as a babble of competing voices and suggest it is necessary to break free of criminological traditions and customs in order to creatively engage with the world and make meaning (343-344). They suggest the typical method of deriving meaning from the babble is to use a scientific framework to analyse, codify and reduce the babble into what seems like a universal or monolithic discourse. By melding real and fictional voices together, Crank and King (2007) create a coherent narrative that is

intentionally made ludicrous by their insertion of traditional empirical form, such as a methods section that contains lyrics from Coolio, a measurement and evaluation section that is comprised of a portion of script from *21 Grams*, and a table of findings that is filled with random numbers and symbols. Their purpose is two-fold: to demonstrate how the normative knowledge of the criminal justice system drowns out other discourses and to demonstrate how the knowledge produced by such means codifies, simplifies, and makes abstract a particular reality rather than providing a deeper understanding of this reality (Crank & King, 2007, 343, 359). It is significant that Crank and King (2007) choose to deconstruct criminological knowledge production using stories and narratives in order to engage the reader and also to encourage an interpretation of meaning rather than an acceptance of normative discourse (343-344). The possibility of engaging with and deconstructing criminological ideas using popular culture helps ensure the continued relevance of criminological knowledge and demonstrates one of the benefits of the introduction of fiction into criminological study.

Although the possibility of using literature as an object of criminological inquiry has been discussed since the 1980s (e.g. Sagarin, 1981; & Smith, 1987), Frauley (2010) notes that this area is only recently beginning to develop (437). An increasing number of studies pertain to crime fiction, but they are not necessarily criminological in nature (e.g. Sagarin, 1981; Smith, 1987; Friedland, 1991; Kelly, 1991; Engel, 2003; Brown, 2004; & Rafter, 2006). According to Ruggiero (2003), few sociologists and criminologists use fiction as a means of clarifying or exploring concepts, communicating sociological meaning or elaborating on analysis (1). Pointing to the wealth of crime literature, Kelly (1991) asks

whether criminological research has been enhanced or even affected by it (50-52). Brown (2004) identifies the lack of attention to fiction as a gap in criminological analysis, claiming that other fields are advancing analyses on fiction but criminology is being left behind (206). Considering the popularity and potential of crime fiction, this gap seems significant. Cultural criminology, discussed in the following section, has begun to address this gap.

The Contributions of Cultural Criminology

...the study of crime necessitates not simply the examination of individual criminals and criminal events, not even the straightforward examination of media 'coverage' of criminals and criminal events, but rather a journey into the spectacle and carnival of crime, a walk down an infinite hall of mirrors where images created and consumed by criminals, criminal subcultures, control agents, media institutions, and audiences bounce endlessly one off the other (Ferrell, 1999, 397).

Cultural criminology is foundational to making further studies involving fiction possible because it introduced extraneous objects like gallery art, popular music and other cultural artefacts into criminology as legitimate objects of criminological study. In other words, it shifted criminology's focus from cops, courts, and corrections to include popular culture as an object of study. Kane (2004) discusses the traditional and limited role culture has played in criminology, claiming, "cultural objects rarely escape their existential fate as expressive tokens. ... [C]ulture is too easily put in a box on the metaphorical shelf, an ornament to be taken out on occasion when a colorful quotation is needed from the proverbial man on the street" (304-305). Ferrell (1999), one of the progenitors of cultural criminology, describes it as a perspective or a framework for considering image, meaning and representation pertaining to crime and crime control, and which borrows theoretical and

methodological devices from other disciplines (396). Cultural criminologists are less interested in crime or criminals, or even the media representations thereof; rather, they are interested in the creative or constructed meaning(s) of crime (Ferrell, 1999, 397-398). Central to cultural criminology is the idea that criminology must look beyond the study of crime and the criminal justice system into other, especially cultural areas, including the symbolic dimensions of daily life.

The introduction of these new cultural objects of study necessitated new methods of analysis because criminology was not equipped to study popular culture or its artefacts. Ferrell (1999) introduced a “melange” of intellectual and disciplinary influences and methodologies into criminology in order to critically consider culture and crime (399). He was less interested in the specific methods or perspectives than in what they could say about crime and culture (Ferrell, 1999, 413). According to Ferrell (1999), the goal was “less to synthesize or subsume these various perspectives than to engage them in a critical, multifaceted exploration of culture and crime” (413). This lack of concern for method characterizes cultural criminology, and is generally touted as a distinguishing feature from quantitative or traditional criminology.³ Although cultural criminology was helpful in introducing cultural objects of study to criminology and legitimizing subjective

³For example, Kane (2004) refers to traditional methods critically, suggesting they tend to reproduce hierarchies of knowledge. For a cultural criminologist, method is intended to oppose this tendency. In her words, “[f]or cultural criminologists, the possibility of effectively moderating, if not curing, the blind obsession with quantitative (in)significance, is in large part a question of method. While I am concerned here with the substance of method—the rules, logics and practices that compose the bundle of habits and inventions we could call method—I am mostly concerned with how methods are differentially situated within hierarchies of knowledge production and dissemination.” (Kane, 2004, 304)

interpretations of cultural artefacts (simultaneously introducing criminology and criminological perspectives into contemporary cultural debates), its haphazard approach in adopting and utilizing methods is reflected in the miscellaneous approaches pertaining to crime fiction which are considered in the following section.

Previous Criminological Studies on Fiction

... the text's 'literariness' is merely the form, the special sort of language in which the knowledge is presented. The critic does not create this knowledge. It pre-exists his efforts of criticism. It is simply there, already existent within the meanings of the text, whether interpretively realized or not... (Potter, 2001, 192)

Because the study of fiction within criminology is marginal, existing studies are characterized by a multiplicity of analytic frameworks. For example, Sagarin (1981) borrows heavily from literature studies to discuss and analyse crime topics, Friedland (1991) adopts a legal framework, Smith (1987) and Engel (2003) neglect to propose an analytic framework, and Ruggiero (2003) selects topics of criminological interest that are present in fiction and analyses them using existing criminological theories. Potter (2001) suggests in the preceding quote that literature should be approached like any body of knowledge that has meaning inherent within it; this approach, he also implies, should be systematic in order to derive meaning. Kraska (2006) proposes a systematic approach to adopting an analytic framework, suggesting that a new object of study requires a sound theoretical framework (171-173). Significantly, he does not suggest developing an entirely new theoretical framework, but instead advocates relying on existing theories that can be organized or utilized in new ways that are both consistent and cohesive. Therefore, the first step in

determining an appropriate analytic framework with which to explore fiction in a criminological manner is to revisit existing criminological theory and studies. Two distinct approaches to analysing fiction criminologically have recently been undertaken. Rafter (2006) exemplifies the social constructionist approach, while Ruggiero (2003) typifies the realist approach.

Rafter (2006) is a social constructionist interested mainly in images or representations and the ideological implications thereof. She suggests crime films are both reflections of ideas about issues and also work to shape how these issues are thought about, suggesting that there is a dialectical relationship between art and life (Rafter, 2006, 3). Rafter (2006) claims that despite the culturally significant role film has “in generating representations and understandings of crime, criminologists have traditionally ignored it, clinging to a narrow social science perspective that pays little attention to the interactions of crime and culture” (4). She does note that there are an increasing number of topical studies (i.e. studies on gangster films, film noir, the femme fatale, etc.) (Rafter, 2006, 4). Although it is implied that Rafter (2006) wants to be more broad and imaginative with the possibilities of crime films by using an analytical framework that borrows from film history and technique, social history, criminal justice and criminology, she in fact does little to further a criminological understanding of fictional realities or the usefulness of fiction to criminology. However, her work is helpful because it is not concerned with the accuracy of a given representation (which would suggest that the world contains an objective knowable reality and therefore lends credence to a positivist understanding of reality); instead, she tentatively explores the dialectical relations between fiction, social reality, and criminology.

In contrast to Rafter (2006), Ruggiero's (2003) conception of fiction proposes that there are real elements and knowledge – not just representations – present in literature. As Potter (2001) argues, “even the most non-naturalistic fictional forms and ‘unrealistic’ fictional universes are reality-dependent in terms of meaning” (184). The knowledge contained within literature, however, is in a different form and produced through different means than scientific knowledge; this does not, however, make it inaccessible to science (Potter, 2001, 187). Ruggiero (2003) uses fiction not only as an object of study but as a tool which, when read sociologically, communicates and elaborates on criminological meaning and analysis and also encourages critical reflection on the discipline as well as the methods of knowledge production. For example, he claims that “[w]hile some sociologists and criminologists do have time to read fiction, few use it to clarify concepts to themselves, discuss them with colleagues and transmit them to students” (Ruggiero, 2003, 1). This statement implies that some knowledge is valued, and that knowledge production and transmission is constrained by tradition. Ruggiero (2003) does not claim that fiction is a better or more legitimate source of data and knowledge, but that it provides a certain freedom to use the imagination (4). In his words, “[l]iterary works teach us freedom of interpretation, because the very ambiguity of language spawns multitude readings of texts” (Ruggiero, 2003, 5).

This is not to say that anything goes. Like Sayer (1992) writes, all knowledge is fallible, but not equally so (68). As Potter (2001) explains, and Ruggiero (2003) agrees, meaning exists and is grounded in reality, or in the structure of language (190). Therefore, while the act of reading is creative, producing meaning, that meaning is constrained by the

text itself. Potter (2001) elaborates on this idea, saying “[t]he words on the page are in one sense the raw material of the production of meaning that reading entails. However, in another sense they are not at all ‘raw’ but pre-packaged, endowed with pre-existent meaning” (190). Individual engagement with the text allows interpretations to vary between individuals, but these variations exist within the boundaries of what the text authorizes. As Potter (2001) explains, a description of a hobbit will produce different imaginings in different individuals, but the image of a dragon will not be conjured in its place (190). Similarly, the choice of analytic framework constrains interpretations of the text. The following section demonstrates how a particular analytic framework provides a language that does not just passively extract meaning from a text, but actively produces new meanings and imaginings (Potter, 2001, 193). This emphasis on imaginings and imagination has recently resurfaced in criminological discussion. The following section outlines the current state of the criminological imagination, which will frame the subsequent analysis of the novel *Native Son*.

The Current State of the Criminological Imagination

“The field of criminology now suffers from a lack of ‘the criminological imagination’” (Williams, 1984, 92).

Mills (1959) prefaces his discussion of the sociological imagination with a critique of the social sciences that both justifies and necessitates the incorporation of the sociological imagination into the social sciences. Mills (1959) is critical of the tendency within social science to be preoccupied with method or theory; he calls these “withdrawals from the tasks

of the social sciences” (50). While he acknowledges their importance, Mills (1959) believes methodology and theory should not become hindrances to the task of the social sciences, which is to enable people to understand the dialectical relations between biography and social structure within the context of history (6). Ultimately, he argues both theory and empirical facts are removed from the substantive problems that concern people (Mills, 1959, 75).

Mills (1959) argues people are alienated from the social sciences, themselves, and their worlds. According to Mills (1959), people are bounded by the immediacy of their lives and are only aware of what occurs in their immediate vicinity (3). Mills (1959) believes that people are disoriented by and dissociated from reality and the complexity of the modern world; he suggests that the sociological imagination provides a way to reconnect in a meaningful way (4). This imagination is useful because it focusses on the troubles and issues experienced by the individual, whether at a personal or structural level. In other words, the concerns of individuals are addressed and clarified by a sociological or criminological imagination.

To summarize, Mills (1959) wrote *The Sociological Imagination* because he was concerned about the lack of relevance the social sciences had in relation to the problems of the individual and suggested much social science was either irrelevant or inaccessible. Twenty-five years later, Williams (1984) echoed that same concern in an article called *The Demise of the Criminological Imagination*.⁴ Williams (1984) and Kelly (1991) argue the

⁴Ironically, in discussing its demise, Williams (1984) was actually the first to coin the term “criminological imagination.”

trend toward disciplinary professionalization and specialization and the pursuit of a “scientific” criminology has resulted in a criminology that is less imaginative and less diverse in its objects of study, methods and research. In discussing the apparent demise of the criminological imagination, Williams (1984) argues criminology focusses on methodology to the exclusion of theory, and that methods and empiricism overshadow the discipline and cause intellectual stagnation (93). He blames the lack of criminological imagination on empirical scientism, or adherence to the belief that objects of study must be quantifiable to be considered real, concerns that echo Mills’s argument (1959) (96).

According to Williams (1984), “[e]mpirical scientism is the application of science without the appreciation of science as a way of gaining knowledge and thus as a tool; instead, the focus is on the use of secondary tools (research designs, methods, measurement, etc.) as the only ‘true’ modes of knowledge production” (96). Similarly, Flyvbjerg (2001) believes the social sciences are not well-developed theoretically and criticizes the Western analytical-rational scientific tradition that suggests humans and society can be adequately studied using the natural sciences model (5, 25). He claims the social sciences are faced with “an impossible task” when they attempt to emulate the natural sciences (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 3). Williams (1984) further criticizes the tendency toward descriptive empiricism, or measuring what is already known, rather than engaging a criminology that furthers understanding by explaining social phenomena (93). Williams’s (1984) motivation for writing this critique is the fact that no theories of significance were formulated in the 1970s

(92).⁵ He believes this is not just a matter of stagnation, but of intellectual constraint (Williams, 1984, 92). Noting that “explanations are predicated upon belief systems,” Williams (1984) criticizes a criminology that measures rather than speculates (93, 97).

Williams (1984) and Whitehead (1985) are helpful because they reiterate the same malaise within criminology that prompted Mills (1959) to respond to an empiricist sociology with imagination. Additionally, they both emphasize that the accepted or prevalent form of knowledge represents value judgements. Whitehead (1985) in particular demonstrates this as he attributes the lack of criminological imagination to official designations of worthwhile knowledge, as decided by academic journals and a pressure to publish (22, 24). It is also possible to infer from Ruggiero (2003) that value judgements are being made about criminological knowledge, as he relates how he was discouraged from writing about literature and criminology, rather than being encouraged to pursue and develop an intellectual curiosity (vii). This intellectual curiosity or imagination is suggested as a strategy for a more vibrant and relevant criminology.

Unfortunately, recent articles referring to the criminological imagination generally use or misuse the term to refer to thinking imaginatively about crime, crime control or criminology (e.g. Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007; Halsworth, 2008; & Mounce, 2008), adopting a critical approach to criminology (e.g. Lynch & Stretsky, 2003; Hamm, 2005; Aas, 2007; Girling, 2008; & McLaughlin, 2008), or thinking about old problems in new ways (e.g.

⁵Williams (1984) tempers his criticism somewhat by acknowledging the works of Quinney (1970), Newman (1978), Pepinsky (1976), Gibbs (1975), Friedrichs (1979), Spitzer (1975), Turk (1976), Foucault (1979) and Black (1976) (92). However, he suggests that none of these became a school or paradigm, therefore supporting his claim that this was a less creative period of criminological development (Williams, 1984, 92).

White, 2003; Green, Ward, & McConnachie, 2007; & Hughes & Rowe, 2007). In one of the more recent and more developed discussions, Barton et al. (2007), conceptualize the criminological imagination as all three, although they emphasize that it serves as a critical counter-discourse to the state and to policy-oriented criminology and suggest criminological knowledge should be problematized and marginalized topics explored in new ways (2-6). Their approach is lacking however, and their interpretation of Mills's (1959) key concepts is limited to history and structure, ignoring biography and Mills's (1959) concern with the individual. These limited references to a vague category or concept called the criminological imagination do little to further its use or to demonstrate its usefulness to criminology. However, these references justify a renewed exploration of the criminological imagination because they are recent, and also offer a departure point to critique the criminological imagination by emphasizing the importance of reflexivity.

According to Alvesson, Hardy and Harley (2008), reflexivity is necessitated by the fact that the existence or possibility of objective research is doubtful, and that knowledge production and research should be critically considered (480-481). Interestingly, Alvesson et al. (2008) introduce the possibility of multiple reflexivities which challenge our understanding of how paradigms produce knowledge, how knowledge is co-produced by the researcher and the subject, what the impact of social context on knowledge production is, and what the relations are between power and knowledge (Alvesson et al., 2008, 482-485). Alvesson et al. (2008) also outline the purposes of these reflexivities. First, they suggest

reflexivity challenges traditional thinking.⁶ Second, they argue that reflexivity adds something new.⁷ They suggest that a dialectical relationship exists between D-reflexivity and R-reflexivity; the former makes the latter possible, and the latter makes the former useful (Alvesson et al., 2008, 495). They expand on this idea by insisting that there is a criteria for successful reflexivity: a tangible result, which can take the form of new research as a result of new ideas, concepts, or challenges to traditional thinking, or improved research and theorizing (Alvesson et al., 2008, 495).⁸

⁶Alvesson et al. (2008) call this D-reflexivity. “*D-reflexivity* practices challenge orthodox understandings by pointing out the limitations of, and uncertainties behind, the manufactured unity and coherence of texts, as well as the way in which conformism, institutional domination and academic and business fashion may account for the production of particular knowledge. It engages with the problems, uncertainties and social contingencies of knowledge claims – whether empirical claims, concepts or theoretical propositions. By emphasizing how social science orders the world in a particular way, power/knowledge connections are illuminated and truth-creating effects are disarmed. These practices are conducted in attempts to counteract harm – to challenge efforts to stabilize the view of the world in a particular way and expose the unreflexive reproduction of dominant vocabularies, rules or conventions in social research.” (Alvesson et al., 2008, 494)

⁷Alvesson et al. (2008) call this R-reflexivity. “*R-reflexivity* is about developing and adding something; the R-reflexivist is in the construction rather than demolition industry. It means bringing in issues of alternative paradigms, root metaphors, perspectives, vocabularies, lines of interpretation, political values, and representations; re-balancing and reframing voices independently of data in order to interrogate these data in a more fundamental way. Instances of alternative constructions and reconstruction of fundamental elements of the research project are central to these reflexive practices. R-reflexive practices are employed to illuminate what is left out and marginalized: the (almost) missed opportunity, premature framing, reproduction of received wisdom, re-enforcement of power relations and unimaginative labelling. They provide alternative descriptions, interpretations, results, vocabularies, voices, 494 and points of departures that could be taken into account, and show some of the differences that they would make. R-reflexivity aims to open up new avenues, paths, and lines of interpretation to produce ‘better’ research ethically, politically, empirically, and theoretically.” (Alvesson et al., 2008, 494-495)

⁸They acknowledge the ambiguity and subjectiveness of the designation of improved or better research, but maintain the necessity of this subjective standard (Alvesson et al., 2008, 495).

This thesis adopts both of Alvesson et al.'s (2008) reflexivities. By considering the possibilities of fiction, traditional criminological thinking and conventions are challenged; by using the criminological imagination, new ways of identifying, formulating and articulating the problems of criminology are demonstrated. Therefore, the criminological imagination acts as a guide, informing the method and influencing the analysis of the analysis to follow.

Proposed Criminological Analysis

Neither the life of an individual nor the history of a society can be understood without understanding both. ... The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. (Mills, 1959, 3, 6)

This succinctly summarizes Mills's (1959) understanding of the sociological imagination, its objects of analysis and the purpose of study. Based on Mills's (1959) classic work, *The Sociological Imagination*, this thesis explores the potential of literature for knowing and explicating self and society and the relations between the two, thereby demonstrating the potential of the criminological imagination. Specifically, a textual analysis of the novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright (2005) will be conducted.

Brown (2004) suggests an exemplary case study can demonstrate the benefits of analyses of fiction for criminology (219). Similarly, Becker (1995) suggests literature provides case studies to better understand social reality, and points to the example of *Candido* (1995) (xi). *Candido* adopts a case study approach that delves heavily into an individual work, seeking not to make comparisons or to justify opinions, but to explore how

well the novel informs our understanding of a subject (Becker, 1995, xiii-xiv). According to Becker (1995), *Candido* resists disciplinary specialization, ascribing neither to a sociology of literature nor to literary theory, and even frequently fails to craft an argument; instead, he explores a work and focusses on its details and relations in order to achieve a better understanding of the text and the social world in which it is read (xvi). This is an approach supported by the criminological imagination, which seeks to reveal relations between society and biography in order to better clarify social realities (Mills, 1959, 15).

Candido (1995) argues any critique of literature must consider the novel both as it exists and as it relates to certain social conditions and structures (144). In his words, “[w]e can only understand the work by mixing text and context in a dialectically integrated interpretation” (*Candido*, 1995, 142). Although this is a compelling argument and has merit, Ruggiero (2003) and others demonstrate that this is not required to create an adequate and complete analysis; criminological study of a text is sufficient. Despite this disagreement, *Candido* (1995) provides a helpful bridge between art and social science, particularly since he has Howard Becker, who left sociology for literature studies, as an advocate.

According to Becker (1995), *Candido*’s work does not recognize a division between art and social science; instead, his approach demonstrates that together they provide a more coherent understanding of history and biography (xiii). *Candido* (1995) is critical of the sociology of literature, which does not consider text, limiting its attention instead to context and remaining a wholly scientific rather than aesthetic endeavour (142-143). He is similarly critical of the opposite tendency of literary theory, which considers a text in minute detail to the exclusion of social context, making it an aesthetic rather than scientific endeavour

(Candido, 1995, 143). Candido (1995) balances an aesthetic approach characterized by close attention to a particular text with a scientific approach that clarifies the rudimentary social science of a text. In addition, both Candido (1995) and Becker (1995) stress the importance of relating art to society and vice versa, focussing on these relations rather than on similarities (xi). Candido (1995) dismisses as inadequate the idea that literature is simply a reflection of the social world, suggesting *mimesis* is always also a form of *poesis* (149).⁹ This insistence on the meaning inherent within a work of fiction is the guiding premise of this thesis.

Ironically, Mills (1959) himself is perhaps the greatest obstacle to utilizing the sociological/criminological imagination to explore fiction, since he makes several strong claims about fiction. According to Mills (1959), contemporary literature is an inadequate means for knowing or understanding the complexity of social and historical reality, as well as for elucidating facts and values (17). Further, he claims it does not have sufficient intellectual clarity to formulate private troubles and public issues (Mills, 1959, 18). He dismisses the realm of literature by stating that “[i]t does not matter whether or not these qualities *are* to be found there [in literature]; what matters is that men do not often find them there” (Mills, 1959, 16-17). Although Mills (1959) alludes to the shared history and content of literature and social sciences, acknowledging that “in the absence of an adequate social science, critics and novelists, dramatists and poets have been the major, and often the only, formulators of private troubles and even of public issues” (18), he retains a traditional view when it comes to fiction as an object of social scientific study. Considering the energy he

⁹In other words, representation is always also an act of creation.

spent challenging scientism, this last vestige of traditionalism that formulates fiction as a lesser or illegitimate knowledge deserves to be challenged, and the full promise of the criminological imagination realized. In light of his claim that cultural rather than scientific tasks are the primary work of the social scientist in making sense of social realities, the failure to seriously consider cultural artefacts such as literature represents a significant oversight and also a hindrance to this task.

This thesis challenges the assertions of Mills (1959) and others regarding the adequacy and usefulness of fiction, and further argues that the criminological imagination provides an ideal meta-framework with which to consider fiction. The following chapter discusses in detail Mills's sociological imagination. This return to Mills (1959) is necessitated by the recent and confused understandings of what exactly a "criminological imagination" is and also outlines the benefits of a criminological imagination.

Chapter Two: The Unfulfilled Promise of the Criminological Imagination

Introduction to the Sociological Imagination

The sociological imagination is not merely a fashion. It is a quality of mind that seems most dramatically to promise an understanding of the intimate realities of ourselves in connection with larger social realities. (Mills, 1959, 15)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the current usage of the term “criminological imagination” refers to a vague concept that bears little resemblance to Mills’s (1959) original explanation. This chapter discusses in detail the sociological imagination as formulated by Mills (1959) in order to establish what a criminological imagination is, and also the benefits of such an imagination. According to Mills (1959), the sociological imagination is a quality of mind, an analytic framework, and a method of knowledge production. There are many benefits of a criminological imagination for the critical researcher, including a meta-framework for organising and analysing information, as well as a means of producing (and introducing) criminological knowledges. Also included in this chapter is a discussion of particular criminological theories that fit within the meta-framework offered by the criminological imagination and further develop the concepts described by Mills (1959) and which will provide the language to analyse the novel *Native Son*.

The criminological imagination is not a passing fashion, as Mills (1959) writes in the quote introducing this chapter, but an enduring concept and exceptional meta-framework that directs the criminologist to consider social realities and also allows an exploration of these social realities. According to Mills (1959), social science is about “human variety, which consists of all the social worlds in which men have lived, are living, and might live”

(132). These social realities can also be found in fiction. Mills (1959) discusses these social realities, claiming that their exploration should always be guided by the necessity of helping the individual engage in sense-making. The goal of social science, therefore, is to illuminate and explicate social realities so that people can better understand themselves and their worlds. Fiction plays an integral part both in formulating and navigating social realities; in particular, the popularity of crime fiction suggests fiction is particularly adept at addressing the problems or challenges of these social realities. However, unexamined popular knowledge does not necessarily aid in sense-making. Similarly, Mills is critical of the unexamined nature of “scientific” knowledge. Instead, he promotes a critical examination of knowledge, a task facilitated by what he describes as a particular quality of mind.

The Sociological Imagination: A Quality of Mind

Criticising one’s own conception of the world means ... to make it coherent and unified and to criticis[e] all hitherto existing philosophy in so far as it has left layers incorporated into the popular philosophy. The beginning of the critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, that is, a ‘know thyself’ as the product of the historical process. (Gramsci, 1967, 59)

As discussed previously, Mills (1959) believes the typical individual is disoriented by, and disassociated from, the reality and complexity of the modern world (4). Lack of awareness of the connections between individual lives and public influences means it is atypical for the individual to attribute their personal troubles or well-being to history or social structure (Mills, 1959, 3-4). Mills (1959) follows up these claims with a call for reflexivity, or an active attempt to cultivate a quality of mind that is able to accurately “grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world” (4). This

quality of mind is a self-conscious attempt to engage in sense-making concerning the self and the world (Mills, 1959, 7). Rather than simply accepting or imbibing facts, and even more important than reasoning skills, Mills (1959) argues a quality of mind is required that enables thinkers to use information as well as reason in order to better understand themselves and social reality (5). This quality of mind is what he calls the sociological imagination.

Mills's (1959) conceptualization of one who possesses the sociological imagination strongly resembles Gramsci's (1967) organic intellectual. According to Gramsci (1967), everyone is a philosopher but some are unconscious philosophers who have not reached what he calls the stage of criticism and awareness (i.e. are not reflexive thinkers) (58). According to Gramsci (1967), we are born into certain imposed worlds, or what Mills (1959) calls personal milieux (58). Organic intellectuals are aware that these constructions and conceptions of the world are neither the inevitable product of history, nor are they external from relations of power, echoing Mills's (1959) sensitivity to and concern with history (Gramsci, 1967, 58-59, 119-120). Rather, organic intellectuals engage in the task of constructing their own conceptions of the world in a unified and coherent way, rejecting the disorganized and conformist notions of the "cave man" (Gramsci, 1967, 59). Rhetorically, Gramsci (1967) asks whether it is "preferable to 'think' without having critical awareness, in a disjointed and irregular way, in other words to 'participate' in a conception of the world 'imposed' mechanically by external environment", or to think consciously and critically (58). Gramsci (1967) therefore echoes sentiments proposed by Mills (1959), suggesting that most people do not think using the sociological imagination, or do not think organically.

Similarly, both Mills (1959) and Gramsci (1967) suggest that a reflexive thinker is logical and methodical, actively resisting tradition and the imposition of self-evident truths. In order to reveal traditional thinking, imposed worlds, or conventional constraints, they suggest that the individual must be aware of his own immediate world in addition to the larger world; in other words, there must be a critical understanding of both self and reality and the links between the two (Gramsci, 1967, 67). Further, the individual must be aware of history and its effects, because history reveals systems of thought and also the means by which an individual can situate himself (Gramsci, 1967, 59, 62). Where Mills (1959) focusses on the scientific origins and pitfalls of knowledge, Gramsci (1967) argues knowledge is historically bound and adopted by the collective rather than arrived at through reason (59). Gramsci (1967) discusses how modern thinking is in fact past or traditional thinking that has been summarized and includes all its errors and falsehoods (62). Where Mills (1959) proposes that the sociological imagination reawakens an individual's capacity for astonishment (8), Gramsci (1967) concludes pessimistically that it is difficult to change the thinking of the mass population or to introduce ideas in their "pure" form (71). Gramsci (1967) is deeply critical of existing thought, and not as optimistic as Mills (1959) concerning the possibility of imagination.

In considering the similarities between Mills (1959) and Gramsci (1967), we are able to locate Mills (1959) and the sociological imagination within the critical intellectual tradition. Whether thinking organically or with a sociological or criminological imagination, the idea of revealing traditional systems of thought and new worlds of possibility are ingrained in a critical discourse. Where Gramsci (1967) departs into a Marxian discourse on

the struggle for individual and class consciousness, Mills (1959) calls for the social scientist to fulfill a task and a promise: explicating social realities that the social individual can grasp.

The implications of Gramsci's (1967) ideas are also relevant to the study of popular culture and more specifically to the study of literature. The organic intellectual must distinguish between what Gramsci (1967) calls elements of the cave man and the modern man, or between popular prejudices and knowledge (59). However, I argue elements of the cave man, or mass culture, are worth studying and are certainly present in popular fiction. According to Gramsci (1967), language is the basis to conceptualize the world, and the degree of sophistication of use and grasp of language determines how broadly or reflexively the world is conceived (60). For Gramsci (1967), the world can only be fully realized or conceptualized through language. This can be used as an argument for a broader reading, and for reading fiction into criminology in order to introduce a more robust conception of criminological realities. The following section discusses the analytic framework proposed by Mills (1959) as suggested by the sociological imagination. This framework provides the language that helps make sense of social reality, including those realities contained in fiction.

The Sociological Imagination: An Analytic Framework

What are the social sciences all about? They ought to be about man and society and sometimes they are. They are attempts to help us understand biography and history, and the connections of the two in a variety of social structures. (Mills, 1959, 31-32)

The preceding quote is the foundation of a meta- analytic framework that is

consistent with both the object and the purpose of my analysis, elucidating the components and scope of the problem, as well as providing the language of analysis. Mills (1959) develops within his conception of the sociological imagination an analytic framework that considers both micro or biographical (i.e. the individual) and macro or societal (i.e. the structural) levels of analysis, as well as the connections between the two. Additionally, he suggests that the social sciences must address public issues and personal troubles, providing a language with which to visualize and describe the range of problems experienced by individuals and societies. This framework is carefully constructed in order to address what Mills (1959) believes to be the primary task of the social sciences: to engage in sense-making at the level of the individual and societal and to understand the relations between the two.

Mills's (1959) criminological imagination provides a meta-framework for this analysis and in particular the units of analysis (31-32). The units of analysis are biography, which includes the inner subjective life and experience of milieu as well as the external careers of individuals, and society, including structural change and societal transformation (Mills, 1959, 3). Although he identifies these separately, Mills (1959) believes these elements can only be understood in relation to one another (3). Significantly, Mills (1959) notes that this is not a new way of doing social science. In fact, he believes exemplary social science always takes this form, pointing to Veblen, Comte and Durkheim as examples of prominent thinkers who used this model of analysis (Mills, 1959, 6). Regardless of the object or scope of study, Mills (1959) claims that "[n]o social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has

completed its intellectual journey” (6).

Mills (1959) also provides the problems to be studied, including personal troubles of milieu and public issues of social structure (8). The former are categorized as private, as they relate to the individual and the social setting in which the individual exists and is personally aware (Mills, 1959, 8). The latter are public matters relating to institutions and social structures of society (Mills, 1959, 8).¹⁰ These are not necessarily separate entities, however, as there are links between milieu and the larger social structure, both of which are located within the context of history (Mills, 1959, 129-130). According to Mills (1959), “[t]he formulation of problems ... should include explicit attention to a range of public issues and of personal troubles; and they should open up for inquiry the causal connections between milieu and social structure” (130). Mills (1959) is careful not to oversimplify the issue, noting that there are many and varied milieu in which the individual exists and is connected to, and argues that awareness of these linkages must be incorporated into the analytic framework (10-11).

Mills (1959) suggests a method for identifying major issues and troubles; he proposes that values and threats to these values, whether they are articulated or not, should guide social science research (Mills, 1959, 11). According to his formulation, when cherished values are not threatened, there is general well-being; when cherished values are threatened, there is a crisis as public issue or personal trouble; when people are unaware of

¹⁰Mills (1959) provides a useful illustration to distinguish between these types of problems: “Consider marriage. Inside a marriage a man and a woman may experience personal troubles, but when the divorce rate during the first four years of marriage is 250 out of every 1,000 attempts, this is an indication of a structural issue having to do with the institutions of marriage and the family and other institutions that bear upon them.” (Mills, 1959, 9)

cherished values or of any threat, there is indifference; when people are unaware of cherished values but are aware of any threat, there is uneasiness (Mills, 1959, 11). Mills (1959) claims the sociological imagination is integral in identifying, formulating and articulating the problems of social science which may or may not be on the public consciousness (13). Using the sociological imagination to study fiction helps address what is on the public consciousness and restate it in criminological terms. This process is integral in clarifying and transmitting criminological knowledge about popular culture, and is a way to facilitate sense-making for the individual.

Mills (1959), therefore, provides the language and the focus of the study, as the criminological imagination is integral in identifying, formulating and articulating the units of analysis and the problems of social science (13). Mills (1959) explicates social analysis as a definable and usable set of traditions that are concerned with social structures, individuals and their history, and that focus on problems at the personal and/or public level (21). Having established that the individual and the structural and their corresponding troubles and issues are the focus of analytic attention, the following section elaborates on and develops more fully these concepts in order to ensure a beneficial criminological analysis of *Native Son*.

Understanding Biography: The Contributions of Katz and Symbolic Interactionism

Katz (1988) explicates a micro-sociology that corresponds to and further develops Mills's (1959) concept of biography. According to Mills (1959), the criminological imagination enables us "to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for

the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals” (5). In other words, sense-making is for, by, and at the level of the individual, even when considering society, because the individual is the point at which history and biography intersect (Mills, 1959, 7). Katz’s (1988) focus on the individual and his concern with real people and real life echo Mills’s (1959) humanistic concerns and provide a good foundation for the analysis to follow.

Katz (1988) believes traditional studies of crime and deviance focus on the search for background forces or factors, either in the offender’s psychological background or social environment, rather than on the seductive lived experience of criminality (3). Katz (1988) criticizes positivistic explanations of crime on the basis that many who fall into causal categories do not commit crimes, many who commit crimes do not fit into causal categories, and those who fall into causal categories commit crimes only at specific times (4). He suggests that regardless of background factors, the primary causal factor of crime is an external seductive impulse, or an attraction to commit crime (Katz, 1988, 4). In a marked departure from traditional studies, he does not search for specific reasons crimes are committed or suggest solutions to “the crime problem.” Instead, he frames crime as an experience that has meaning for the criminal actor (Goode, 1990, 7). In other words, Katz (1988) is concerned with what he calls the foreground of crime, emphasizing the significance of the criminal act and the actor’s experience of it. *Native Son* is a novel devoted to the significance and seductiveness of crime in the life of the protagonist, Bigger Thomas.

Katz (1988) focuses on the seduction of crime, or “those aspects in the foreground of criminality that make its various forms sensible, even sensually compelling, ways of being”

(3). He literally focuses on the senses, or what it means to feel, hear, see, and smell a particular crime, exploring the overlooked qualities of the deviant experience, rather than its characteristics or causes (Katz, 1988, 3). Instead of conceiving crime as an analytic category, he considers it to be a creative social process (Katz, 1988, 10). His focus is on explaining the process a person undergoes as he is seduced by criminality (Katz, 1988, 7). The guiding questions of this research are not why, but how a crime happens, and what individuals are trying to do when they commit a crime (Katz, 1988, 9). This focus on sensuality corresponds well to the text of *Native Son*, which describes several crimes in detail, and whose plot inexorably moves toward the commission or experience of these crimes.

Katz (1988) suggests that every type of crime has a set of individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. The first is a path of action, which includes the practical requirements for successfully committing the crime (Katz, 1988, 9). The second is a line of interpretation, which is how the criminal actor understands how he is and will be seen by others (Katz, 1988, 9). The third is an emotional process, involving those seductions and compulsions that lead the actor to commit the crime (Katz, 1988, 9). Katz (1988) understands the latter to be a dialectical process wherein a person “empowers the world to seduce him to criminality” (7). The distinction between Katz’s (1988) theory and psychological or other individualistic theories is that crime is the outcome of a process wherein external forces (from milieu or social structure, for example) as well as internal drives compel the individual to acts of deviance; in other words there is a dialectical relation between internal and external forces, compelling and seducing the individual to deviant

action.

Katz's (1988) emphasis on understanding the actor and the action in terms of a dialectical process reveals his reliance on symbolic interactionism. Mead (1955) is particularly helpful in explicating the process that informs or comprises the Self, society and action, and the relations between them (which corresponds to Katz's (1988) line of interpretation). According to Mead (1955), becoming a Self is a process that begins when an individual becomes an object to himself (138).¹¹ This happens when the individual conceives himself in relation to what Mead (1955) calls the generalized other, or the group or community that acts as a referent and determining factor in the individual's thinking and action (154-156). Thus, the development of a conception of Self is determined by how the individual perceives the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward one another, and also how the individual perceives himself in relation to the generalized other, insofar as he experiences or interacts with the generalized other (Mead, 1955, 158). Like Mills (1959), Mead (1955) emphasizes the importance of relations, suggesting "Selves can only exist in definite relationships to other selves" (164). In other words, selves are social, determined in large part by external societal forces and factors.

Mead further distinguishes between what he calls the "I" and the "Me." The "I" is the response of the individual to the attitudes of others, including drives and urges. The

¹¹Mead (1955) describes the process in the following way: "For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behaviour in which both he and they are involved" (138).

“Me” is how we believe others perceive us, and is the source of our reflection on how we ought to act given our interpretation of the situation (Mead, 1955, 173-178). Mead (1955) suggests that while the Self adopts the attitudes of others to belong to a community and to be considered a citizen, the Self also reacts to the social attitudes and changes in the community to which it belongs (199-200). In this way, a dialectical process is enacted whereby the social environment affects the development of the individual and the individual, through the process of change, necessarily effects change on the community (Mead, 1955, 215). This reflects Mills’s (1959) belief that there is a dialectical relation between the individual and social (6).¹²

In the tradition of symbolic interactionism, action involves the dialectical relations between the act and the interpretation of the situation, both of which are undertaken by the actor (Mead, 1955, 145). In other words, action is the result of self-interaction (Blumer, 1966, 536). Acts are constructed as a result of what individual takes into account, including wants, feelings, goals, and actions of others, rules of the group, the situation, conceptions of Self, memories and imagined consequences (Blumer, 1966, 537). The actor has to organize and make a decision based on these factors (Blumer, 1966, 537). This is in opposition to traditional thought that action is a product of environment or heredity, for example; it is instead a process of active determination rather than determined action (Blumer, 1966, 537). The focus on Self and action as the outcome of a process of self-interaction requires the

¹²In his words, “[w]e have come to know that every individual lives ... in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequences. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove.” (Mills, 1959, 6)

focus of social scientists “to shift from a preoccupation with initiating factor and terminal result to a preoccupation with a process of formation. They would have to view action as something constructed by the actor instead of something evoked from him” (Blumer, 1966, 542). This process is in large part the result of a dialectical relationship between the Self and the generalized other.

Katz (1988) is primarily concerned with sensual details and the dynamic through which an individual experiences crime, or what Ferrell (1992) calls “the interactional strategies and personal politics out of which a criminal event is constructed” (para. 3, 5). Katz (1988), therefore, is helpful in further developing and explicating the factors, meanings and events that occur within Mills’s (1959) biography and milieu. Katz (1988) draws on symbolic interactionism to understand the situation’s social negotiation and construction. Symbolic interactionism, although it elaborates a discussion of society, discussed in the following section, does not correspond well to Mills’s (1959) structural understanding of society. Therefore, the work of the Birmingham School (Clarke et al., 2006), which lends a materialist understanding of social structure, gives better insight into Mills’s (1959) conception of society, while retaining a commitment to symbolic meanings.

Understanding Society: The Contributions of the Birmingham School

In order to better understand the contributions of the Birmingham School to the development of a structural or materialist understanding of society, it will be contrasted with the symbolic interactionist understanding of society. According to symbolic interactionists, society is viewed “not as an established structure but as people meeting their conditions of

life; it sees social action not as an emanation of societal structure but as a formation made by human actors” (Blumer, 1966, 543). In the symbolic interactionist understanding, therefore, society is social rather than structural; society is understood to be the result of dialectical relations and constructions of meaning that govern actions and selves. Mead’s (1955) major premise is that society cannot be composed of elements outside the individual’s understanding and life-process and therefore even institutional aspects of society must have social elements, or represent common social responses (257). Mead (1955) defines institutions as common responses to certain social situations, although the forms of these responses vary according to the institution.¹³ He argues these institutions are necessary to help the individual develop fully by defining the general social, or socially responsible, patterns of individual (Mead, 1955, 262). Conflicts with institutions are seen as the result of conflict with perceptions of Self or community, and lack of integration with these community values (Mead, 1955, 304-307).

The symbolic interactionist understanding of societal organization is problematic because it cannot access or formulate a language to explain the structural elements of society that exist independently of human interaction (Layder, 1993, 103). As Clarke, Hall, Jefferson and Roberts (2006) of the Birmingham School argue, while there is some

¹³The following is a portion of Mead’s (1955) discussion on societal or institutional responses: “In the community there are certain ways of acting under situations which are essentially identical ... There are, then, whole series of such common responses in the community in which we live, and such responses are what we term ‘institutions.’ The institution represents a common response on the part of all members of the community to a particular situation ... Thus the institutions of society are organized forms of group or social activity – forms so organized that the individual members of society can act adequately and socially by taking the attitudes of others toward these activities.” (Mead, 1955, 260-262)

individuation, biographies are enacted “in and through the determined spaces of the structures and cultures in which the individuals are located” (45). The Birmingham School recognizes, as Mills (1959) did, that society has a structural form within which individuals live their biographies (7). In other words, people are born into and subsequently formed by institutions and structures, not just social relationships or interactions (Clarke et al., 2006, 4). What ties symbolic interactionists and the Birmingham School together, however, is the emphasis on the importance of expression and meaning given to social and material existence (Clarke et al., 2006, 4). For the Birmingham School, these meanings are not just found or created in interactions, but are created, transmitted and reproduced in social structures.

The Birmingham School conceptualizes the structure of society as unequal and hierarchical; individuals are constrained by what they call fields of possibility and are ranked according to productive relations, wealth and power (Clarke et al., 2006, 5). Social structure is therefore characterized by relations of domination and subordination, and is also an expression of the power, position and hegemony of the dominant interests (Clarke et al., 2006, 5, 26). These relations are closely linked to production, which orders everyday life from housing and the ecology of the neighbourhood to the ideal of a nuclear family (Clarke et al., 2006, 27). Although these relations are determined primarily by production, they are sustained by an ideology of affluence which promotes the idea of a meritocracy in order to give the working class a stake in production, contributing to the idea of consensus rather than a hegemonic ordering of society (Clarke et al., 2006, 27-29).

Since society is structured and ordered by capitalist production, which is necessarily

hierarchical, struggle is inevitable, according to the Birmingham School (Clarke et al., 2006, 6). However, the hegemony of dominant interests gives the appearance that consent and conformity are not coerced in order to make the *status quo* seem legitimate, natural and normal (Clarke et al., 2006, 28-29). Because the hegemony of the dominant interests requires legitimation, the reproduction of dominant ideologies is required in order to manufacture and transmit consent; state apparatuses and institutions including the family, school church, cultural institutions, law, police, army, and courts provide these legitimating ideologies for the hierarchical structuring of a society (Clarke et al., 2006, 30).

Therefore, actions cannot be understood solely in terms of social interactions, but must be understood to occur within a specific context and setting. The context refers to macro social organization and includes structures such as race, class and gender, values and traditions, forms of social and economic organization, as well as power relations (Layder, 1993, 72). The setting refers to intermediate social organization which includes work, education and leisure (Layder, 1993, 72). To better understand the distinction between context and setting, Clarke et al.'s (2006) claim that institutions have power concentrated within them will be considered (32). Power relations in general belong to the realm of context, while these power relations gain substance in a particular institution or setting. For example, a judge derives her authority from the structure and power of the criminal justice system; this power is not inherent within the person of the judge, but is derived from the status inferred by the court structure. While actions that break the law may evoke a social response, this is incidental to the structural response (i.e. a trial). This structural response reacts to a threat to existing power relations, demonstrates the power within the setting of the

court as an institution and an embodiment of justice, and also transmits an ideology of justice.

This understanding of the transmission of ideology through structural apparatuses emphasizes the need for a historical understanding of social structure because ideology is subject to change as well as contradiction (Clarke et al., 2006, 30). Although the existence of a hegemony implies general consent, Clarke et al. (2006) suggest the creation of subcultures is evidence of attempts to resolve contradictions inherent in the social structure (Clarke et al., 2006, 21, 23). Individuals and collectives therefore do not simply act according to social responses and interactions, they react to contradictions between ideology and opportunity (Clarke et al., 2006, 25). This response is not always social in nature, but may be functional or structural as individuals or collectives react to the hegemony, reject the dominant ideology and/or recognize structural limitations (Clarke et al., 2006, 20).

Therefore, Mills's (1959) biography and social structure, further developed by Katz (1988) and the symbolic interactionists as well as the Birmingham School, provide the units of analysis. The following section discusses the general approach to methods as discussed by Mills (1959) concerning the sociological imagination.

The Sociological Imagination: A Method

It is neither by dogmatic models of Scientific Method nor by pretentious proclamations of The Problems of Social Science that social scientists may hope to develop their disciplines in a fruitful way (Mills, 1959, 130).

Having begun his discussion of the sociological imagination with an emphasis on a critical quality of mind and by including both individuals and structures within the

parameters of the analytic framework, it is unsurprising that Mills (1959) goes on to critique the scientific paradigm predominant in the social sciences. Mills (1959) critiques methods and conceptual systems; he calls them a set of bureaucratic techniques that inhibit social science research and imagination (20). Instead of formulaic methods, Mills (1959) instead emphasizes the importance of fluidity in both methods and theory. He cautions, however, that neither methods nor theory are the “actual work” of the social scientist (Mills, 1959, 122). Instead, they are ways of approaching and studying social problems or phenomena and suggest ways of extracting meaning or significance from data. Mills (1959) is against allowing one part of the knowledge process, including grand theory (which generalizes problems at the historical and structural level) as well as abstracted empiricism (which is so dominated by method there are no substantive propositions or theories) to dominate (33, 55). He identifies and cautions against the problematic tendencies toward grand theory and abstracted empiricism in the social sciences.

The first tendency, what Mills (1959) calls grand theory, is an attempt to create an overarching theory of social life, is historic and systematic, and can become too narrow, attempting to fit human history within its bounds (22-23). Due to its focus on macro level issues, it is necessarily abstract and removed from the understanding of the individual who is so central to Mills’s (1959) conceptualization of good social science (34). Consequently, one sign of grand theory is a lack of intelligibility (Mills, 1959, 27). Because it is so abstract, grand theory cannot address problems within historical and structural contexts, and its poor formulation and communication of problems makes it seem removed from social reality (Mills, 1959, 33). To avoid this trap, Mills (1959) suggests “every self-conscious

thinker must at all times be aware of ... the levels of abstraction on which he is working.

The capacity to shuttle between levels of abstraction, with ease and with clarity, is a signal mark of the imaginative and systematic thinker” (34). In particular, he emphasizes the need to be precise when using abstract terms or concepts such as capitalism or power elite (Mills, 1959, 34). Most importantly, Mills (1959) concludes that no one grand theory can provide all answers and can become so concerned with supporting its own theoretical system that social science never occurs (47-48).

The second tendency is toward empirical studies of facts and problems which can be an insignificant potpourri of facts and figures (Mills, 1959, 23, 66, 71). Mills (1959) attributes the popularity of method to the fact that “any fairly intelligent person” can learn to sample, conduct interviews, classify answers and reduce to statistics and charts (50). Problematically, this encourages a mean of mediocrity and a tendency to rely on traditional concepts rather than invent new ones or challenge old ones (Mills, 1959, 54). Further, the significance or relevance of the findings is called into question because the focus is frequently on form rather than content (Mills, 1959, 55). Rather than an inhibited social science, Mills (1959) encourages an imaginative one that is free to engage with social realities rather than comply with formulae (56-58).

Mills (1959) concludes that both grand theory and abstracted empiricism lack a connection to substantive problems (75). “As practices, they may be understood as insuring that we do not learn too much about man and society – the first by formal and cloudy obscurantism, the second by formal and empty ingenuity” (Mills, 1959, 75). These “withdrawals from the tasks of social sciences” put into perspective the importance of method

and theory, which are essential, but should not inhibit or hinder the tasks of social sciences, which is sense-making (Mills, 1959, 50). Mills (1959) argues for a middle ground between these two extremes as social scientists search for an optimal level of verification and also relevance (71).

Having established and described the problematic tendencies in the social sciences, Mills (1959) reiterates that the task of the social scientist is to identify, elucidate and resolve public issues and private troubles. Once a problem is identified, Mills (1959) suggests a conception that contains some empirical referent must be developed. Balancing the idea of the problem with its content is the challenge, in order to avoid grand theory or abstracted empiricism (124). He suggests the conception must be grounded in reality and also point abstractly toward social and historical structures (Mills, 1959, 124).

Although Mills (1959) rejects the preeminence of the scientific method, questioning its usefulness and validity, he still emphasizes the need for social scientists to explore problems in an orderly way (33). This may include a selection of materials, conceptions and methods from multiple disciplines since he argues that “the requirements of one’s problem, rather than the limitations of any one rigid method, should be ... [the] paramount consideration” in determining the method (Mills, 1959, 142, 146). The overriding consideration in selecting a method is that social science depends on the study of biography and social structure within history, and the method should be able to consider these as well as the relations between them (Mills, 1959, 143).

Although he critiques social science for its tendencies toward grand theory and abstracted empiricism, Mills (1959) cautions against intellectual snobbery and segregation.

He notes that “differences among social scientists occur not between those who would observe without thinking and those who would think without observing; the differences have rather to do with what kinds of thinking, what kinds of observing, and what kinds of links, if any, are between the two” (Mills, 1959, 33). For Mills (1959) there is no single method to guide the sociological imagination, but instead a dynamic interplay between micro and macro issues, concepts, and frameworks that results in the modification and clarification of ideas and problems. Still, this is to be an orderly and systematic rather than haphazard and eclectic endeavour in order to produce worthwhile knowledge (Mills, 1959, 126-127). The following section discusses the method with which a systematic and beneficial analysis of the novel *Native Son* will be conducted.

Method: Textual Analysis

The criminological imagination serves as a broad conceptual framework within which criminological theory can contribute ideas of significant value. In particular, as suggested by the analytic language and framework of the criminological imagination, this thesis will examine the dialectical relations between troubles and issues, biography and social structure, milieu and society within the context of history. I will devote analytic attention to the novel in order to demonstrate and explore different ways of seeing, expressing and analysing crime in fiction. To do so, I will use the qualitative technique of textual analysis.

Fairclough (2003) introduces his comprehensive book on textual analysis to researchers in the social science and humanities who have little background in conducting

language analysis; criminology is not even included in the list of disciplines that might find this methodology useful (11). Granted, the list was likely not intended to be exhaustive, but this omission is suggestive of the tendency in criminology to exclude this particular method. As a method, textual analysis is relatively new to the social sciences, although it is the primary method of legal analysis (Kraska & Neuman, 2008, 437, 445). Criminology has a long tradition of quantitative approaches that are characterized by an ontology that posits a reality that is accessible and knowable rather than relative and constructed, an epistemology that is objectivist rather than subjectivist, and a methodology that is experimental rather than interpretive (Lincoln & Guba, 2007, 256). Textual analysis is a qualitative method that employs inductive rather than deductive reasoning, and findings are derived through interpretation rather than the scientific method (Neuman, Wiegand & Winterdyk, 2004, 66-67). Textual analysis is a tool of social science that examines and critiques the manifest and latent content of a body of communication (written, oral or visual) in order to uncover or understand its meaning (Krippendorff, 2004, xvii). From this definition, language is understood to be an integral part of social life, and texts are understood to “speak” to people, providing representations from which meaning can be derived (Fairclough, 2003, 2-3; & Krippendorff, 2004, 16, 19). Denzin (2003) notes such interpretation or meaning-making is necessary because “[n]othing speaks for itself” (447). Literature is a privileged method of communication because meaning is both inherent and expected within the content, making its analysis natural (Schirato & Webb, 2004, p. 25).

Some argue that texts have meaning within themselves that can be discovered or extracted, while others propose that meanings are constructed from a text (Marvasti, 2003,

9). Hermeneutics is an interpretive form of social science that is distinct from empiricist social science, and that encourages a variety of interpretations and understandings (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, 91). Although textual analysis is a relatively recent addition to the social sciences, hermeneutics originated in the Renaissance, where exegesis (the interpretation of texts) of the Bible and classical texts was common (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, 92). Hermeneutics was first introduced to the social sciences by German thinkers, such as Weber, who distinguished between natural and cultural sciences, rejecting positivism in favour of hermeneutics (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, 94). Rather than focussing on identifying and explaining causes, hermeneutics adopts an inductive approach that explores the dialectical relations between the parts and the whole; it is believed that in understanding more of each, it is possible to understand more of both (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, 92, 95). This approach, therefore, corresponds well to the concerns of the criminological imagination. However, there are still few clear rules for interpretation (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, 97; & Fairclough, 2003, 1-2). Instead, the importance of process, including a pattern of interpretation that is coherent and consistent rather than common sense, is emphasized over the conclusions (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009, 98-99).

Schirato and Webb (2004) note that interpretation is not passive, but is interactive and creative; interpretation is also selective as certain aspects are studied to the exclusion of others (14). As a result, interpretations of a text may vary between individuals due to differences in cultural, methodological, or disciplinary emphases, for example (Fairclough, 2003, 14; & Schirato & Webb, 2004, 16). Fairclough (2003) attributes differences in interpretation to the impossibility of fully reducing the reality and complexity of a text (14).

Another person could interpret *Native Son* in an entirely different way, but ideally, multiple ways of viewing and multiple viewers create a more complete understanding of a work of literature. The possibility of ongoing production of knowledge from a single text is seen as a strength in the hermeneutic tradition, because the viewer, not the content has changed (Schirato & Webb, 2004, 25-26). For this reason, *Native Son* is a useful focus of analysis because anyone at any time can produce a new meaning from the same material content.

This emphasis on the importance of the production of meanings or knowledge is a focal concern of Mills's (1959) and a key function and characteristic of social science. As discussed in this chapter, Mills (1959) understands the sociological imagination to be a quality of mind, an analytic framework, and a method. He also believes it is a method of knowledge production. The following section reiterates Mills's (1959) concerns about science and claims about the sociological imagination, since it was these concerns that prompted him to write *The Sociological Imagination*. This discussion helps clarify the purpose and promise of social science.

The Sociological Imagination: A Method of Knowledge Production

Much that has passed for 'science' is now felt to be dubious philosophy; much that is held to be 'real science' is often felt to provide only confused fragments of the realities among which men live. Men of science, it is widely felt, no longer try to picture reality as a whole or to present a true outline of human destiny. Moreover, 'science' seems to many less a creative ethos and a manner of orientation than a set of Science Machines, operated by technicians and controlled by economic and military men who neither embody nor understand science as ethos and orientation. In the meantime, philosophers who speak in the name of science often transform it into 'scientism,' making out its experience to be identical with human experience, and claiming that only by its method can the problems of life be solved. With all this, many cultural workmen have come to feel that 'science' is a false and pretentious

Messiah, or at the very least a highly ambiguous element in modern civilization.
(Mills, 1959, 16)

Mills (1959) claims intellectual ages are characterized by dominant ways of thinking that produce certain types of knowledges (13-14). He critiques the dominance of the physical sciences as the primary mode of scientific thought and method, noting “[t]he technique of the laboratory’ has been the accepted mode of procedure and the source of intellectual security” (Mills, 1959, 14). He concludes that the physical sciences are inadequate to explore cultural meaning or to produce creative knowledge (Mills, 1959, 15-18). Because the physical sciences cannot adequately address social issues or produce relevant cultural knowledge, Mills (1959) suggests in the preceding quote that the current esteem for science is worth revisiting. He suggests that science has become a set of techniques rather than a creative expression and method of knowledge production. Science is conceptualized as being static rather than a way to make sense of the world; in his words, science is not understood in terms of ethos and orientation.

When Mills (1959) talks about the sociological imagination, he discusses something creative rather than descriptive (40). The sociological imagination is a process that produces knowledge and understanding, it does not derive or distill it from a greater truth or reality. Mills (1959) seeks to produce knowledge that enables the individual to engage in sense-making about self and structure in various social realities. While acknowledging the complexity of social realities, Mills (1959) maintains that the sociological imagination, as a method of knowledge production, helps to make sense of the life of an individual, the history of a society, and the dialectical relations between them (3). As Hunt (1989) points out, “all

intellectual inquiry is a construct which deploys concepts and language in such a way that the selection of concepts and language is determinant of the kind of knowledge that can be produced” (160). The selection of the criminological imagination as a meta-framework produces worthwhile and useful knowledge because it requires the researcher to be critically aware of conceptions and procedures, provides a language to clarify these conceptions and procedures, is general enough to be used in a variety of research settings, and it liberates rather than limits the imagination (Mills, 1959, 120).

The use of a criminological imagination requires the social scientist to make choices about conceptions of the world. As Gramsci (1967) says, “[p]hilosophy in general does not in fact exist: various philosophies and conceptions of the world exist and one always makes a choice between them” (61). When we explore Crank and King’s (2007) babble or use Mills’s (1959) sociological imagination, we choose certain normative worlds and knowledges to produce. As Gramsci (1967) notes, we choose our philosophies (61). Similarly, the conception of the world and the knowledge derived from it represent choices. Gramsci (1967) argues these choices are political (61), which is unsurprising given his socialist stance. Mills (1959) also acknowledges that choices must be made concerning political values as well as intellectual issues because, in his words, “we cannot very well state any problem until we know *whose* problem it is” (76). Mills (1959) clearly articulates the need to make explicit the values guiding the selection of problems and key conceptions, as well as how these values affect the conclusions (78).

Mills (1959) challenges the bureaucratic use of social research, such as research commissioned by correctional or military establishments, because the ideological nature of

this research is frequently unacknowledged; as well, this form of research puts criminology in danger of becoming only a practical science that serves dominant economic, political and military purposes (80-81, 92). He argues the result of these choices is that researchers become “intellectual technicians” rather than Gramsci’s (1967) organic intellectual (Mills, 1959, 103). Due to the political nature of social science research, Mills (1959) promotes the independence of the researcher to the extent possible, a proposition that is possible in the project outlined in the following section (181).

Similarly, Taylor, Walton and Young (1974) suggest the outcome of knowledge production should be considered (446). For example, Gramsci (1967) proposes that organic intellectuals experience congruence in thought and action; in other words, thinking organically leads to action (64, 67). According to Mills (1959), however, the sociological imagination reawakens an individual’s capacity for astonishment, and also helps the individual make sense of the self and the world (8). Mills (1959) proposes that the job of the social scientist is to challenge the assumed structure of society (78-79), to provide context and meaning for the individual life (5, 187), and to challenge the *status quo* of the discipline (184). Knowledge produced using the sociological imagination, therefore, should be revelatory, in contrast to research that is mundane (Mills, 1959, 105). That is the standard by which the subsequent analysis of *Native Son* is measured.

Chapter 3: Analysis of Native Son

Introduction

I have argued that creative and imaginative analysis is necessary for a reflexive criminology, and that exploration of the fictional reality is both legitimate and potentially useful for this endeavour. This exploration is not simply a matter of novelty, but of renewal, and also serves to introduce a new perspective to criminological theory and practice. In particular, this analysis demonstrates how criminological ideas can be applied in systematic and yet creative ways to produce differing descriptions and explanations, reinforcing the value of considering alternative rather than traditional objects of criminological study. This analysis demonstrates that while both literature and criminological conceptual systems are imperfect mirrors of reality, they provide maps for exploring the world (Sayer, 1992, 59). This thesis is intended to reveal the constraints around criminology, demonstrate the benefits of introducing literature as an object of study as well as the benefits of the criminological imagination, and contribute new criminological meanings and understandings derived from the novel *Native Son*.

To challenge the assertions of Mills (1959) and others regarding the adequacy and usefulness of fiction to the field of criminology discussed in the first chapter, and to demonstrate that the criminological imagination provides an ideal meta-framework with which to consider fiction as discussed in the second chapter, this chapter contains an analysis of the novel *Native Son* by Richard Wright (2005). This analysis incorporates the criminological imagination as a quality of mind, an analytic framework, and a method and also demonstrates the kinds of knowledges that can be produced when two seemingly

incompatible analytic frameworks are integrated within the meta-framework of the criminological imagination. The specific language provided by Katz (1988) and the symbolic interactionists as well as the Birmingham School (Clarke et al., 2006) provides more nuance than that provided by Mills (1959); this language can be integrated into his meta-framework, thereby yielding an holistic account of social phenomena.

Introduction to Native Son

Written by Richard Wright (2005) and first published in 1940, *Native Son* is an American novel set in Chicago in the 1930s that deals with themes of racism and violence and with the experiences of an individual (Bigger Thomas) within society and the criminal justice system. Wright (2005) is an icon of American literature and history, having written powerful and controversial literature dealing with race, class and politics. In addition to their literary merit, his works depict a stark and unequal social reality and advocate radical social change, attracting interdisciplinary attention. There have been many literary studies of *Native Son*, but two analyses in particular attempt to transcend disciplinary boundaries and say something of criminological relevance, and also provide a rationale for engaging with *Native Son*.¹⁴

¹⁴Friedland (1991) collected essays by English professors who lectured in a law school seminar that was intended to provide ““insights into aspects of crime, the criminal process, and the history of the criminal law by analysing the way perceptive writers have dealt with matters relating to crime”” (xi). Of particular interest were issues of meaning and justice (Friedland, 1991, xi). Importantly, this work emphasizes the amorphous boundaries between law and literature, suggesting that these realities can be explored without being concretized (Friedland, 1991, xii). In his analysis of *Native Son*, Blake (1991) introduces the “unease” readers feel about the novel, citing concerns about its literary quality, its depiction of social reality, its potentially negative impact on blacks, and its Marxian content (187-188). His analysis centres on relations

In addition to its sociological and criminological relevance, the novel was chosen based on criteria proposed by Mills (1959) and elaborated by Rafter (2006). Mills (1959) believes research must have genuine relevance and clear, logical connections to the social world it is problematizing and/or explaining (73). Rafter (2006) provides four criteria that help meet these conditions (7-8). First, *Native Son* was both critically acclaimed and well-received by the public. It was the first book by an African-American to be featured by the Book-of-the-Month Club, making it the first black novel to be widely read by a racially

between fiction and reality, and between law, morality, justice, and social reality, as well as the meaning we can derive from these relations. Blake's (1991) study is instructive in pointing to the usefulness of exploring competing views and categorizations to gain a fuller appreciation of the complexity of a phenomenon. He emphasizes that literature evokes a response, and that controversy or conflict is helpful in pointing toward something worth studying (Blake, 1991, 190). Further, he demonstrates how literature is a vessel from which we can derive meaning (Blake, 1991, 189). He suggests that a provocative work like *Native Son* be continually revisited to extract new meanings and understandings of categories, particularly as they pertain to social fact and reality (Blake, 1991, 195).

Unlike the previous approach that could be characterized as a literary approach dealing with criminological issues, Ruggiero (2003) approaches fiction as a means of clarifying criminological concepts as well as a means of pedagogy (1). In his words, fiction is "a tool for the communication of sociological meaning and the elaboration of criminological analysis" (Ruggiero, 2003, 1). Ruggiero (2003) premises his analysis on the grounds that ethnic minorities pose a problem (105). He does not mean that their existence is a problem, but that they are frequently studied in criminology as offenders or victims, raising concerns about marginalization, violence, and institutional racism (Ruggiero, 2003, 105). He uses *Native Son* as an exemplar of these concerns as represented in literature and as an opportunity to revisit issues such as race-inspired hate and fear (Ruggiero, 2003, 127). Further, he extends existing criminological ideas to explain the specific actions of the character and violence committed by Bigger Thomas (Ruggiero, 2003, 132). For example, Ruggiero (2003) claims violence is an option available to all people, but violence primarily works to the detriment of the powerless rather than the powerful (132). He demonstrates the strength of this claim by looking at the cost Bigger paid for his violence, as compared to the violence exerted by the criminal justice system against Bigger (Ruggiero, 2003, 132). A significant part of Ruggiero's (2003) exploration, therefore, pertains to categories and categorizations, linking what he finds in the novel to help explicate criminological ideas. In this instance, he discusses what he calls a diseconomy of violence to better understand violent criminal social interaction (Ruggiero, 2003, 132).

mixed audience (Rampersad, 2005, xxi); it is twentieth on the Modern Library's hundred best novels of the last century (Random House, 2007); and its protagonist, Bigger Thomas, is twentieth on Book Magazine's hundred best fictional characters since 1900 (Ottawa Citizen, 2002, C13-C14). Further, *Native Son* sold a quarter of a million copies in one year and is still in print in multiple languages today (Rampersad, 2005, xxi); it was adapted into a stage play by Orson Welles (Rampersad, 2005, xxi); and it is still referenced in popular culture in such films as *Save the Last Dance* and *American History X*. Second, its themes of racism and violence in urban America remain both relevant and significant, as indicated by the number of criminological studies on these areas, but were shocking for the time. Third, the novel remains a controversial landmark in black American and literary culture and has enjoyed an unusual amount of analytic attention as a result (e.g. Sagarin, 1981; Blake, 1991; Kelly, 1991; Engel, 2003; & Ruggiero, 2003). Sagarin (1981), for example, describes *Native Son* as "a powerful novel" (14), and includes it in his selected list of literature for further study (160). Finally, *Native Son* serves as a good entry point for discussing issues of criminological relevance. For example, Engel (2003) advocates the use of *Native Son* to talk about themes of race, class and justice in America (349-350). Similarly, Kelly (1991) discusses "the great American novel" (*Native Son*) in terms of the interactions between the private individual and the larger social construct of race, and the consequences of such relations and categorizations (49). *Native Son*, therefore, avoids Brown's (2004) injunction against analyses that are specialized or specific, and instead provides an ideal case study for diverse criminological exploration (208). My exploration of this novel not only helps illustrate the criminological imagination, but also enables engagement with an alternative source of valuable insights into criminological themes and issues.

Plot Synopsis

Native Son covers a very short time span in which the protagonist, Bigger Thomas, commits two murders, is caught, and is put on trial. There are three parts to the novel corresponding to these events called “Fear,” “Flight” and “Fate.” Bigger is a young black man on welfare who is pressured into accepting a chauffeuring job with the white upper-middle class Dalton family in order to support his mother and younger brother and sister. On his first day, Bigger murders Mary Dalton and disposes of her body. He then convinces his girlfriend, Bessie Mears, to help him make it seem like Mary has been kidnapped and the two attempt to extort money from Mr. and Mrs. Dalton. When Bigger’s deception is discovered, he kills Bessie Mears during his escape. He is soon captured and put on trial.

The characters in *Native Son* are symbolic. Bigger Thomas represents the worst possible stereotypes of a working class black person. Mr. Dalton owns several poorly maintained buildings in Chicago’s South Side that house black people at exorbitant rates, including the one in which Bigger’s family lives. He also engages in minor acts of philanthropy toward black people, such as sending ping pong tables to the local community centre. Mr. Dalton represents the hierarchical, capitalist, and seemingly benevolent white upper-middle class aspect of society. Mrs. Dalton is blind and dresses all in white. She is the one to discover Bigger in her daughter’s room, contributing to the circumstances that lead Bigger to commit his first murder. She represents the hegemonic and omnipresent spectre and values of white society that Bigger struggles with and against. Mary Dalton is an only child and is enamoured with Jan, a Communist. She rejects many of her mother and

father's beliefs, but her friendly attitude toward Bigger confuses and angers him. She represents a well-meaning but ignorant and ill-fated attempt on the part of white people to emancipate black people. Bessie Mears is Bigger's girlfriend who exchanges sex for alcohol. She represents black people who try to ignore structures of oppression and misery by remaining ignorant and unaware. Other characters are secondary and will be introduced as necessary to further the analysis. These characters help provide both the biographical and societal context; while Bigger interacts with and has relationships with these characters, the characters are also symbolic of societal relations.

An Analysis of Native Son Using the Criminological Imagination

What follows is an analysis of four events in *Native Son* that lend themselves to a fruitful exploration using the criminological imagination. This exploration clarifies what Candido (1995) calls the rudimentary social science in literature as well as criminological concepts by engaging with them through literature like Ruggiero (2003) suggests. Specifically, Katz's (1988) treatment of the badass, righteous slaughter, and cold-blooded, senseless murder are discussed in relation to the novel. These concepts are discussed at the level of biography as well as society, using the language provided by symbolic interactionists and the Birmingham School. This analysis demonstrates that the criminological imagination is a useful meta-framework and makes explicit the criminological relevance of a study of literature. This study is significant because it demonstrates how seemingly incompatible frameworks or criminological theories such as Katz's (1988) descriptions of the seductions of crime and the Birmingham School's understanding of class culture can be integrated using

the criminological imagination as a meta-framework, resulting in greater criminological understanding. This study is necessary to move us toward a greater appreciation of the criminological imagination, as well as a greater understanding of the benefits of exploring fictional realities.

Analysis One: Ways of the Badass

Katz (1988) describes the badass as primarily a youth phenomenon wherein young people overtly embrace various symbols, attitudes and actions of deviance (80). The three stages, comprising varying degrees of deviance required to become a badass include: being *tough* rather than morally malleable, constructing *alien* ways of living that are distinct from and hostile to convention, and demonstrating *meanness* through irrational violence or the threat of violence (Katz, 1988, 80). Being *tough* involves portraying a tough appearance through clothes or symbols and engaging in tough interactions that ignore the conventions of civility (Katz, 1988, 81-83). Being *alien* allows the individual to move beyond the negativity of being *tough* and permits a certain creativity in constructing subcultures, including ways to walk, talk, and look (Katz, 1988, 87-90). Finally, being *mean* shows you mean it, “it” being the possibility/reality of inflicting violence or chaos on anyone at any time for any reason (Katz, 1988, 99). Bigger Thomas and his friends, Gus, G.H. and Jack, are badasses, according to Katz’s (1988) stages of deviance. In the scene below, Bigger and Gus meet near Doc’s poolroom and demonstrate ways of being *tough* and *alien*.

“Hi, Bigger!”

“What you saying, Gus?”

“Nothing. Seen G.H. or Jack yet?”

"Naw. You?"

"Naw. Say, you got a cigarette?"

"Yeah."

Bigger took out his pack and gave Gus a cigarette; he lit his and held the match for Gus. They leaned their backs against the red-brick wall of a building, smoking, their cigarettes slanting white across their black chins. ... He puffed slightly, relaxed, his mind pleasantly vacant of purpose. Every slight movement in the street evoked a casual curiosity in him. Automatically, his eyes followed each car as it whirred over the smooth black asphalt. A woman came by and he watched the gentle sway of her body until she disappeared into a doorway.

[...They watch a plane...]

"I could fly one of them things if I had a chance," Bigger mumbled reflectively, as though talking to himself.

Gus pulled down the corners of his lips, stepped out from the wall, squared his shoulders, doffed his cap, bowed low and spoke with mock deference:

"Yessuh."

"You go to hell," Bigger said, smiling.

"Yessuh," Gus said again.

"I could fly a plane if I had a chance," Bigger said.

"If you wasn't black and if you had some money and if they'd let you go to that aviation school, you could fly a plane," Gus said.

For a moment Bigger contemplated all the "ifs" that Gus had mentioned. Then both boys broke into hard laughter, looking at each other through squinted eyes.

[...]

"Let's play 'white,'" Bigger said, referring to a game of play-acting in which he and his friends imitated the ways and manners of white folks.

"I don't feel like it," Gus said.

"General!" Bigger pronounced in a sonorous tone, looking at Gus expectantly.

"Aw, hell! I don't want to play," Gus whined.

"You'll be court-martialed," Bigger said, snapping out his words with military precision.

"Nigger, you nuts!" Gus laughed.

"General!" Bigger tried again, determinedly.

Gus looked wearily at Bigger, then straightened, saluted and answered:

"Yessuh."

"Send your men over the river at dawn and attack the enemy's left flank," Bigger ordered.

"Yessuh."

"Send the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Regiments," Bigger said, frowning. "And attack with tanks, gas, planes, and infantry."

"Yessuh!" Gus said again, saluting and clicking his heels.

For a moment they were silent, facing each other, their shoulders thrown back, their lips compressed to hold down the mounting impulse to laugh. Then they guffawed, partly at

themselves and partly at the vast white world that sprawled and towered in the sun before them.

“Say, what’s a ‘left flank’?” Gus asked.

“I don’t know,” Bigger said. “I heard it in the movies.” (Wright, 2005, 15-18)

Bigger and Gus demonstrate *toughness* in terms of their morals, appearance, and interactions. This scene takes place during a workday; by leaning against a wall, Bigger and Gus reject what Wright (2005) describes as the Christian work ethic which is embodied by the Daltons who believe in hard work and living a clean life (56). The idleness of these young men is in contrast or contradiction to one of the primary values of white society; that is, the economic imperative to follow the American Dream. In addition to their adoption of alternative morals, Bigger and Gus portray a tough appearance by slouching against the wall and smoking cigarettes. This contrasts with the mock military straightness (and implied straight living) Gus adopts when they play “white.” They also engage in tough interactions that ignore the conventions of civility; Gus calls Bigger a “Nigger” in contrast to the alternative “Negro” which is used by others in the novel. Finally, the rich description of colour, in particular the contrast of the white cigarettes against their black chins, creates an evocative symbol of rebellion.

Although their *toughness* is enacted at the level of biography and in a particular milieu, this *toughness* cannot be wholly attributed to the biography and milieu in which Bigger and Gus live. According to Clarke et al. (2006), “biographies only make sense in terms of the structures and cultures through which the individual constructs himself” (45). As Katz (1988) explains, being tough involves portraying a tough appearance through clothes or symbols (81-83). Clarke et al. (2006) describe a concept called style that similarly

emphasizes the importance of symbols. According to Clarke et al. (2006), subcultures “adopt and adapt material objects - goods and possessions - and reorganise them into distinctive ‘styles’ which express the collectivity of their being-as-a-group” (30). Bigger and Gus appropriate material objects (the building and cigarettes) in order to express a certain style. With their casual stance, the building against which they lean is transformed from a structure that contains a place of business into a public rejection of the economic structures of society. Similarly, the cigarette is no longer merely a product to be consumed, it is a symbol of the rejection of the capitalist imperative to produce, since both Bigger and Gus are unemployed. *Toughness*, therefore, is also an expression of subcultural style and the appropriation of material objects and structures for subversive purposes.

The influence of material structures is especially evident in the progression to the next stage of becoming a badass in which Bigger and Gus construct an *alien* culture. This process occurs as a result of the disjunction between ideology and opportunity, or what Clarke et al. (2006) call the “ideological and economic ideals of embourgeoisement and the reality of ghettoisation” (25). Bigger is excluded from economic opportunity and privilege (represented by the plane) by the racialised class-based structures of society. Bigger and Gus accurately locate themselves within a hierarchy that is ordered by racial and economic power relations. The effect of this hierarchy is to restrict their opportunities to participate in certain settings, such as attend flight school. Acknowledging that they live in a white society but are excluded from and subordinated to its social and economic opportunities, Bigger and Gus create distinct and distinctly hostile ways of living by playing “white.” In an effort that is part distraction and part creation, as well as an act of resistance, they mock white culture and

construct an *alien* one in its place. This *alien* culture is based on a commonality between Gus and Bigger; they are black and live in a hegemonic white society. Their culture, therefore, is a subculture; the black working class culture is created as a response to and in opposition of the dominant white culture while still remaining linked to it. Bigger and Gus demonstrate resistance to the hegemonic values of this culture through play acting.

It is significant that while playing “white,” Bigger constructs a military scene; Bigger relates to white society in terms of enemies, violence and rigid hierarchy. Still, this game allows him to impose control and meaning; when he plays “white” he re-imagines the relations of the settings from which he is excluded. This play-acting also reaffirms a black way of walking and talking that is looser (like the passing woman’s swaying body) and distinctive (like Bigger’s response to Gus’s greeting). It is a strategy of resistance to white hegemony, as Bigger both appropriates and denigrates white culture (Clarke et al., 2006, 34).

From this scene, it is possible to infer that the formation of the individual or biography of the badass takes place in a certain milieu and in response to the effects or lived experiences of both context and setting. Bigger is *tough* because he rejects the supposed hardworking morality of white society, shunning employment in the public sphere in favour of idleness on a public street. Because he is excluded from white society and a vague dream of becoming an aviator, and is instead confined to the South Side of Chicago, he constructs not only himself, but also white society as *alien*, which comes out when he insists Gus play “white” with him. Not only does the game mock white society, it acts as a mechanism of difference, as Bigger and Gus speak using a distinctive argot and refer to black people as niggers following the end of their game (Wright, 2005, 19). Bigger and Gus

create a distinctive and subversive black milieu in response to their exclusion from white society. The game “white,” therefore, is a response to the public issues of economic marginalization and institutionalised racism.

Bigger grumbles against the racial structures of society that exclude him, saying he feels “like I’m on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence...” (Wright, 2005, 19-20). When he walks to a job interview with the white Dalton family, he leaves behind the black milieu he has created and enters white society and experiences feelings of fear and shame (Wright, 2005, 44). As a reaction to this exclusion and confusion, Bigger progresses to the next stage of deviance where violence or threat of violence makes him equal. To summarize, the hierarchical and racially-based economic exclusion from the dominant white society precipitates the creation of a black subculture, and also contributes to Bigger’s subsequent *meanness*.

The violence and unpredictability of *meanness* arise because Bigger is excluded from the white society where norms are to be non-violent; Bigger likens the experience of this rejection to a red hot poker down his throat, which hints at the repressed violence he experiences as a result of this exclusion and subordination (Wright, 2005, 20). Interestingly, the first object of this violence is his friend Gus, with whom he identifies as a badass and whom he accepts as being part of the black subculture. This scene occurs in the context of a planned robbery of a white man’s store. Previously, the four badass friends have robbed blacks; they are apprehensive about the consequences of robbing a white man. They understand that if they victimize a white man, they will experience the effects of the power of the structures of the white society and in particular the criminal justice system (Wright,

2005, 14). The badasses feel that robbing a white man will “be a violation of ultimate taboo; it would be a trespassing into territory where the full wrath of an alien white world would be turned loose upon them; in short, it would be a symbolic challenge of the white world’s rule over them” (Wright, 2005, 14). In Clarke et al.’s (2006) formulation, it would be an act of resistance against the hegemony (4). Yet Bigger is acting and reacting to the structures of society; the injustice of these structures causes him to target their symbol within his own milieu (i.e. Bigger wants money because it is valued but cannot easily obtain it, so he decides to rob Blum’s store).

According to Katz (1988), the first stage in a stick up or robbery is obtaining a subjective moral advantage that gives would-be robbers control over the situation (168). Bigger and his three friends have discussed robbing Blum’s store for months and Bigger brings it up again at the pool hall. He shares his plan, which is fairly simple and seems foolproof, since Blum is an old man who will be alone against four armed men and there will be no police in the area for a one- hour period. This fulfills Katz’s (1988) criteria concerning establishing the dominance of the robbers and the weakness of the victim (170). The robbery does not progress, however, due to the inability of the would-be robbers to establish moral dominance (Katz, 1988, 169). This lack of moral dominance comes not from some sense that robbery is wrong (they have robbed before), but from the fact that Blum is white (Wright, 2005, 23). Bigger and his friends are instead dominated by fear.

[Bigger] was divided and pulled against himself. He had handled things just right so far; all but Gus had consented. The way things stood now there were three against Gus, and that was just as he had wanted it to be. Bigger was afraid of robbing a white man and knew that Gus was afraid, too. Blum’s store was small and Blum was alone, but Bigger could not think of robbing him without being flanked by his three

pals. But even with his pals he was afraid. He had argued all of his pals but one into consenting to the robbery, and toward the lone man who held out he felt a hot hate and fear; he had transferred his fear of the whites to Gus. He hated Gus because he knew that Gus was afraid, as even he was; and he feared Gus because he felt that Gus would consent and then he would be compelled to go through with the robbery. (Wright, 2005, 25)

The stick up does not progress because although Bigger and his friends have constructed themselves as badasses, and although the generalized other (which Bigger understands to be those who embody a white middle-upper class values and a capitalist work ethic) accepts them as badasses, the generalized other denies them any moral legitimization. The fear and shame of being black and working class constrains their ability to be badasses in both white and black milieux. This lack of moral transcendence stems from the fact that Bigger's badass relations are rooted in fear and distrust and are created in reaction to white society's dominance (Wright, 2005, 115). Bigger believes that whites "ruled him, even when they were far away and not thinking of him, ruled him by conditioning him in his relations to his own people" (Wright, 2005, 115). In other words, Bigger's fear of robbing a white man reaffirms the hegemony of the white upper-middle class culture (Clarke et al., 2006, 6). This uneasy and subconscious acceptance of the legitimacy or at least the reality of the white culture's hegemony causes Bigger to demonstrate meanness when Gus is a few minutes late for the planned robbery.

Without warning, Bigger attacks Gus from behind and responds in a pattern of escalating violence and humiliation toward Gus; for example, Bigger forces Gus to lick the knife he holds to his throat and threatens to cut out his navel (Wright, 2005, 37-40). The violence is not specific, nor is it rational since Bigger was the one to instigate the robbery

and they still have time to rob the store if they choose (Katz, 1988, 100-102). Bigger replaces his feelings of fear with a compulsive and seductive violence; this is evident when Bigger punches Gus in the head before he is conscious of having done so (Wright, 2005, 38). When Gus asks why Bigger attacked him, Bigger says it is because he wanted to (Wright, 2005, 37). This is an expression of *meanness*, and a case of unpredictable violence, reaffirming Bigger's reputation as a badass regardless of the aborted stick up. It also suggests Bigger is not aware of the distinction between public issues and private troubles. Rather than attempting to resolve the contradictions inherent in the hierarchical and unequal society, Bigger instead violently acts out at the level of biography, substituting Gus as the source of his fears and frustrations. With an act of violence, Bigger symbolically and misguidedly attempts to resolve the ideological contradictions of white society.

To conclude, Katz's (1988) stages are helpful in identifying the course of becoming a badass while the Birmingham School (Clarke et al., 2006) contributes to a greater understanding of the ordering and impact of social structure; combined, they illustrate the dialectical ways in which biography and society interact in the creation of the badass. From this exploration of the badass, it is possible to conclude that biography is influenced not only by interaction, as Mead (1955) suggests, but also by the subordination of the black working class by the hegemonic white upper-middle class and the subsequent limited access to social and economic structures and opportunities. Bigger is excluded from economic structures of opportunity (such as becoming a pilot) due primarily to the hierarchical ordering based on the construct of race. Further, he is exploited by these same economic structures. This occurs when Bigger is forced by necessity to work for his landlord, Mr. Dalton, who charges

an insupportable rent and refuses to lease property to black people outside the South Side of Chicago.

It is possible, therefore, to conclude that Bigger experiences a history that is racialised and biased in nature. His subsequent biographical evolution, or his history as a badass, develops in reaction or resistance to this experience of discrimination. He becomes a badass and chooses to target a symbol of this racial-historical oppression and the hegemony of the white upper-middle class: Blum's store. Bigger's biography is dominated by being a badass, but he is reacting to the real and tangible effects of history and society, including structures of economic and racial oppression, as well as his understanding of white society or the generalized other. The following section represents a continuation and escalation of these problematic relations and reactions as Bigger goes from being a badass to becoming a righteous killer.

Analysis Two: Righteous Slaughter

Katz (1988) describes a type of murder called righteous slaughter, in which the murderer self-righteously kills to defend some version of the Good (14). Its features include a self-righteous act defending communal values, a lack of premeditation, a spirit of quickly developing rage, and an arbitrary relationship between what the assailant is trying to do and what he achieves (Katz, 1988, 18). The process begins when the victim attacks the worth of the aggressor, so that the latter feels that he loses control of his identity and agency as a result of becoming an object of ridicule (Katz, 1988, 22-23). This feeling of humiliation is perceived as being entirely external in origin; because the aggressor does not recognize any

failings or inadequacy within himself, he feels innocent and the source of his humiliation becomes blameworthy (Katz, 1988, 26-27). Humiliation becomes rage when the aggressor believes the way to resolve the problem of humiliation is to reverse the structure of the humiliation through an act of rage (Katz, 1988, 27). Rage, therefore, (re)establishes the part of the aggressor's identity that is valuable; in other words, there is a correlation between the offence received and the ensuing attack (Katz, 1988, 31, 36). A sacrificial slaughter of the victim holds potential for the righteous killer to transcend both humiliation and circumstance and also to be symbolic transformed (Katz, 1988, 43).

The righteous slaughter is set in motion from the beginning of the novel, when Bigger's mother blames him for the family's meagre existence and criticizes his supposed lack of manhood because he is content to remain on welfare (Wright, 2005, 8-9). This causes him to feel shame, which is distinct from humiliation because it is internalized, and makes Bigger feel powerless to act (Wright, 2005, 10). These family expectations constrain him and he feels that "he could never have any way of his own" (Wright, 2005, 99). This social shame as well as economic pressures propel him to go to the Dalton's house to accept a job as a chauffeur; his options are to work for white people and become part of the economic system that oppresses him or starve (Wright, 2005, 12). His resistance to white society and his rejection of the economic imperative to work is subordinated by the demands of production.

The Birmingham School reminds us that power relations are reproduced and transmitted in institutions; therefore, this necessity to engage Bigger in productive work is precipitated by the power of the capitalist context that requires enough workers and that sets

up productivity as a virtue of “manhood.” In Bigger’s mind, he is tricked into a surrender of black working class values as he sacrifices being a badass by entering into white society (Wright, 2005, 12). When he gets the job, Bigger is told that he “ought to work hard and keep it and try to make a man out of” himself (Wright, 2005, 101). This is an example of the hegemony of the white capitalist culture that idealizes the working man (Clarke et al., 2006, 5). This hegemonic ideal subordinates Bigger who is demeaned by having to work as a chauffeur for a white upper-middle class family and leave behind the black working class culture with which he identifies.

On entering white society, Bigger experiences fear and humiliation; for Bigger, the two are closely linked. In order to ameliorate his fear, he brings a gun to the interview at the Dalton place (Wright, 2005, 43). Bigger reasons that because he is entering white society and interacting directly with the generalized other, he needs a gun to be their equal and to feel complete (Wright, 2005, 43). This is significant because it shows how vulnerable Bigger feels as he tries to establish new relationships while entering a new milieu. His first experience of humiliation occurs when he tries to figure out how to enter white society; this is a literal dilemma as Bigger agonizes over whether to use the front or back entrance to the house, and worries about what a police officer might do if he is seen wandering around a white neighbourhood (Wright, 2005, 44). According to Bigger, “[i]t would be thought that he was trying to rob or rape somebody” (Wright, 2005, 44). These fears play a significant role later; for now, it is sufficient to note that Bigger understands that his movements and actions within white society are regulated. He is no longer in a black working-class milieu and outside capitalist relations or expectations. Instead, he is a black man incorporated and

subordinated at the bottom of the capitalist hierarchy.

When Bigger finally enters the house, he experiences the first feelings of rage as he feels more black and inferior as a result of sitting in a white house with its strange objects (Wright, 2005, 45-46). To cope with these feelings, Bigger adopts a certain posture during the ensuing job interview in order to act the way he believes the generalized other (embodied in the Daltons) expect and desire. “He stood with his knees slightly bent, his lips partly open, his shoulders stooped” (Wright, 2005, 48). This reaffirms Bigger’s subordination within white society; he feels and therefore acts as the inferior. Bigger describes these feelings of inferiority in the following passage.

Every time I think about it [segregation] I feel like somebody’s poking a red-hot iron down my throat. Goddamit, look! We live here and they live there. We black and they white. They got things and we ain’t. They do things and we can’t. It’s just like living in jail. Half the time I feel like I’m on the outside of the world peeping in through a knot-hole in the fence... Every time I get to thinking about me being black and they being white, me being here and they being there, I feel like something awful’s going to happen. (Wright, 2005, 20)

Bigger goes on to say that he feels like white people live inside him. This passage should not be interpreted as prophetic, but as an integral part of the process of becoming righteous. Bigger constructs the relations between himself and white society as unjust, and experiences these relations as humiliating. This humiliation finds a symbolic target in Mary Dalton and her communist friend Jan.

At their first meeting, Mary Dalton asks Bigger if he is in a union, which is a foreign concept to him (Wright, 2005, 51). She repeatedly reaches out to Bigger, assuring him that she is his friend and inviting him to eat dinner with her and Jan in a black restaurant (Wright, 2005, 64). While chauffeuring her and her boyfriend, Bigger does not feel included but

rather oppressed by “two vast white looming walls” (Wright, 2005, 67-68). In attempting to deconstruct years of hierarchical societal relations organized by categories such as class and race Mary instead humiliates Bigger, who believes she is acting strangely (Wright, 2005, 71). The external nature of this humiliation is evident in the following passage where Jan insists that Bigger shake his hand and not call him “sir.”

But they made him feel his black skin by just standing there looking at him, one holding his hand and the other smiling. ... He felt naked, transparent; he felt that this white man having helped put him down, having helped to deform him, held him up now to look at him and be amused. At that moment he felt toward Mary and Jan a dumb, cold, and inarticulate hate. (Wright, 2005, 67)

Bigger is humiliated because the reactions of Jan and Mary imply that something is wrong with Bigger when he is acting as decades of relations have conditioned him. His experience of racial discrimination is historical; it permeates both his biography and the social structure in which he exists. Mary attempts to deconstruct the public issue of racialised power relations at the level of biography, ignoring the effects of history. As a result, Mary becomes the symbolic target of Bigger’s rage. She does not understand the full magnitude of the public issue of institutionalised racism and Bigger does not understand her attempts to ameliorate it at a personal level.

The process of turning Mary into a sacrificial victim begins when Bigger tries to get her, while she is intoxicated, up to her room without being caught and losing his job. As he helps her out of the car, he again wonders what white people will think if they are seen; remember that Bigger’s greatest fears on entering white society were false accusations of rape and robbery (Wright, 2005, 81). Bigger turns Mary into a profane object by cursing her (Katz, 1988, 37), and also condemns her for her immoral behaviour with Jan in the car and

with him as he tries to get her to her room (Wright, 2005, 83, 113). While he is still inside Mary's room, Mrs. Dalton appears, realizing Bigger's fears. Rather than face rape charges, Bigger kills Mary to avoid detection by the blind Mrs. Dalton. This is a righteous slaughter intended to maintain Bigger's righteousness because he has not raped Mary but is unable to prove it. Being a black man in a white woman's room is enough to make him guilty, according to the values of white society, but Bigger refuses to become a victim of racial prejudice and instead Mary becomes the sacrificial victim of institutionalised race relations. Bigger blames Mary for his humiliation and for her own death, and in doing so maintains his own righteousness (Katz, 1988, 20). In effect, Bigger attributes Mary's death to the oppressive relations of white society and to his experiences of these relations.

Although Bigger acts as an individual in murdering Mary Dalton, her death galvanizes white society, including the generalized other as well as institutions; five thousand police officers and three thousand volunteers search for Bigger (Wright, 2005, 242). By murdering an heiress, Bigger represents a significant and symbolic threat to the cherished values of white capitalist society. This act of murder, therefore, cannot be understood solely at the level of biography, but must also be interpreted in light of the interactions between biography and society. Mrs. Dalton, with her white hair, clothes and eyes, symbolically represents the hegemonic spectre and omnipresence of white society that contributes to Mary's death (Wright, 2005, 61). She is described as a "white blur was standing by the door, silent, ghostlike" (Wright, 2005, 85). When Mrs. Dalton enters Mary's room, trapping Bigger, the latter acts out of fear of being caught in inappropriate relations; the inappropriateness is determined solely by the colour of his skin. His path of action is to

smother the helpless and drunken Mary with her bedclothes in order to preserve his innocence. Bigger commits this act of resistance because he understands the line of interpretation adopted by the generalized other and the criminal justice institutions will label him guilty because he is a black man in a white woman's room. As a result of this desire to maintain his innocence, and his rejection of this social and structural interpretation, Bigger undergoes an emotional process that makes murder a seductive and even compulsory alternative to this injustice.

The murder is an allegory of Bigger's symbolically changing relations with white society. He no longer passively accepts his subordination by white society but instead actively threatens it with a symbolic act of resistance: the murder of heiress Mary Dalton. After the act, "[t]he reality of the room fell from him; the vast city of white people that sprawled outside took its place" (Wright, 2005, 87). This is an example of Katz's (1988) moment of self-reflection, in which Bigger experiences himself as an object controlled by external forces (Katz, 1988, 8). In this process, Bigger creates distance between himself or his biography and society in order to reflexively understand himself in relation to this society (Katz, 1988, 5). He believes that by killing Mary, white society no longer subordinates him. He reflects on this realization in the following passage.

The thought of what he had done, the awful horror of it, the daring associated with such actions, formed for him for the first time in his fear-ridden life a barrier of protection between him and a world he feared. He had murdered and created a new life for himself. ... He was outside his family now, over and beyond them... While sitting there at the table waiting for his breakfast, he felt that he was arriving at something which had long eluded him. Things were becoming clear; he would know how to act from now on. The thing to do was to act just like others acted, live like they lived, and while they were not looking, do what you wanted. ... He felt that they wanted and yearned to see life in a certain way; they needed a certain picture of the

world; there was one way of living they preferred above all others. (Wright, 2005, 105-106)

Through the act of murder, Bigger transcends not only his humiliating circumstances, but he seemingly resolves ideological contradictions between the values of his milieu and white upper-middle class values. Bigger believes that to this point white people ruled him through structures and legislation and unequal economic opportunity and by sowing in black relations seeds of fear and distrust (Wright, 2005, 115). Bigger understands white society to be the dominant culture and the creator of the violence he commits. His relations with society are conditioned by fear, and Bigger responds to the ultimate fear (a charge of rape) with ultimate violence (an act of murder). The sacrificial slaughter of Mary Dalton affects Bigger, altering his self-identity so that he no longer feels fear or hate (Wright, 2005, 273). Instead, he is described as “[h]aving been thrown by accidental murder into a position where he had sensed a possible order and meaning in his relations with the people about him” (Wright, 2005, 274). Symbolically, Bigger has murdered the unequal and unjust social structure, although its material form is unaffected (Clarke et al., 2006, 37). Bigger undergoes a symbolic transformation from subordinate to free man. The righteous slaughter of Mary Dalton holds potential for him as he sees it as an opportunity to bring blacks together, because with this act of resistance, he has done something significant by acting to overcome the humiliating relations legitimated by the hegemony that reproduces hierarchical race and class relations. Therefore, as a result of his criminal actions, Bigger undergoes a significant transformation of the “Me” and subsequently the “I” as well; his actions alter his understanding of the perceptions (and perceptiveness) of the generalized other and influence

his subsequent criminal actions. This new awareness of relations and the possibilities they hold for him lead him to commit cold-blooded, senseless murder.

Analysis Three: Cold-Blooded, 'Senseless' Murder

If the righteous slaughter of Mary Dalton changes how Bigger understands the relations between himself and white society, the cold-blooded, senseless murder of Bessie Mears demonstrates how Bigger perceives these new symbolic relations. Bessie Mears is Bigger's girlfriend, although the relationship is characterized as utilitarian or even capitalist in nature rather than romantic. In Bigger's mind, "[s]he wanted liquor and he wanted her. So he would give her the liquor and she would give him herself" (Wright, 2005, 139). After murdering Mary, Bigger goes to visit Bessie. At this point, he has accepted and even revels in his self-definition or image of a killer, but he has not shared this self-image with Bessie or told her of his part in Mary's supposed disappearance. Bigger understands Mary's murder as the most meaningful event to have occurred in the history of his life, and has completely reshaped his relationships, including his relationship with Bessie (Wright, 2005, 239). He tries to involve her in a ransom plot before Mary's body is discovered and she reluctantly agrees. When Mary's body is discovered prematurely, Bigger flees to Bessie. Her response at the discovery of the body is one of relief, since she does not have to go through with the ransom plot. This is the point at which cold-blooded, senseless murder begins.

A cold-blooded, senseless murder is one that goes beyond practical requirements to achieve an objective (Katz, 1988, 275). Katz (1988) identifies three aspects to this kind of murder, including *image*, *emotion* and the *practical act*. The commission of a cold-blooded,

senseless murder corresponds in part to an *image* or self-definition that the offender presents to others (Katz, 1988, 276). In discussing the *emotions* of this kind of murderer, Katz (1988) refers briefly to a primordial evil and awareness, and also to a concept he calls dizziness (282, 296). According to Katz (1988), cold-blooded, senseless murder emerges “from a *dizziness* in which *conformity* is the greatest spiritual challenge and *deviance* promises the peace of transcendent significance” (296). In other words, cold-blooded, senseless murderers kill because there is insufficient motivation for them to adhere to moral or legal standards, and inner turmoil is settled by an external act of murder (Katz, 1988, 300). The *practical act*, then, occurs when the appropriate emotional dynamic coincides with an opportunity to present the desired self-image (Katz, 1988, 276). One of the identifying features of these types of murders is the excessive use of violence (Katz, 1988, 300).

When Mary’s body is found, Bessie accuses Bigger of murder and he confesses (Wright, 2005, 225). It is at this point that his *self-image* as a killer is fully realized because he is able to present it to another, Bessie. As a recognized murderer, Bigger is free to relate to others, including Bessie, with this *self-image*. This triggers an *emotional* change in Bigger. He realizes that he is alone because Bessie is thinking only of herself and how to avoid being further entangled in the death of Mary Dalton (Wright, 2005, 225). Their relationship to this point has been based on mutual satisfaction; Bessie is no longer useful to Bigger, as is evident in the following passage.

What could he do with her? She would be a dangerous burden. It would be impossible to take her if she were going to act like this, and yet he could not leave her here. Coldly, he knew that he had to take her with him, and then at some future time settle things with her, settle them in a way that would not leave him in any danger. He thought of it calmly, as if the decision were being handed down to him

by some logic not his own, over which he had no control, but which he had to obey. (Wright, 2005, 229)

Although this process is described in terms of calmness and coldness, Bigger is engaging in what can be termed an instinctive *emotional* process. Katz (1988) refers to what he calls a primordial awareness that is not learned but is instinctive, and can emerge as primordial evil (282-283). Bigger's survival instinct functions as this primordial awareness, and induces dizziness in him. Bigger kidnaps Bessie in order to preserve his identity as a killer and as a threat to the hegemony of white society. He is thinking about what "he must do to save himself and feeling resolved to do it" (Wright, 2005, 230), ironically condemning Bessie for the same reason he kidnaps her.

Bigger, continuing in a state of dizziness, rapes Bessie. Immediately afterward, he concludes that Bessie has no part in his future and he tries to remember where exactly he saw bricks lying on the floor of the abandoned building (Wright, 2005, 236). While lying beside her as she sleeps, Bigger remembers that the window is easy to open and that the air-shaft is right below. He determines to "throw it [the body] out of the window, down the narrow air-shaft where nobody would find it" (Wright, 2005, 235). When he actually picks up the brick to kill his girlfriend as she sleeps, Bigger is only aware of the cold and darkness in the room, and Bessie's breathing (Wright, 2005, 236). The description conveys the sensual nature of the *practical act*.

He lifted the brick again and again, until in falling it struck a sodden mass that gave softly but stoutly to each landing blow. Soon he seemed to be striking a wet wad of cotton, of some damp substance whose only life was the jarring of the brick's impact. He stopped, hearing his own breath heaving in and out of his chest. He was wet all over, and cold. How many times he had lifted the brick and brought it down he did not know. All he knew was that the room was quiet and cold ... But he had to look.

He lifted the flashlight to where he thought her head must be and pressed the button. ... Blood and lips and hair and face turned to one side and blood running slowly. She seemed limp; he could act now. (Wright, 2005, 237-238)

Bigger does not just kill Bessie, he obliterates her face and hides her body even though the murder takes place in an abandoned building (Katz, 1988, 300). The murder of Bessie goes beyond practical requirements to achieve an objective; Bigger is focussed on escape, but lingering with her precludes that possibility. Bigger is not trying to escape the reputation or image of a killer; he is reconciled to it. Instead, he wishes to escape capture; he does not want to be subordinated by the institutions of society or society's dominant values and ideologies that would condemn his self-image (Clarke et al., 2006, 28-29). However, having fully realized his self-image as a killer with Bessie, Bigger's internal turmoil and desire to avoid capture provide insufficient motivation for him to escape while he can. Instead, he embraces his self-image of a killer and believes another murder will promise transcendence over these hegemonic institutions; in this case, he believes it will help him escape. Bigger murders Bessie because there is insufficient motivation for him to abide by the moral and/or legal restrictions enforced by society's criminal justice system. He kills her in the moment when the practical act of murder coincides with an opportunity to present the desired self-image (Katz, 1988, 276). This resolves his inner turmoil and he is again able to think of escape.

Because Bigger murdered Mary Dalton and seemed to get away with it, the institution of the criminal justice system and the reaction of the generalized other seemed less ominous or even detached from Bigger. When his crime is discovered, however, his biography and understanding of Self have already undergone a significant transition to the

extent that the structures of society and in particular the criminal justice system are of secondary importance to Bigger. Rather than defining himself and (re)acting in relation to these institutions, as he has been conditioned to do and as was evident in his formation as a badass, Bigger is now more concerned with developing an acceptable image of Self. This Self is created as an act of continuing resistance to white upper-middle class hegemonic values. In other words, his self-interactions are more influential in determining his actions, but they also represent a continuing form of resistance to the hegemony of white society. Because Bigger undergoes a change in self-definition, going from badass to murderer, he perceives his relations to society to have undergone a similar shift and likewise his relationships change. When Bigger is captured, the structures of society work to reassert and transmit the dominance and hegemony that Bigger's acts of murder threatened, as is described in the following section.

Analysis Four: The Hunt for, and Capture of, Bigger Thomas

“The hunt for Bigger Thomas served as an excuse to terrorize the entire Negro population, to arrest hundreds of Communists, to raid the labour union headquarters and workers' organizations” (Wright, 2005, 385). Although these relations and tensions existed prior to Bigger's murder of Mary Dalton, this solitary act provokes a societal and historically-based reaction. The targets (i.e. black people) of this reaction are those in Bigger's milieu and share his cultural values. By murdering Mary Dalton, Bigger symbolically resists the hegemonic order, triggering a moral panic (Clarke et al., 2006, 56). Bigger is identified as a responsible enemy and becomes the target of moral entrepreneurs

because he did not just break the law, he threatened the hegemony and values of the white upper-middle class by murdering a white heiress (Clarke et al., 2006, 56). The supposed rape and murder of Mary represents a significant act of resistance as well as the ultimate humiliation and threat to the values of white society. The heiress's vulnerability is equated with the vulnerability of the established hierarchical and economically-ordered structure of society. The institution of the criminal justice system initiates the hunt for Bigger. This demonstrates how Bigger's individual act is perceived to be an attack not only against Mary but also a symbolic attack against the hegemony of white society (Wright, 2005, 244). The generalized other, represented by media, lynch mobs and volunteers, also reacts and expresses rage through acts of physical violence against blacks, the vandalism of black property, and the dismissal of hundreds of black employees. These acts are expressions of white dominance.

If Bigger reacted to Mary Dalton in a righteous rage, justifying her killing, then the white society that he symbolically attacked responds in kind. The newspaper coverage of the case and mob presence at his capture, inquest and trial set Bigger up to be a righteous slaughter (Wright, 2005, 279-281). That the generalized other turns Bigger into a sacrificial victim is vividly portrayed during his capture. He is turned into a profane object when his capturers pull him down the steps by his feet, shouting profanities and threats at him, as in the following passage.

"Kill him!"

"Lynch 'im!"

"That black sonofabitch!"

They let go of his feet; he was in the snow, lying flat on his back. Round him surged a sea of noise. He opened his eyes a little and saw an array of faces, white and looming.

“Kill that black ape!”

Two men stretched his arms out, as though about to crucify him; they placed a foot one each of his wrists, making them sink deep into the snow. His eyes closed, slowly, and he was swallowed in darkness. (Wright, 2005, 270)

That Bigger is going to become a sacrificial victim is never in doubt. However, the formalities of a trial are necessary because hegemony requires some level of consent in order to maintain its legitimacy (Clarke et al., 2006, 30). Within the structure of the criminal justice system, the ideology of justice requires a courtroom scene in order to legitimate the sacrificial slaughter of Bigger (Clarke et al., 2006, 30). The trial and its media coverage also serve as mechanisms of winning, reproducing and sustaining the hegemony of the white upper-middle class and transforming Bigger's acts of resistance into meaningless murder (Clarke et al., 2006, 30). This process of legitimation and the reassertion of white hegemony is demonstrated in the jail scene in which Bigger receives several symbolic visitors.

Within the institution of the criminal justice system, Bigger's freedom to conceptualize and realize his Self is limited. Instead, he is subjected to institutional definitions of himself (i.e. a rapist and murderer) and his interactions are likewise constrained. In other words, his freedom of biography is limited by his close interactions with history and the forces of social control. Bigger's first visitor is the black preacher, who tries to convince Bigger that God can change him and also that he has done wrong by committing murder (Wright, 2005, 283). Bigger understands religion as a form of escape from life, or a structure of society that has an obscuring effect; it conceals rather than reveals relations of power and encourages acceptance of the hegemonic ordering of society (Wright, 2005, 283). Jan, the communist friend of Mary's, comes to remind Bigger that by forging

relations and recreating structures of society based on equality, white and black people can fight together and change social and structural relations built on hate and inequality (Wright, 2005, 287). Max, Bigger's communist lawyer, assures Bigger of similar ideas; for example, Max will try to defend Bigger's actions and argue that there are mitigating circumstances to the murders because the structure of society contributed to the events. Buckley appears as the representative of the oppressive white society's criminal justice system, trying to make Bigger confess and profit from the confession in time for his upcoming re-election. By convicting Bigger, Buckley will reassert the dominance and seeming necessary rightness of the criminal justice system while ignoring the inequalities of social structure. The Daltons also appear as representatives of white society, trying to convince Bigger to condemn Jan, and to also reassure Bigger of their continued good intentions to black people. Mr. Dalton, as a capitalist, tries to prevent further threats to the hegemony by discrediting the ideology of communism and by engaging in philanthropic acts; he even informs Bigger that he sent a dozen ping-pong tables to the South Side Boys' Club that day (Wright, 2005, 294). Finally, Bigger's family and friends show up as reminders of the positive and negative pressures of Bigger's milieu (Wright, 2005, 295-301).

In this one jail cell are the representatives of Bigger's milieu and also of society. Represented are organized religion, hegemonic white society, the paternalistic and racialised economic system, the oppressive legal system, and family and friends. Interestingly, these interactions are not necessary as the outcome of the trial is almost certain to end in Bigger's conviction. But Bigger's exceptional biography and resistance to the control of society and influence of history represents a threat to the continued dominance of white hegemony.

Accordingly, the structures of society try to exert control over the biography and Self of Bigger, trying to subordinate him and the symbolic threat he represents. Although on the surface it seems that perhaps the influence of Bigger's biography leads him to commit murders and that only individuals within his milieu are affected, the previous analyses demonstrate that Bigger acts as he does not because of some internal flaw but as a result of his relationships with those within his milieu (such as his family and Gus) as well as his relations to white society and history (in particular, the class-based structure of racialised economic oppression as represented by the Daltons). These dialectical relations exert pressures on him and affect his understanding of Self. Bigger, therefore, is the point at which biography, society and history intersect.

Conclusion

This interpretation was framed and necessarily limited by the criminological imagination as well as by the text itself. As Potter (2001) explains, meaning exists and is grounded in reality or in the structure of language (190). Therefore, while the act of reading is creative, producing meaning, that meaning is constrained by the text. My engagement with the text was necessarily subjective and interpretive. This interpretation was guided by Mills's (1959) concepts in order to better understand the social reality contained in *Native Son*. The goal was to explicate the biography of Bigger Thomas and the history of his society and the connections between them. According to Mills (1959), the typical individual is disoriented by, and disassociated from, the reality and complexity of the modern world (4). This was true in *Native Son*; Bigger was disassociated from the world, and likewise the

casual reader might similarly experience a certain disassociation. Rather than accepting the author's interpretation of events, the criminological imagination was used to resist the self-evident truths and rudimentary criminology of the novel. Instead, a rigorous analytic framework that considered the micro or biographical elements as well as the macro or historical elements and the relations between the two was engaged to consider personal troubles and public issues that Bigger Thomas encountered, and to restate them in criminological terms. Textual analysis was used to approach and study these social problems and to extract meaning in an orderly way that allows the dynamism of the relations between history and biography to be evident.

Mills's (1959) test for any proposed study is whether it has relevance and is connected to the social world (73). Based on what has already been stated here, this thesis has relevance to criminology because it encourages a more creative and reflexive consideration of criminology, its objects of study, and its methods. Further, this thesis provides relevant criminological insight and introduces imaginings not only of fictional realities, but also furthers discussion of Katz's (1988) concepts of badasses, righteous slaughter, and cold-blooded senseless murder. Additionally, the focus on the seductiveness or sensual nature of crime complements not only the realm of fictional realities in general, but the fictional reality of *Native Son* in particular. The analysis of four scenes from *Native Son* was helpful in clarifying the processes outlined by Katz (1988), illuminating his connection to symbolic interactionism, as well as the way in which Katz (1988) complements Mills's (1959) concept of biography. For Mills (1959), social science and sense-making are for, by, and at the level of the individual (7). Katz's (1988) theory,

therefore, fits well within the criminological imagination in terms of focussing the analysis, as well as with the novel, as it focusses on the actions, interactions, and self-interactions of Bigger Thomas. The Birmingham School complements the work of Katz (1988) by introducing a structural, hierarchical and hegemonic understanding of society, and allowed the dialectical relations between biography and society to be explored.

In terms of the specific analysis undertaken here, it followed the plot of *Native Son*, where through Bigger's interactions with society, the process of being or becoming a badass was explored. The badass is generally a youth phenomenon that involves the adoption of certain symbols, attitudes and actions (Katz, 1988, 80). In addition, three stages, including being *tough*, constructing *alien* ways of living, and demonstrating *meanness* through irrational violence or the threat of violence were present in the initial scenes between Bigger and his friend Gus (Katz, 1988, 80). What Katz (1988) calls the ways of the badass are in fact a rejection of and reaction to a capitalist work ethic as well as the hierarchical ordering of economic opportunity based on race. In other words, because Bigger experiences racial exclusion, (for example, he cannot become an aviator), he rejects and mocks white society. In reaction to this exclusion and as a misguided act of resistance, Bigger uses violence to establish his worth as a badass. The interplay between biography and history was evident as Bigger experiences structural economic marginalization and exploitation (i.e. having to work for the Dalton family) as a result of institutionalised racism and a biographical evolution into a badass occurs as a result.

From being a badass, Bigger becomes a righteous killer. The characteristics of such a murder include a righteous defence of some version of the Good (in this case black

working-class values), a lack of premeditation, a spirit of quickly developing rage, and an arbitrary relationship between what the assailants are trying to do and what they achieve (Katz, 1988, 18). Bigger's worth and values were challenged by his interactions with the Dalton family and by Mary Dalton in particular. Her bewildering attempt to befriend him in fact humiliates him because she treats him as if his current experience of being black and poor can be overcome with ideological help from her communist friends. Bigger understands race relations in a certain way and when Mary challenges the way he thinks and acts, she becomes the substitutionary target of his rage. When she becomes drunk and he has to escort her to her room, he kills her because he understands the dominant cultural values regulating race relations will label him as guilty for simply being a black man in a white girl's room. Bigger ends up transcending the humiliating circumstances that subordinate him by forcing him to take a job from the oppressive white economic structures by killing a white woman and seeming to get away with it, symbolically killing or altering the unjust structure of society. Bigger essentially blames Mary's death on her individual immoral behaviour as well as the oppressive hegemony of white society and his experience of these relations. His act of righteous slaughter serves to seemingly or at least symbolically overcome the negative effects of these relations and opens Bigger up to the possibility of new relations.

The new relations, as perceived by Bigger, are characterized by a lack of fear of white society (both the generalized other and the institutions) and Bigger experiences no sense of social control (according to Mead's (1955) definition, which includes formal, informal and personal self-control) or societal control (according to the Birmingham

School's structural understanding of acquiescing to the accepted hegemony). For Bigger, the contradiction in class and cultural values has been resolved and the hegemony of white society has been challenged by the act of murder. His attempts to escape subordination by white society leads to the cold-blooded, senseless murder of Bessie Mears, which goes beyond practical requirements in order to achieve an objective (Katz, 1988, 275). Katz (1988) identifies three stages in this murder, including image, emotion and the practical act. When Bigger reveals his self-image as a killer to Bessie, he experiences self-fulfilment and cannot rationalize a reason not to kill her, even though this costs him an opportunity to escape capture for the first murder. He murders Bessie because he experiences this moment and this murder as a moment of transcendence both in his self-image as a killer and over the threat of discovery and subordination that he fears she represents. This provides insight into the interactions at the biographical and historical levels. Because Bigger feels detached from societal structures, he acts in such a way that his self-interactions (i.e. realizing himself as a killer) are of more importance than abiding by norms or structures of social control. In going from a badass to a murderer, Bigger's history likewise changes and affect his subsequent actions and interactions.

Finally, the capture of Bigger represents a societal response. The norms and values of society were violated and threatened by Bigger's actions, and the institution of the criminal justice system was engaged in order to reassert social control and the hegemony. This social control is vividly illustrated in Bigger's cell, where organized religion, a hierarchical capitalist economic system, an unequal criminal justice system, and family and friends are all symbolically represented and have an interest in subordinating or modifying

Bigger and his behaviour. These mechanisms of control try to alter Bigger's self-definition and make sense of his actions. They vividly demonstrate how Bigger's actions form the point at which society, and biography intersect and clash.

The analysis of *Native Son* was conducted using the criminological imagination and helped illuminate the dialectical relations between biography and structure. This analysis produced new criminological interpretations of a literary text in order to better understand the criminological potential and meaning contained within the text, and also clarified and explored criminological concepts. This exploration of a social reality was necessary to demonstrate the promise not only of the criminological imagination, but also of the fictional reality for criminology.

Chapter Four: The Promise of the Criminological Imagination

Introduction

Reading criminology through culture, in this sense, can be about shaking the taken-for-granted foundations of inequality and all its disciplinary accomplices in the social sciences and justice systems. It is about poking and provoking the collective conscience in the information age, about making myths conscious and about the reconfiguration of knowledge production in the larger discipline. (Kane, 305, 2004)

This thesis was inspired by Mills's (1959) claims that literature is inadequate to formulate the problems of biography and history and the relations between the two, as well as his work on the sociological imagination. In challenging these claims regarding the adequacy and usefulness of fiction as an object of study, it was demonstrated that a criminological imagination in fact provides an ideal meta-framework with which to consider fiction and fictional realities. According to Mills (1959), a criminological imagination reawakens an individual's capacity for astonishment and also helps an individual make sense of both self and world (8). I therefore tried to fulfill the job of the social scientist, according to Mills (1959), by challenging the assumed boundaries of criminology and by deriving meaning about the biography of an individual and the structure of society and their dialectical effects through an analysis of the novel *Native Son*. In doing so, this thesis makes significant contributions to criminology in the areas of methodology and epistemology, discussed in the following section, while avoiding Mills's (1959) injunction against abstracted empiricism and grand theory.

Contributions: Realizing the Promise of the Criminological Imagination

This thesis helps to clarify what is meant by the term "criminological imagination"

and demonstrates how it can be used effectively. Recent studies misinterpret or misuse Mills's (1959) concept, using it to refer to thinking imaginatively about crime, crime control or criminology (e.g. Gabbidon & Higgins, 2007; Halsworth, 2008; & Mounce, 2008), adopting a critical approach to criminology (e.g. Lynch & Stretsky, 2003; Hamm, 2005; Aas, 2007; Girling, 2008; & McLaughlin, 2008), or thinking about old problems in new ways (e.g. White, 2003; Green, Ward, & McConnachie, 2007; & Hughes & Rowe, 2007). While the criminological imagination does not preclude these aspects, Mills (1959) explicates a specific concept that incorporates a quality of mind that is critical and reflexive, a meta-framework for analysing the individual and the societal and their relations, and a method of knowledge production.

As a quality of mind, the criminological imagination challenges traditional boundaries and conventions. Using a criminological imagination, I revisited the boundaries and conventions found in the discipline of criminology. The very definition or composition of criminology is subject to considerable debate both from within and without. For example, Shearing (1989) discusses the limits imposed around criminology, which he argues is both constituted and constrained by a single object of study: crime (171). Braithwaite (2000) calls these boundaries rigid (229), a state that Kuhn (1970) cautions can lead to complacency and a *savoir faire* attitude rather than a continual renewal and production of ideas and knowledge (19-20). Kuhn's (1970) concerns in relation to criminology are echoed by some criminologists (e.g. Nelken, 1994; & Braithwaite, 2000). Hunt (1990) encourages criminologists to live on the edge of these boundaries, exploring them in order to create knowledge that is interesting and valuable (657). More recently, Fattah (1997) and Garland

and Sparks (2000) problematize criminology as a permeable category, rather than a clearly delineated one marked by boundaries, and suggest it is a place where a broad spectrum of thought that is responsive to the realities of the world is possible (167 & 193). When viewed historically, we see that criminology is an evolving and expanding discipline devoted to exploring crime and deviance. Distinct paradigms within the discipline (i.e. classical, positivist and critical) adopt particular methods and objects of study. Rather than focussing on the causes, cures or complaints concerning crime, this thesis emphasized the importance of both the cultural aspects of the criminal experience as well as sources of cultural knowledge. This thesis, therefore, was a response to a changing understanding of reality by acknowledging the importance, significance, and pervasiveness of fiction as a cultural artefact. Accordingly, fiction was proposed as a legitimate object of criminological study, ensuring the responsiveness of criminology to changing realities, and encouraging reflection both on and within the discipline. This is encouraging because it means criminology can continue to be a responsive rather than repetitive or restrictive discipline.

In order to analyse this new object of study (i.e. fiction), the meta-analytic framework suggested by Mills (1959) was adopted and the contributions of Jack Katz (1988) and the Birmingham School (2006) were integrated to reveal the relations between Mills's (1959) concepts of biography and society. Richard Wright's (2005) *Native Son* was used as a particular empirical referent to test the assumptions and assertions concerning the legitimacy and value of fiction as an object of criminological study in terms of its analytical and explanatory potential. Although I selected *Native Son* for legitimate reasons (i.e. its critical acclaim and public popularity, its relevant criminological themes of violence and racism, its

enduring nature, and its ability to stimulate criminological thought and debate), the goal of this thesis was not to study a particular work of fiction, *per se*. In other words, there was no particular criteria for inclusion or exclusion of other works of literature. This was because, in a broader sense, this thesis was devoted to issues of methodology. Therefore, demonstrating that criminology can adequately access and analyse fiction was more important than the particular conclusions drawn from an analysis of *Native Son*. This thesis was intended to explore whether and how frameworks and theories could be integrated to study cultural artefacts, specifically fiction. For this reason, I could have chosen any number of novels, but this one was emblematic of a particular genre (i.e. black American fiction) and was congruent with my objectives of demonstrating the relevance of fiction as an object of criminological knowledge, and one that is distinct from other objects of criminological study. This thesis, therefore, made methodological contributions to criminology not only in terms of what and how to extract meaning or significance, but also in demonstrating what kinds of objects are useful sources of criminological knowledge.

Finally, relying on the criminological imagination as a method of knowledge production, this thesis made epistemological contributions to criminology. In particular, the prevalence of the natural sciences model with its standard of objectivity and the belief that the world is inherently knowable was challenged. Instead, taking a Kuhnian position, the possibility that science is in fact an historical invention and is potentially arbitrary in its methods and substance was adopted in order to open a space for reflection (Kuhn, 1970, 4). The biases concerning valid and valuable knowledge ingrained within criminology were challenged in order to demonstrate other ways of knowing; in particular, the fact-fiction

divide was challenged. Based on the premise that criminology is an evolving discipline and the object of criminological study is a matter of choice and debate, this thesis introduced fiction as an object of study to challenge familiar systems of thought. The goal was not to encourage a myth of polarization between art and science, but to blend the two in a fruitful and nuanced search for knowledge. Rather than accepting a dichotomy between art and social science, fact and fiction, subjective and objective knowledge, this thesis allowed for a broader and richer exploration and understanding of social reality. By critiquing a narrow understanding of science that excludes fiction as a valuable and viable source of knowledge, new sources of knowledge were explored. This thesis was premised on an ontology that includes fiction within the realm of criminological possibilities. Rather than being merely illustrative of or secondary to criminological thought or study, literature was the primary object of study. Therefore, whether adopting the social constructionist approach exemplified by Rafter (2006) or the realist approach of Ruggiero (2003), multiple sources of knowledge were acknowledged and explored, and the legitimacy of considering literature as one form of representation of reality was demonstrated in this thesis.

Limitations & Areas of Further Study

This analysis demonstrates that literature and criminological conceptual systems provide maps for exploring social worlds (Sayer, 1992, 59). Because it is impossible to reduce the complexity of social worlds, either “real” or “fictional,” there is always room for debate or alternative interpretations. In the hermeneutic tradition, however, the possibility of ongoing production of knowledges from a single text is considered valuable and worthwhile.

This is because the criminologist rather than the content has changed. Multiple interpretations of *Native Son* can create a more complete understanding of it, as well as its links to criminological thought. This thesis encourages further reflexivity and explorations by adopting Alvesson et al.'s (2008) reflexivities, including D-reflexivity (where traditional understandings of criminology are challenged and uncertainty is introduced concerning the dominant techniques and modes of thoughts) as well as R-reflexivity (where the possibility of knowledges contained in fictional realities and the benefits of these studies are discussed). This study was an exploration, therefore, intended to provide a greater appreciation of the criminological imagination and the benefits of exploring fictional realities. It provided a version of the true rather than a particular truth. Additional exploration into fictional realities in general or *Native Son* in particular can help renew and reinvigorate a criminology that takes into account Mills's (1959) human variety and all the social worlds in which we exist, the relations between history and biography, and also allows the individual to make sense of Self and society.

Having explored the genre of black fiction and having found that legitimate links can be made to criminology, this suggests that there is a great deal of potential in the realm of literature that can be explored using a criminological imagination. Future avenues of study might include historical autobiographies in order to gain better insight into the culturally relative and historically specific aspects of crime and deviance; it makes sense to analyse cultural artefacts such as literature in order to gain better insight into both crime and culture, including their dynamic social, political and economic contexts. Traditionally, the sociology of literature is concerned with context while literary studies are concerned with text. The

study of historical autobiography might necessitate a study of both text and context within the framework of the criminological imagination. To summarize, the criminological imagination and the study of fiction have implications for criminology, enabling the researcher to branch out into different genres in order to achieve different objectives. This is an exciting statement about the kinds of criminology that can be done.

Conclusion

Mills (1959) wrote his book, *The Sociological Imagination*, over fifty years ago. However, his commitment to critical thinking, clarity of concepts, and the congruence between epistemology and methodology ensure the continuing relevance of this imagination within the social sciences. The incorporation of a criminological imagination into the discipline of criminology is particularly helpful in overcoming traditional boundaries and exploring new objects of study, specifically fiction. The analysis of *Native Son* provided fruitful exploration on a number of different levels. First, it enabled the exploration of particular criminological concepts found in the work of Jack Katz and the Birmingham School at both the level of biography and of society. It allowed me to challenge the conventional notion of methodology found within criminology by demonstrating the broader epistemological and ontological elements relevant to criminological objects and enquiry, and also provided an opportunity to make a theoretical contribution by clarifying Mills's (1959) meta-analytical framework, demonstrating its potential for combining substantive theories oriented to both micro and macro level phenomena. The analysis of *Native Son* exemplifies the usefulness and value of my approach for black American fiction and suggests there is

criminological potential in many genres of fiction. In other words, by working through the novel as my empirical referent, I have been able to make a contribution on a number of levels, only one of which is the crafting and testing of an approach that demonstrates the value of fiction as an object for criminological exploration and insight. This thesis represents a kind of criminological intersection in which biography and society, fact and fiction, methodology and epistemology were explored.

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