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Heather Shore, *Artful Dodgers : Youth and Crime in Early Nineteenth-Century London*

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«superstitious» practices from the meanings which they possessed in Indian culture? Such meanings, after all, could challenge the authority of the Company's law.

One of the most dramatic and romantic stories of the way that the British brought «law and order» to India is that concerning the suppression of Thuggee. The thugs, according to the men who suppressed them as well as to subsequent novelists and movie makers, were criminal communities whose trade was the robbery and murder of ordinary travellers. Reality is invariably and, perhaps, inevitably more mundane than romance, and Singha presents a convincing challenge to the traditional view. There were, she notes, few complaints about the inadequacy of existing laws for dealing with robbery on the roads before the Thuggee Act of 1836; parties containing Europeans were not attacked, while the incidence of attacks does not appear to have reached serious proportions. Rather the campaign against the thugs, in Singha's estimation, stemmed principally from a desire to elaborate the paramountcy of the British. As the paramount power in India they were thus taking it upon themselves to rid the entire territory, and not just the Company's lands, of the evil; moreover such action could be portrayed in the broadest sense as reformist, rather than simply authoritarian. «It was far easier to prosecute a prisoner on a charge of belonging to some ill-defined criminal collectivity than to establish individual responsibility for a specific criminal offence» (p. 170), and it is relevant to note that the Thuggee Act made «Thuggee» and being a member of «a gang of thugs» an offence without ever defining either.

Both Farmer and Lindsay take the readers far from the comfortable notion of the law as some kind of abstract entity to which everyone within a society is subject, and which is disinterestedly interpreted by judges. Arguably the current historical research into crime and the law in Europe and America has been consistently pressing such a case in recent years, yet Singha's Indian vantage point provides a valuable new dimension, and Farmer's penetrating insights are particularly significant coming as they do from a critical legal perspective. Suggestions that law was often a compromise between one set of cultural values and another, that it can be related to assertions of paramountcy, that it is essentially a system of administration within society rather than a representation of community interests and morality, may smack of the post modern and may not win the plaudits of many senior legal practitioners, but as deployed in these two books they make good sense and stimulate.

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In the contemporary popular imagination the juvenile offender can be placed anywhere on a spectrum ranging from a loveable cockney rascal, such as 'the Artful Dodger' of Lionel Bart's 1960s musical *Oliver!* (as opposed to Charles Dickens' original), to the two ten-year-old 'monsters' who murdered two-year-old Jamie Bulger in Liverpool in February 1993. More often than not attitudes veer towards the latter

end of the spectrum, especially as the popular press feeds its readers on a diet of teenage car-thieves, muggers, drug addicts, and single mothers, and as politicians seek to blame their political opponents for these indicators of problems within society. A variety of individuals and social forces are identified as the causes of the juvenile delinquency – feckless parents, teachers who fail to teach right from wrong, violent films and videos, an overall decline in morality and respect. However, when the violence of such offenders is particularly apparent, or horrific, as in the Bulger case, then it is the children/juveniles who are themselves guilty of being ‘evil’. The current situation finds deep resonances in Heather Shore’s *Artful Dodgers* with its focus on early nineteenth-century London.

In recent years there has been considerable historical interest in the origins of juvenile delinquency in England. Shore builds significantly on this work. She stresses that the youthful offender was not someone new in the early nineteenth century; what was new was the development of a novel and specific definition of such an offender, particularly in legal discourse. She judiciously balances the explanations offered by early nineteenth-century commentators with her own, careful reading of a variety of sources – court records, police reports, even a clutch of interviews with juvenile offenders held on the *Euryalus* prison hulk between 1825 and 1843. She explores the existence of these offenders at home, at work, and on the streets, the varieties of their offences – generally petty theft, rarely violent – and their process into and through the criminal justice system. Some of her conclusions turn out as might be expected. Youthful offenders were mainly male, and their families were usually poor. But while there are examples to support the early nineteenth-century notions of the juvenile pickpocket linked with a criminal subculture and adult receivers such as Dickens’s Bill Sikes and Fagin, this does not appear to have been the situation of most offenders, nor is there much evidence to support the idea of a steady progression from petty to serious crime. Rather than the stereotypical drunks, scroungers, prostitutes and petty thieves, some parents were clearly respectable in their poverty and in despair at the behaviour of their unruly sons; and most of the young men appear, probably, to have given up occasional offending with growing maturity and the acquisition of forms of responsibility. Mindful of the problems of court statistics, Shore concludes with an exhaustive statistical appendix, based on the Criminal Registers of Middlesex, which categorises the patterns of juvenile crime and punishment.

In sum, this is a well-researched and well-argued monograph contributing significantly to our understanding of juvenile delinquency. Perhaps it is the voices of the offenders which Shore has found in such records as the interviews conducted on the *Euryalus* which provide some of the most compelling material deployed here. These interviews underline the fact that each offender was a distinct individual – sometimes pathetic and unfortunate, and sometimes brutal and cruel, but rarely one that fell neatly and simply into popular characterisations.

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