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[See table of contents](#)

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# Principles to Sort By: Surveillance and Policing in David Adams Richards's *Principles to Live By*

THOMAS HALFORD

**H**ERB WYILE WAS DEEPLY INVESTED in Canada's Atlantic provinces, not as an isolated and sealed-off region, but as a place always undergoing an exchange with the rest of the world. One author whom he continually returned to was David Adams Richards. Wyile's evaluations of Richards's later novels were not always positive, but Wyile clearly respected Richards and saw immense value in his work. In *Anne of Tim Hortons: Globalization and the Reshaping of Atlantic-Canadian Literature*, Wyile writes that,

Although *Anne of Tim Hortons* occupies itself for the most part with the generation of writers who have followed in Richards's wake, his fictional world reflects many of the concerns articulated in the following chapters. He is, in a way, the book's éminence grise. At the same time, Richards hovers at the edges of this book somewhat uneasily. He has been vocal in emphasizing the primacy of moral and spiritual concerns in his writing, and, indeed, his work does not fit that readily with the kinds of political, social, and economic considerations driving this study, nor is Richards particularly receptive to the interpretation of his work in these terms. (6)

Wyile's disenchantment with Richards's writing was complicated. Essentially, however, "Firing the Regional Can(n)on: Liberal Pluralism, Social Agency, and David Adams Richards's Miramichi Trilogy," which Wyile wrote with Chris Armstrong, criticizes Richards for turning to a didacticism that puts him "in danger of being lumped in with the contemporary neo-conservatives clamoring for the dismantling of the welfare state and generating a backlash against a demonized, progressive political correctness" (15). Indeed, Armstrong and Wyile's critique of Richards's later novels sparked one of the most lively debates in Atlantic-Canadian scholarship.<sup>1</sup> One goal of this essay is to reconcile the work

of Wyile and Richards through ethical criticism.<sup>2</sup> It is unfortunate that Wyile did not have the chance to turn his critical gaze on *Principles to Live By*, because Richards's text is concerned with how forces outside the region have social and political consequences within it. Furthermore, in its development of John Delano, a recurring character in Richards's novels, *Principles to Live By* adds new layers to persistent debates about the author's work.

In one of his final essays, on Lisa Moore's *Caught*, Wyile considers surveillance from the perspective of those who enforce the law and the perspective of those who break it ("Best Stories").<sup>3</sup> In this balanced piece, he examines the ways that government institutions affect personal identity and limit the autonomy of citizens, while also offering a deeper reflection on the human qualities of both criminals and police officers. Carrying on from Wyile's scholarship, I apply ethical criticism to *Principles to Live By* in order to study how surveillance influences the personal identities and the autonomy of police officers in the novel. Wyile's critique of *Caught* contributes an important element to the discourse on surveillance by focusing on the intersections between surveillance and genre. Where Wyile considers the thriller, I take a closer look at detective fiction in order to probe the thoughts and feelings of those tasked to observe and protect the public. John Delano, the protagonist of *Principles to Live By*, is an RCMP officer nearing retirement who consistently expresses anxiety about how others observe him and how they characterize his behaviour. Like many of Richards's protagonists, Delano maintains an inner goodness despite being profoundly misunderstood. As he investigates a cold case of a missing boy from Rwanda, Delano feels unfairly surveilled by co-workers, reporters, and ex-convicts. The weight of constant and often misplaced scrutiny damages his mental and physical health. In *Principles to Live By*, police tend to feel closely monitored by their society and by other police. In Richards's world, those tasked with surveillance, traditionally the metaphorical guards in the tower overlooking society, seem to be glancing over their shoulders into their own panopticons.<sup>4</sup>

Delano's character arc, across many different novels, highlights aesthetic shifts in Richards's writing. When Delano is first introduced in *The Coming of Winter*, he has just received news that a close friend has died in an accident. Richards presents a troubled, afflicted young man, one more likely to break the law than to enforce it. Delano is full of

uncertainty and doubt, traumatized by the present and worried about the future. In *David Adams Richards of the Miramichi*, Tony Tremblay aptly describes this early characterization of Delano: “John is a character in moral crisis whose delinquency on the outside refracts a spiritual anguish within. . . . [H]e is trying to come to terms with himself in late adolescence, a messy prospect at best” (172). Even though the behaviour of Delano is often upsetting and disturbing, Richards never presents him as a one-dimensional villain in either novel. In *The Coming of Winter* and *Blood Ties*, Delano is not simply good or bad; he is a complex human being afflicted by grief. Richards’s consistency in portraying the humanity of even the most unlikeable characters is often praised. As Tremblay writes of *Blood Ties*, it is “most fully alive when rife with the small negotiations and compromises that people constantly make with themselves” (184). Delano resurfaces in *Hope in the Desperate Hour* and *Mercy among the Children* as a police officer. In many ways, he becomes a character who represents a force for human decency through his work for the RCMP. These different permutations of Delano comprise an important way to contextualize the criticism on Richards’s career as an author. Even though a character might prove to be one-dimensional in a particular text, he or she often returns in other texts. Depending on the aesthetic strategies and the narrative structure, that character might be more fully developed depending on his or her role in the particular novel.

These different permutations of Delano are particularly notable in criticism on Richards’s work. Changes in Delano from *The Coming of Winter* and *Blood Ties* to *Hope in the Desperate Hour* and *Mercy among the Children* elucidate key shifts in Richards’s aesthetic strategies. Armstrong and Wylie lament “a decline in the subtlety of characterization and narrative conflict in Richards’s work” (13). This shift in Richards’s aesthetic can be seen in his characterization of Delano in *Hope in the Desperate Hour*: “Sergeant Delano, with his reddish hands and his dark eyes, wanted to learn. He had spent his entire life wanting to know” (195). Although Richards’s description of Delano here might not prove to be as subtle as in *The Coming of Winter* and *Blood Ties*, it is economical and intriguing in that it provides a glimpse of a minor character’s inner world. David Creelman, in *Setting in the East: Maritime Realist Fiction*, observes that Richards’s aesthetic moves away from realism and toward the genre of moral romance, which also explains such a shift in characterization (168). In this genre, the differ-

ences between right and wrong are easier to separate. J. Russell Perkin, who focuses mainly on *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*, argues that Richards's "characters inhabit a fictional world in which there are identifiable ethical categories of right and wrong, good and evil, and the characters are seen to make meaningful choices in that world" (121). In *Mercy among the Children*, Delano operates as a moral centre, righting the wrongs and the failings of other characters. Standing near the narrator's bookshelves, picking out certain books, and musing on them, Delano says, "I promise if I have a breath in my body, your father will never be an outcast again. . . . The truth does matter. There was a time I did not think it. All of a sudden falsehood just goes away" (335). Not only is Delano an important character to observe in the trajectory of literary criticism on Richards's work, but he is also a compelling character to consider in relation to ethics and its focus on ambiguity. As a police officer, Delano often operates on hunches, which are a complex blend of certainty and uncertainty. He does not claim to know the truth. However, he has instinct, and he has the conviction to do what he believes is right, which will lead him to certainty and to truth.

Ethical criticism is a fruitful theoretical framework through which to consider *Principles to Live By* because it encourages a holistic understanding of a topic; it aids in the imagining of various scenarios related to that topic; and it insists on considering characters through empathy or alterity. Although ethical criticism is not a uniform approach to literary studies, theorists can be melded together in productive ways. Ethical critics are generally divided between Anglo-American — examples include Lionel Trilling, Wayne C. Booth, and Martha Nussbaum — and European critics — examples include Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Simon Critchley (Serpell 15). Among the basic differences between them is that one group tends to search for sameness and the other for difference. This approach manifests itself in the reading act as either empathy (as defined by the Anglo-Americans) or alterity (as theorized by the Europeans). Reading for empathy means that one attempts to think and feel as another person thinks and feels even if that person has lived a very different life. Reading for alterity means that one respects that one can never truly think or feel as another person. Alterity, argues Dorothy Hale, encourages readers to view the world with less certainty and to embrace differences rather than assume that all people are essentially the same (901). In considering how surveillance affects the officers in *Principles to Live By*, I

rely on the fluctuation between empathy and alterity, admitting that one will fail in trying to fully understand the thoughts and feelings of others but that the effort might still be productive. Namwali Serpell in *Seven Modes of Uncertainty* argues for “an extreme movement between empathy and alterity” (44), a kind of “flinging of the self toward the other that nevertheless recognizes its own futility and thus neither dissolves the self nor appropriates the other” (58). Reading and thinking about fictional police officers does not equate to knowing their struggles. Nevertheless, fictional representations can be helpful reminders of the human qualities sometimes concealed by an individual’s social position. An essential addition to this framework is Wylie’s “Making a Mess of Things: Postcolonialism, Canadian Literature, and the Ethical Turn,” in which Wylie argues that literary fiction is rich territory for ethical considerations as a counterpoint to transcendental truths traditionally sought by philosophy (821-22). However, he warns that, even though novels offer “a more nuanced and ambivalent exploration of the ethical complexities of cultural politics in Canada . . . [and] that literature can cultivate ethical engagement without positioning itself in the role of ‘moral ideology for the modern age’” (825), critics do not simply get to prescribe how novels should be understood; rather, literary novels “exhibit a resistance to moral prescription that has the significant effect of placing the responsibility for ethical judgment squarely in the hands of readers” (836). One of the many lessons to be taken from Wylie’s reading of ethical criticism is that, even though *Principles to Live By* offers a powerfully imagined representation of how both watching and being watched affect the psyches of police officers, readers will not simply accept the perspective of Richards or this critique. However, such an approach might still benefit the discourse on surveillance in persistently considering otherness<sup>5</sup> in all possible manifestations, including those who surveil.

*Principles to Live By* offers a powerfully imagined world in which to consider how both watching and being watched affect the world of policing. Some might argue that police should be closely monitored and scrutinized considering their power and influence in society. That point is fair, but it also makes sense to consider the effect of this public scrutiny. In *The Vigilant Eye: Policing Canada from 1867 to 9/11*, Greg Marquis details how “For decades the dominant narrative in Canada was that its justice system, including its police, was tough but fair. . . . [However,] a national poll [in 2012] suggested that confidence in the

RCMP had fallen to a historic low, and attitudes toward the municipal police were almost as negative” (2). Criticism from the public does not necessarily contribute to positive change within police culture; in some cases, it results in more negative behaviour among police officers (Nix and Wolfe 100-01). One of the biggest concerns in the discourse on surveillance is not just how the public watches the police but also how the police watch their own. Unfortunately, at least in Canada, there does not appear to be a benevolent professional gaze. In fact, there appears to be a significant problem in the RCMP with workplace harassment, and this professional tension can affect how officers watch the public. The *Report into Workplace Harassment in the RCMP* conducted by the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP offers this warning in the conclusion:

Workplace harassment, bullying, intimidation and sexual harassment can cause significant harm to individual RCMP members and employees, in some cases damaging careers and causing serious emotional and physical harm. . . . [S]uch problems are also eroding the trust of the Canadian public, who are asking whether the RCMP’s internal problems have ‘filtered outside’ and affected the treatment of members of the public. (4)

Obviously, observing the public is a tough task. A weakening of public trust and a troublesome workplace environment can only make the job tougher. As part of a larger effort to restore the relationship between the public and the RCMP, thoughtful considerations of policing and police culture might help. In this sense, it is vital to consider the perspective of those who surveil, as Richards does in *Principles to Live By*. Delano manages to do good work despite the pressures that he feels in watching and being watched. However, the same pressures clearly influence Sergeant Melonson, who seems to operate as Delano’s insidious foil, to intimidate others and to behave in ways that he himself does not respect.

People are not always certain why or how the growth of surveillance is an important subject of study. One general dismissal of the topic is that, if people are not doing anything wrong, then they have nothing to worry about. Although that is probably true for most people, it is near-sighted in the sense that it does not take into account how mass surveillance changes a society and how it affects quality of life. The focus of this essay is on police, but the real victims of surveillance are

young, poor, male minorities. In *Transparent Lives*, Colin Bennett and his co-authors argue that certain forms of surveillance are dangerous because they enact social sorting: “Having a sense of control over our public persona is vitally important, as are the ways in which we are profiled and categorized, because such processes have an impact on our life chances and choices. We are treated differently depending on our profiles, and such treatment, in turn, changes our present and our future. This is social sorting” (4). Because of vast amounts of data and small amounts of time, governments observe citizens and sort them into types. Young, poor, male minorities tend to be the most closely watched, which means that those who fit into these categories have fewer chances to make mistakes (47).

In Richards’s novel, this social sorting is enacted on the poor. Melon Thibodeau, a vulnerable loner who has information on one of the central crimes in the text, is followed by Officer Melonson: “He noticed the man, and thought nothing of it as he was going home. . . . [H]e saw the man straddle the wrought iron fence and approached. . . . He beckoned, but Melon pretended not to notice. He turned again and went back the way he had come, always looking over his shoulder” (*Principles* 89). The person following him turns out to be Officer Melonson, who asks Melon for a light. When Melon produces matches, Melonson teases the ex-convict: “[Y]ou broke your parole. You have matches on you” (90). Melon has information on Melonson that would reflect poorly on the officer, so Melonson seeks to control the ex-convict through threats. Melonson is a clear example of an officer who abuses his power. Through surveillance and threats, he seeks to keep his own name clear of blame even though he behaves unethically. This is not behaviour that Melonson himself would condone, but he feels trapped in this course of action: “Melonson was in fact enraged at having to act like this” (91). One can surmise that he feels threatened by the way that he would be surveilled if Melon’s story were heard by others. As this example demonstrates, there are basic problems with social sorting in terms of equality and fairness in that those already struggling are observed more closely than others. Unfortunately, there are circumstances in which it is necessary to categorize people. The authors of *Transparent Lives*, for example, do not dispute that some level of surveillance and profiling is necessary; their argument is largely against the scope of private information accessible to various institutions and individuals (Bennett et al. 5).



Discussions of surveillance often focus on the absence of privacy, but not just the lack of privacy is worrisome in the surveillance state, for surveillance itself is a form of power. In “Totalitarian Paranoia in the Post-Orwellian Surveillance State,” Henry Giroux writes that,

Under the surveillance state, the greatest threat one faces is not simply the violation of one’s right to privacy, but the fact that the public is subject to the dictates of arbitrary power — and a power it no longer seems interested in contesting. It is not simply the existence of unchecked power, but the wider culture of political indifference that puts at risk the broader principles of liberty and freedom which are fundamental to democracy itself. (127)

Melonson, the bad cop to Delano’s good cop, exhibits the kind of behaviour about which someone like Giroux might worry. He uses his position to advance his own interests rather than the interests of the public, and he does so in a way that humiliates others. Richards writes that Melonson “loved to gloat over catching people in lies — it was part of the forte of being a bully” (*Principles* 132). Such bullying tactics are used not only against the public but also against other officers. Melonson begins to observe Delano and even tries to have him end his investigation of the missing boy. The narrator writes that “Melonson told him not to bother 87 Shelf Street [the address of the foster home] again — for no boy was ever reported missing from that house, and no one they knew of ever resembled anyone from Rwanda. That the McCrease family [the foster family who took in the missing boy] certainly had a right to privacy from the police or anyone else” (137). Rather than shy away from issues of privacy, Melonson actually uses the right to privacy to advance his own interests. He is really trying to cover up an error that he made years ago on the case that Delano is now investigating.

One way that literary criticism can contribute to the discourses on surveillance and policing is through the study of well-established literary genres that are already focused on these issues. It should not be surprising that there are telling intersections between real-life experiences of police and fictional representations of these experiences. For example, the classic detective hero, embodied by Delano, upholds societal values despite an unappreciative public, and the same storyline can be found in the real-life world of policing; it is known as having an “exaggerated sense of mission” (Cummins and King 834). These intersections do

not necessarily reveal anything about actual police officers. However, they might be helpful in discussions of the cultural politics of Canada in that they contribute to viewing the difficult work of policing with either empathy or alterity. One strength of Wyile's essay on Moore's *Caught* is how it connects the politics of surveillance to genre. Wyile details how the thriller genre "is characteristically preoccupied with hermeneutic questions, particularly the importance of reading appearances and evaluating the veracity of both people and situations" ("Best Stories" 273). Although distinct, the thriller genre and detective fiction are closely aligned. John Scaggs points out in *Crime Fiction* that,

Perhaps more than any genre, detective fiction foregrounds the related view of reading as a quest for meaning, or a form of detection, and the relationship is an important one for various ideological reasons. Primary among these is that the first-person narrator of the private eye story is easily identifiable with the private 'I' of the solitary reader . . . , making the hard-boiled novel a powerful ideological tool. (74)

Delano's attention to details during crime-scene investigations is closely connected with his love of reading. The narrator of *Principles to Live By* frequently comments that Delano is well read, even that there are "writers he had got to know from Newfoundland to Saskatchewan" (60). His ability to do a close reading contributes to his skill at analyzing his surroundings and vice versa.

This connection between reading and detecting encourages an alertness and an attention to detail — a way of seeing the world that is closely aligned with the discourse on surveillance. In this sense, Wyile's focus on generic concerns might prove to be an important step in articulating yet another reason why modern surveillance is troubling. Detective fiction sheds light on how those tasked with surveillance internalize and negotiate their positions as observers. Scaggs makes repeated connections between detective fiction and Foucault's understanding of the panopticon:

The difference between the Panopticon, however, and the constant surveillance of the new judicial ideology . . . is that the Panopticon presupposes that the prisoners open to constant visual inspection from the tower at the centre of this model prison are guilty of some crime, whereas the objects of Miss Marple's gaze are noth-

ing more than suspects and potential criminals, and in the textual Panopticon of detective fiction, it would seem that everybody is a suspect. (45-46)

From the perspective of those who detect, society needs to be observed closely; anyone and everyone could turn out to be a criminal. From the perspective of those observed, it is unsettling to be viewed as a potential criminal if one has not committed any crimes.

In *The Novel and the Police*, D.A. Miller soundly argues that the novel itself is a kind of panopticon in that fiction has served historically to demarcate the normal and the deviant; novels, Miller claims, encourage readers to internalize the author's sense of right and wrong (216). Monitoring and judging do not happen only during the reading experience but are also parts of book culture. In an interview with Tony Tremblay, Richards expresses anxiety about feeling unfairly judged: "The outrage over my novels comes mostly from these types — academics or intellectuals who work for the CBC. Their criticism of my work can be self-serving and hypocritical because it says that Dave Richards is not allowed to say this and that about us, but we can say anything about his characters and him" ("Interview" 40). Similarly, in *Principles to Live By*, books leave certain characters feeling closely monitored. Although Miller's argument is about the influence that books have on readers, the narrator of *Principles to Live By* is acutely aware of how being written about affects one's psyche. A scholar, Professor Milk, writes a book about Delano and his wife Jeannie's missing child, Gilbert, and "For Jeannie it was the only way to keep Gilbert's story alive. The only way to keep hope alive. . . . And if enough people read her story, maybe just one would have seen him" (206). In this sense, the book spreads important information, even potentially encouraging people to look for the missing boy. For Delano, however, the book changes how people observe him: "*Tragedy in the Campground* the book was called. John had a copy. In it he was a rude, backward-thinking RCMP officer with an eye on his career — and according to anonymous reports, known as a bigot, neglecting and bullying the child, who would have been better off with people like Melissa Sapp [who runs child protective services]" (207). *Tragedy in the Campground* frames and characterizes people's observations of Delano's life situation. As an observer and protector of the public, Delano might be viewed as the man in the watchtower of the

panopticon, observing everything, but he too has his troubling paranoia, his own fear of being watched.

Books at their best, however, might help people to move past the anxiety of the surveillance state in significant ways. One basic way that fiction aids in this process is that it allows people to observe or to imagine the interior of the panopticon. For Scaggs, this looking back is really about seeking comfort: “In the case of mystery and detective fiction, [the pleasure of the text for] . . . the home-owning bourgeois reading public . . . is to see the dominant social order of which they are a part maintained, and their stake in it protected” (45). Both Scaggs and Miller view fiction as a kind of ideological tool that maintains the status quo. Although comfort-seeking might contribute to the appeal of the crime genre, it is reductive and dismissive to group all readers and viewers into one category that implies they are not sophisticated or brave enough for more complex fiction. *Principles to Live By*, for example, offers little comfort to readers. Although the central mystery is resolved, the novel focuses on missing children and genocide. Furthermore, certain texts within the crime genre and certain readings of texts, such as Wyle’s interpretation of Moore’s *Caught*, encourage meditation and ethical groundwork that could open dialogues between citizens and their government institutions.

*Principles to Live By* helps readers to consider the lives of those who surveil, to openly engage with their worldview, and to observe how their ways of seeing might be internalized. Richards’s narrative fluctuates between empathy for and alterity to Delano. There are moments when he can be observed and understood, but there are also moments when his pain is beyond comprehension. Considering his various permutations, his troubles go further back than his policing career. From the moment that Delano is introduced in *The Coming of Winter*, he is battling some kind of trauma. In *Blood Ties*, he takes part in extremely dangerous behaviour, and in both *Hope in the Desperate Hour* and *Mercy among the Children* he is involved in highly stressful situations. It becomes clear in *Principles to Live By* that Delano suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the narrator describing him as “A man who asked the battered darkness about him . . . the one question that pertains to us all: ‘Why?’” (170). His work experience as a police officer in various capacities, including time in Rwanda during the Tutsi genocide, has left him profoundly damaged. Richards does not present

Delano as an uncomplicated and simply understood character. His pain is wholly other. This portrayal of the psychologically damaged police officer is consistently seen throughout the genre of detective fiction. Ian Cummins and Martin King argue that the dominant representation of police in TV dramas is “almost classic cases of PTSD,” yet the officers and their colleagues do not “see their behaviour in these terms. While *Dirty Harry* . . . was damaged, he was in control whereas in modern-day representations the predominant model is out of control and staring into the abyss” (844). In *Principles to Live By*, Richards characterizes Delano’s profession as harrowing, difficult, perhaps even heroic in how Delano is misunderstood: “John was unloved and did an unloveable job, and [he] exacerbated this alienation by his analytical approach to those about him” (74). His PTSD surfaces more than once as the narrative progresses. His psychiatrist asks him if he ever thinks of taking his own life. Delano replies, “not so often. Four, maybe five times a day” (171). His own son disappears, and he has several professional struggles that put him in a severe depression: “[I]t came over John in waves as he spoke to his psychiatrist about it. . . . [Events] had made his life so bitter that for days on end he did not get out of bed. Once, when people told him he would die if he did not eat, he replied, ‘Well, why in God’s name do you think I am not eating?’” (81). This consistent portrayal of officers who suffer from a host of mental and physical troubles, some resulting from the job and some not, presents questions for those who study crime fiction. Is this kind of suffering an expectation within the culture of policing, or is it an expectation of the public? What are the intersections between fiction and real life, if any? If there are any intersections, can they be employed to lessen this suffering?

Although public perception and popular media impose certain values or principles onto the policing world, police aspire to live by their own code. Cummins and King argue that

any discussion of police culture needs to explore the attitudes that officers have about their own roles but also the wider society [sic] that they live in and police. This is vital because these attitudes underpin officers’ conduct. One feature of this set of attitudes that has been highlighted is the police officers’ exaggerated sense of mission. As Skolnick (1966) comments, [because] . . . police officers are charged with the defense of societal values (obviously, a contested

concept) . . . it is inevitable that they see themselves as the living embodiment of these values. (834)

Delano consistently struggles with trying to live up to an idealistic set of values. As the protagonist of *Principles to Live By*, he exhibits a selfless human decency, and he is capable of great sacrifice with little reward. As Richards writes, “it was a thankless job very well done. In fact like great men and women John had done his job heroically, without the benefit of help or hope of applause” (310). Delano’s sacrifices take a toll on his mental and physical health. His greatest anxiety and suffering occur, however, when other people do not live up to his ideals. His relationships with those in power, embodied by a group of Canadians working at the United Nations who fail to adequately respond to the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda, is often tense and confrontational. These repeated negative interactions with others give Delano a bad reputation, and instead of being seen as an individual who upholds a set of principles, he becomes “the poster child of intolerance within the police” (65). However, the assumptions that people draw from their observations of Delano are almost always counter to his internal self as characterized by the narrator. This distinction between the complex inner world and the simplified and unfairly judged outer self is extremely similar to social sorting except that it is enacted on a police officer.

Richards’s representations of Delano and Melonson encourage a productive sense of uncertainty about policing and surveillance. For Wylie, the importance of literary ethics lies in producing what he describes as messiness, a kind of moral ambiguity: “Perhaps more importantly, the ethical utility of literary texts may well reside most of all in their lack of amenability to clear judgment (whether that judgment be consensus or disagreement) — that is, in their recurrent ambiguity” (“Making a Mess of Things” 831). Scaggs’s reading of crime fiction ties nicely into Wylie’s description of ethical criticism. Scaggs writes that “highlighting the impossibility of what has always been central to crime fiction [is] . . . the process of interpretation itself. It is the indeterminacy of the interpretative act, and the parallels between detection and the reading process that allow postmodern crime fiction to underline this indeterminacy” (4-5). The narrator of *Principles to Live By*, despite the thematic emphasis on principles, also values a level of uncertainty. In the dichotomy developed between Melonson and Delano, Melonson is notable — among other things — for exhibiting false certainty and seeking the most obvious

answer: “He already believed the [missing] boy was Jack Toggle [a local kid], who had run away — Jack Toggle had run away before so now he had done so again. That was the paradigm Melonson insisted upon” (131). Delano also exhibits certainty but not until he has experienced a moment of self-doubt and hesitation: “I am now thinking that he [the missing boy] came to the wrong city — there was a mix-up, and perhaps he was supposed to be in St. John’s, Newfoundland. But I am uncertain” (102). The narrator develops these two competing methods of observing the world and observing an event. Melonson begins with a solution to the problem and plods along with absolute certainty to prove that it is correct. Delano has a hunch and through careful observations, trial and error, finds out if his hunch is true or false. This productive and humble sense of not knowing, which might eventually lead to certainty, is an important lesson for ethical criticism, which seems to be fixated on uncertainty. Tremblay describes Richards’s moral philosophy as “his belief in the ethical superiority of spontaneous action over calculated intent, which is always more ideologically laden” (313). Richards has been criticized for this apparent favouring of impulsive action over more self-conscious action. Discussing the Miramichi trilogy, Armstrong and Wylie argue that “The narrative voices across the trilogy are predisposed to place under suspicion reason, causality, and larger complexes of social meaning, privileging instead spontaneity, chance, and un-self-consciousness” (7). The behaviour of Delano, clearly the hero of *Principles to Live By*, does not fall on either side of this dichotomy but is a strange mix of reason, causality, chance, and spontaneity. His hunches are reminiscent of Serpell’s “flinging of the self” in that Delano accepts that he does not know the truth but must act nonetheless. He must throw himself into the case, and as he sifts through the past his hunches are his best method of acting justly within the moral ambiguity of complex moments.

Considerations of the police are not solely about developing an ethics of surveillance; imagining the difficulties of those tasked with surveilling the public might actually contribute to better police work. In “The Impact of Negative Publicity on Police Self-Legitimacy,” Justin Nix and Scott Wolfe argue that

it is irresponsible for researchers (and the public) to ignore how . . . negative publicity can diminish officers’ sense of self-legitimacy.

This is important because research suggests that self-legitimacy is associated with a number of beneficial behaviors for law enforcement agencies and the public more generally. Officers with greater confidence in their authority are more likely to identify with their agency and its goals . . . , support the idea of interacting with citizens in a procedurally fair manner . . . , and — perhaps most relevant to the current debate surrounding the police — be more restrained in the decision to use force. . . . (100-01)

Self-legitimacy is how self-perception melds with public perception, and in *Principles to Live By* public perception of the police is heavily influenced by the news media. In this sense, Richards is perceptive in that the majority of the information available to average people about surveillance and policing comes from popular media. As Kenneth Dowler and Valerie Zawilski write,

popular media [are] . . . of fundamental importance in the construction of attitudes toward criminal justice and criminal justice agents. The majority of public knowledge about crime and justice is derived from media consumption. . . . As such, the perception of victims, criminals, and law enforcement officials is largely determined by their portrayal within the media. (193)

In *Principles to Live By*, news media obstruct policing efforts and unfairly characterize the protagonist's motives. One of Delano's more infamous cases is heavily influenced by his portrayal in the media: "[H]e did not address a suspect in French when he was making an arrest. The case was overturned and the man walked free. This was a major victory for the forces of liberty and equality, one paper had said. And John was the man who had subverted liberty and equality in order to get the job done" (70). Commenting on the case, Delano says, "I was looked upon as a bigot" (70). Even though he acted reasonably, "the media and others became increasingly wary — John Delano was not the most savoury person; well, not in Canadian terms, anyway" (312). The man arrested, Bennie Cheval (who speaks English almost exclusively), is implicated in a murder case, and he walks free in part because of the media's intervention. Richards presents an ethical dilemma in that liberty and equality are social goods, but they are used to a negative end in freeing a murderer. The case hinges on how the media influence observations of Delano's character, thus exemplifying the intersection



of surveillance and language; the words used to describe Delano change how he is watched, and such scrutiny damages his mental and physical health. He is still an effective officer, but he is not able to work as much as he did in the past. In contrast, similar pressure on Melonson alters his self-legitimacy, and he does not always interact “with citizens in a procedurally fair manner” (Nix and Wolfe 101). Condemnations of those tasked with watching the public, though certainly necessary from time to time, might not be as productive as even-toned attempts to understand their difficult jobs.

Although *Principles to Live By* offers insights into the lives of police officers, some of the characters who interact with the police are designed to be one-dimensional. In a review in *Quill and Quire*, James Grainger criticizes the portrayal of Melissa Sapp: “Sapp, as Richards characterizes her, is the embodiment of everything wrong in the modern world: an intellectually arrogant hypocrite who uses left-wing pieties to mask and satisfy her will to power. She’s also a feminist, a position that, for reasons never specified, infuriates Delano” (25). This criticism seems to be well founded, and it is not a new criticism of Richards. The same critique that Armstrong and Wylie make of his antagonists could be directed at Sapp and the Lion of Justice (a UN envoy): “The majority of the antagonists in the novels have achieved a certain level of social respectability — enough, certainly, so that they are acutely conscious of others’ lack of it — and come across as self-aggrandizing, hypocritical, calculating, yet insecure. . . . [B]ut their motivation is constructed as self-concern rather than *genuine* concern for others” (9-10). The one-dimensionality of Sapp is particularly notable considering that Richards is adept at developing characters who are more realistic. Delano and Melonson, for example, are complex, nuanced, and extremely interesting representations of police officers. Grainger adds that “She [Sapp] and other representatives of liberalism and the left — including a UN special envoy referred to as ‘the Lion of Justice’ — are described with hectoring sarcasm, as if Richards’s contempt prevents him from elucidating their inner lives and motivations (a notable omission, given his talent for creating believable villains)” (25). To be fair, the actions of both Sapp and the Lion of Justice deserve sarcasm. Furthermore, the Lion of Justice is clearly designed to be a satirical character in that his actions consistently play against his name. To better understand this aesthetic choice, it makes sense to go back to one of Wylie’s earliest essays on Richards. In

“Laughs in the Desperate Hour,” Wyile argues that “Richards’ fiction is much more consistently humorous than it gets credit for” (107). He adds that, “if Richards’ writing is humorous, most of that humour is of the dark variety” (111). The *Lion of Justice* is written with this “dark” sense of humour that Wyile noticed early on in Richards’s career. The desire for exclusively well-rounded characters in a novel might be more reflective of scholarly expectations than a failing of *Principles to Live By*.

Nevertheless, Grainger’s point still stands: Sapp and the *Lion of Justice* are not developed with the same complexity and nuance as Delano or Melonson. What results is a didacticism in which a moral lesson is implied about good and bad behaviour. Armstrong and Wyile make a similar criticism in their evaluation of the Miramichi trilogy: “[T]he trilogy often appears to be a didactic exercise, a set of modern morality tales about the dangers of progressive political correctness — to be sure, a practice that is at odds with Richards’s valorizing of ‘life’” (12-13). Didacticism is a problem for literary fiction because it tends to simplify complex issues.<sup>6</sup> Grainger’s criticism is essentially that Richards sorts characters into conservatives and liberals and that the liberal characters are often examples of bad behaviour. However, looking closely at the scholarship on Richards, he is not the only one who sorts people into groups. Lawrence Mathews strongly argues that Richards has been simplified and categorized by academics: “Armstrong and Wyile suggest that Richards’ philosophical position is not the result of decades of intense thinking and feeling about art and life but rather something like a reflex action” (134). Perhaps a lesson that can be taken from this discourse is that, the moment people can be separated into groups, they begin to simplify one another in extremely complex ways. The heart of this tension between Richards and the academy is partially aesthetic, but it is also a difference of politics. Whether rightly or wrongly, he is viewed as a conservative author, and to be blunt, this conservatism has bothered some critics. To be truly pluralist, however, means embracing authors who appear to be conservative as well as those who appear to be liberal. Respectfully, this openness has not always occurred in the discourse on the work of Richards.

A similar kind of social sorting plays out in *Principles to Live By*. Delano feels harassed by his enemies, and they feel harassed by him. One root of harassment is a failure to consider other people’s thoughts and emotions. Delano feels unfairly observed and criticized by Sapp,

and undoubtedly she has similar feelings about him. Sapp and the Lion of Justice think of Delano as a one-dimensional person. He is characterized as rude and bigoted when he is actually far more complicated than people think. The failure to appreciate the complexity of other people results in part from the false assumption that one can fully understand their thoughts and feelings, that their inner worlds can be approached with empathy alone. Delano and Sapp think that they know one another. However, she merely projects a simplified version of his inner world onto his behaviour; he in turn does the same to her. Each has a poor approximation of the other. In this sense, alterity is an extremely important concept for the discourse on surveillance and the issue of social sorting; it discourages simplified understandings of other people's behaviour; it encourages humility, respect, and open-mindedness. Thus, though *Principles to Live By* does not present a holistic understanding of the surveillance state, it offers a perspective that, when paired with ethical criticism, could be particularly instructive for discussions of the cultural politics of Canada.

Wyile's scholarship deftly tracks the political and social changes that have shaped Canada's Atlantic provinces from both a regional and a global perspective. Whether positive or negative, Wyile's observations on Richards's work were passionate, well articulated, and perceptive. *Principles to Live By* demonstrates Richards's interest in how Atlantic Canada is situated within the broader world, and whether or not one agrees with the politics of this novel, there is undoubtedly a political undercurrent. Wyile's critical gaze informs and challenges Richards's creative work and vice versa.

Furthermore, Richards's text might add to the discourse on surveillance in narrating the interior of the panopticon. Those who enact surveillance are not necessarily secretive, unfeeling individuals concealed from the public. Sometimes they are strangers, but they are also neighbours, friends, and parents. Sometimes they revel in their role as observers, and sometimes they secretly feel trapped in their position. Richards is careful to contrast public perceptions of police officers with their interior worlds. The public in *Principles to Live By* tends to view the officers as blunt, forceful, and even crude. However, the officers' inner worlds are always more complex. Marquis concludes his study with a call to action: "[I]t is imperative that academics, interest groups

and ordinary citizens resist . . . ‘police as hero’ narratives and hold police organizations and their governance bodies accountable” (237).

However, if this resistance is carried out in a way that increases tension between the police and the public, then both sides will lose. The idea of resistance might need to be exchanged for less dramatic notions such as cooperation and mutual compromise. *Principles to Live By*, among other things, is a literary imagining of what happens when the public fails to appreciate the RCMP and when police officers fail to support one another. Introducing the concept of self-legitimacy to the discourse on surveillance might be an extremely productive step to ensure positive interactions between the police and the public. Calmly and evenly considering the perspective of those who surveil might contribute to a more realistic understanding of the complex work that police officers do, which in turn might generate more positive interactions with the public and a greater likelihood of a healthy police work culture (Nix and Wolfe 101).

Many of the officers in *Principles to Live By* who are powerful and exert force on their surroundings do not feel powerful. They tend to express — in their thoughts at least — a sense of feeling trapped in an unjust world, suffering to make it better in some way. In this sense, thinking about policing and surveillance as informed by literary genre might not only help to identify connections between real and imagined worlds but also be a way to develop a nuanced image of police culture within this discourse. The public in *Principles to Live By* tends to presume that officers do not have complex inner worlds. They observe police in a way informed more by social positions than by individual characteristics. This consistent failure to imbue the public figure with a private self might well be considered poetic justice; those who enact social sorting are also categorized and sorted in their own way. However, considering the police also seems to be an important component of the discourse on surveillance in that it broadens the scope of the discussion to imagine the internal conflicts of those who observe; it pulls back the blinds inside the watchtower to reveal another series of panopticons, a matryoshka doll with a hidden camera at each layer.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This essay is written for two people. Herb Wyile was a kind and generous scholar. I wanted to write this essay out of respect for him and his work. The father of my wife was an RCMP officer, and she has done her best to honour his memory. This essay is also written for her.

I would like to thank Cynthia Sugars, Paul Chafe, Peter Thompson, Alexander MacLeod, Larry Mathews, and Danine Farquharson for their help with my scholarship. Some of the research on surveillance and ethical criticism was completed during my PhD. I would also like to thank David Adams Richards for writing *Principles to Live By*.

The allowance for average people to freely and conscientiously discuss our national institutions is one of the many things that makes this country great. This essay in no way is a commentary on any RCMP officer.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For further reading on this debate, see *David Adams Richards: Essays on His Works*, edited by Tony Tremblay.

<sup>2</sup> Although my approach will differ slightly, this ground has already been tilled by Tony Tremblay in *David Adams Richards of the Miramichi: A Biographical Introduction* and by J. Russell Perkin in "Learning about the Crucifixion: The Religious Vision of *For Those Who Hunt the Wounded Down*."

<sup>3</sup> In *Transparent Lives: Surveillance in Canada*, surveillance is defined as "any systematic focus on personal information in order to influence, manage, entitle, or control those whose information is collected. Put this way, it is clear that surveillance can be good or bad, acceptable or not. But it is also clear that surveillance is more than peeping at, snooping, or eavesdropping on others. Surveillance is a dominant organizational practice that often results in people being categorized in ways that facilitate different forms of treatment for different individuals" (Bennett et al. 6). The only contentious word in this definition is *personal* in that the personal and the private are often difficult to disentangle. For that reason, I follow an amended definition and remove that word. Furthermore, Steve Mann defines surveillance as the way in which hierarchical structures enact observation of the public, and he contrasts it with *sousveillance* or counter-observation from the public (620). In *Principles to Live By*, the lines between hierarchical structures and the public are too fuzzy for such a distinction.

<sup>4</sup> The panopticon is an integral theory in surveillance studies. It originated with Jeremy Bentham, who envisioned a prison in which those who observed the prisoners remained concealed in a watchtower. He discussed how "persons of all classes" could watch prisoners from inside the tower, and because of feeling watched, prisoners would manage their own behaviour (200). In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault used Bentham's panopticon as a metaphor to describe the processes of socialization in contemporary society (205). People behave in certain ways because they internalize social norms. The greatest motivator for living one's life according to these norms is not only the threat of punishment or a desire to be like others but also the sense of being monitored.

<sup>5</sup> Embracing otherness is the seeking out of difference in the self and in other people. This philosophy was largely pioneered by Emmanuel Levinas (*Otherwise, Totality*) and extended by Jacques Derrida ("Violence"). Prominent contemporary thinkers who have advanced concepts of otherness include Judith Butler (*Giving*) and Simon Critchley (*Infinitely Demanding*). Otherness and alterity are frequently used in ethical criticism as

synonyms. They are terms that encourage a respect for differences as opposed to a search for similarities. Serpell points out that otherness and alterity generally lead to “the discovery of uncertainty,” but she warns that it is the job of the critic to do more than merely submit to otherness (17). Critics also need to identify the specifics of alterity and to consider what might be learned from difference.

<sup>6</sup> The same criticism does not ring true for *Principles to Live By* when it is bracketed within the crime genre, which has its roots in the cautionary tale (Scaggs 13). Crime novels are almost always didactic in the sense that, by their conclusions, at least one of the characters is generally punished; if the wrong people are punished, then their punishment also presents a moral lesson.

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