A Review of Simon Lelic's Novel: *Rupture*[1] – a Case of Genre Deviance

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Simon Lelic's first novel *Rupture* would certainly fit into Gregoriou's (2007: 123-156) category of a generically deviant detective novel as it departs drastically from the assumptions contained in Monsignor Knox's (1929:1739) much-quoted, entertaining but humorously politically incorrect 'decalogue'[2] of prohibitions concerning detective stories. W. H. Auden's definition of a classical detective novel is, however, probably more succinct and more precise than any other:

> The vulgar definition, "a Whodunnit," is correct. The basic formula is this: a murder occurs; many are suspected; all but one suspect, who is the murderer, are eliminated; the murderer is arrested or dies. (Auden 1974: 400)

Interestingly, Auden goes on in the next paragraph to exclude Francis Iles's *Malice Aforethought* (1931) from his definition. In this novel, the murderer is revealed in the opening sentences:

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[1] The novel is now also published under the title *A Thousand Cuts.*

[2] 'Ten Rules for a Good Detective Story' (Besides being a well-known intellectual in literary circles, Monsignor Ronald A. Knox (1888-1957) also wrote popular detective stories.)

1. The criminal must be someone mentioned in the early part of the story, but must not be anyone whose thoughts the reader has been allowed to follow.
2. All supernatural or preternatural agencies are ruled out as a matter of course.
3. Not more than one secret room or passage is allowable.
4. No hitherto undiscovered poisons may be used, nor any appliance which will need a long scientific explanation at the end.
5. No Chinaman must figure in the story.
6. No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.
7. The detective must not himself commit the crime.
8. The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
9. The stupid friend of the detective, the Watson, must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind; his intelligence must be slightly, but very slightly, below that of the average reader.
10. Twin brothers, and doubles generally, must not appear unless we have been duly prepared for them.

> It was not until several weeks after he had decided to murder his wife that Dr Bickleigh took any steps in the matter. Murder is a serious business. (Iles 7: 1931)

Similarly, in *Rupture* there is no mystery as to who the perpetrator is - Samuel Szajkowski is a history teacher of Polish origin, who murders three pupils and one teacher before finally shooting himself in the assembly hall of a North London comprehensive school, all in full view of the assembled staff and pupils.

Another deviance from the classical genre in this novel is the fact that it does not conclude optimistically with a mystery solved and all loose ends tied up, but, instead, ends on a note of defeat, perhaps, even to the point of despair. This is muted only by the fact that the investigator, Detective Inspector Lucia May, successfully confronts her enemies and exposes their evil and hypocrisy to their faces. Lucia May is later suspended from the case and, in the end, hands in her resignation. There is even a remote threat of legal action to be taken against her on account of her (innocently) divulging confidential information during the investigation. Her 'fault' is that she becomes too involved in the investigation in defiance of her boss Chief Inspector Cole who wants the case to be cleared up as quickly as possible, almost as though the crime could be treated as if it were in a classical detective novel:

> 'Five people died. All right then. Where did they die?' He looked at Lucia but did not wait for her to answer. 'In the same room. And how? By the same gun, at the hands of the same gunman. You have a murder weapon, a motive, a room full of witnesses.' DCI Cole looked at his watch. 'I've got an hour before I'm due to go home. I could write your report and still knock off twenty minutes early.' (Lelic 2010: 25)

Lucia, however, wants to find out what drove a relatively mild mannered history teacher to embark on a killing spree before committing suicide. In her investigation, May discovers that a culture of bullying, fear, viciousness and violence is endemic amongst both the staff and pupils. What is even worse is that Bartholomew Travis, the headmaster, is less concerned with uprooting the causes of the malignant atmosphere that pervades the whole school than with abrogating his own responsibilities, apportioning blame to others and covering up all traces of negative behaviour in order to present a positive image of his school. Even more shocking is the fact that the school is presented as less dysfunctional than other schools in the neighbourhood. Mr. Samson, whose son, Elliott, had to be hospitalised on account of the physical damage he had suffered from school bullies and was eventually driven to suicide by a campaign of utterly

malicious cyber bullying, shocks Lucia May when he expresses his intention to send his daughter to the same school despite the torture his son had been subjected to:

> 'Academically it's a good school. Fine. But your son was attacked. He was beaten and was cut and was bitten. Why would you want to send your daughter there as well?' […]
>
> He nodded again, emphatically. 'And when we looked at the alternatives, Inspector. The other schools. Some of them…. You just wouldn't. You just couldn't.' (Lelic 2010: 185 & 186)

Mr. Samson's descent into speechlessness in his attempt to describe the other schools in the area provides a convincing impression as to what are perceived to be the horrific conditions in the English state secondary schools of that area. Travis, who is in league with Cole, succeeds in rescuing the totally undeserved positive reputation of his school. The bullies at the school together with the sexist bullying Lucia endures at the CID unit continue to go unpunished. Lucia not only loses her job but is also emotionally broken by the whole experience. This dystopia is not some nightmarish scenario set in a fictive society, but is, instead, a convincing portrayal of bullying within 'Broken Britain'[3]. Lelic's view of contemporary society is very bleak, but few would argue against its accuracy as the portrayal is convincingly detailed. (See also footnote 4 for corroboration as to the extent of this social malady.)

In his review of the novel in the *Independent*, Bill Greenwell refers to the novel as a *whydunnit* as opposed to the conventional *whodunnit*. However, this designation is not totally apt because there are as many unanswered questions at the end of the novel as there are comprehensible motives for Szajkowski's committing this appalling crime. It is not even clear as to who was Szajkowski's prime target in his botched murderous rampage. This is why Gregoriou's category of generic deviance would seem to be a preferable classification even if it can be used to include novels as varied as Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, G. K. Chesterton's *The Man Who Was Called Thursday* or Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. There is an element of the structure of a detective novel in these three examples, but solving a crime is by

[3] This term to describe the breakdown of family, morals and standards has been used since 2007 by David Cameron and the Conservative Party and was later popularized by the *Sun* newspaper with the result that it is a still very much a current formulation.

no means the main issue. The same applies to *Rupture* and it will be argued that this novel is not out of place in the *ad hoc* canon just quoted in the previous sentence.

The main theme of this novel is bullying. It is, of course, well-known that this important issue[4] has been recently (2011) highlighted by Catherine Middleton, now the Duchess of Cambridge. She requested contributions to charities rather than lavish wedding presents for the royal couple and specified the anti-bullying charity *Beatbullying* for inclusion. This has led to a national debate on this subject, which had already been graphically exposed by Lelic, among others, more than a year before the royal wedding. The novel deals with two *bullycides*[5], Samuel Szajkowski's suicide and that of a pupil called Elliot Samson already referred to, whose tragic death acts as a sub-plot.

A remarkable structural feature of this novel is the use of dia/monologues. Fifteen different speakers recount their impressions of Szajkowski and the events surrounding the massacre. The monologues are based on dialogues with Detective Inspector May who, however, remains 'invisible' throughout each discourse, but her presence and questions can be inferred from the statements of the interviewees. An example of this technique can be seen in the very first monologue when a pupil narrates events surrounding the massacre to May and apologises for referring the headmaster Bartholomew Travis by his nickname *Bickle*:

> Bickle, that's Mr. Travis, the headmaster. That's what we call him cos basically he's mental. You won't tell him that I said that, will you? (Lelic 2010: 3)

This technique is a bold venture as each interviewee is not introduced, but the identity of the speaker becomes clear in the course of the dia/monologue. The identity and role of the

[4] The charity *Beatbullying* published research (12.05.2011) showing that 'more than a third (37%) of young people report having suffered a severe physical or sexual attack during childhood by a fellow young person – over a quarter of which involved the use of a weapon. The severity of bullying is significant, 52 per cent having sustained physical injuries from the attack, 28 per cent threatened with a weapon and almost a tenth (7%) knocked unconscious, reported the 16 – 25 years olds questioned. A further quarter of those respondents who had suffered child-on-child violence were subjected to a sexual attack by a peer; of these victims 19 per cent were young girls.' (*Beatbullying* Website: Homepage: http://www.beatbullying.org: 12.05.2011)

[5] This is a recent portmanteau term that has entered the English language to refer to cases of suicide or murder caused by bullying because this sad phenomenon has become so prevalent in British schools. (This is the main theme throughout Field & Marr 2001).

interviewee can generally be recognized by what he or she asserts, but also and, more interestingly, by each particular sociolectal register and idiolectal variation. Bill Greenwell is rightly impressed by this technique:

> It's true that the unvarying pattern of the novel – a succession of 15 "monologues" interspersed with May's experiences – is risky. You could say that 15 voices is too ambitious; that it is impossible to distinguish them; that the structure leads to a degree of predictability. Yet Lelic pulls this off, each speaker helping the reader puzzle out what has happened and, more importantly, why. (Greenwell: 2010)

To "pull off" this feat, Lelic tries to keep the dia/monologues as close as possible to the original speakers' supposed idiolects as is the case in broad phonetic dictation and so contractions and weak forms such as 'cos' for *because* abound in the language of the pupils. Oddly, however, Lelic makes frequent use of the common confusion of misspelling the contraction of the auxiliary verb *'ve* (for *have*) with the preposition *of* to reveal a low sociolectal register as far as level of education is concerned as is the case with some of the pupils as in the following example:

> Samantha reckons I fancied him but I never did. I was going out with Scott, Scott Davis, so I wouldn't *of* told anyone even if I had *of* done. (Lelic 2010: 3) [My italics]

Even though the contraction *'ve* (for *have*) and the preposition *of* are homophones and so would not obtrude in speech, Lelic convincingly captures the idiolect of a sensible teenage girl pupil by using this technique, among others. Similarly, Lelic uses syntactical variation to show a low sociolectal register by the use of *never* to replace a simple negative as in the phrase *but I never did* or by frequent use of emphatic double negatives. The use of *never* for the simple negative is a very common intensifier in contemporary English, particularly amongst teenagers as argued by Palacios Martínez (2011: 4-35)[6]. Sometimes the dia/monologues are so close to the reality of contemporary semi-articulate youth speech, which is often heavily dependent on gestures and body language, that the reader has to be alert in order to comprehend exactly what is being said as in the following brief quote:

> And this other kid I know, David, he's like laughing at Gareth and going, I dunno, Gareth, maybe he dictates. And Gareth is like, oh. Which is like, duh. (Lelic 2010: 191)

[6] It could be an interesting exercise to compare Palacios Martínez's findings with Lelic's fictional representations of teenage speech as, even with a cursory glance through the article, a close correspondence can be established.

However, in the context of the novel, it is perfectly clear that the young lady is illustrating Gareth's interjection of surprise *oh* as being equivalent to an interjection reflecting stupidity *duh* because Gareth is rather slow on the uptake by failing to realise that *Bumlog*[7] is a hoax. There are, however, more than just two levels of variation: educated and uneducated. It could be argued that the idiolects of fifteen different people have been captured as claimed by Greenwell in his *Independent* article, but, for present purposes, to illustrate this hypothesis would demand a long and detailed analysis of the text.

The protagonist Samuel Szajkowski and his crime are thus portrayed entirely through the dia/monologues: his is the one voice we do not hear. We do not hear his defence so that we receive a generally negative portrait as he was not popular either with the pupils or with the staff. Even his one female friend, Maggie, rarely felt comfortable in his company. Apart from one botched session of sexual intercourse, they had little physical contact, despite being involved with each other for months:

> Apart from that one time, there was no physical involvement. We didn't even kiss. I'm embarrassed to say that, I don't know why. But it's the truth. We didn't kiss, we didn't hug, we didn't even hold hands. (Lelic 2010: 60)

Yet despite Szajkowski's tendency to alienate virtually every person he encounters on account of his low emotional intelligence and despite the protagonist's appalling crime, the reader still has more than a little sympathy for Szajkowski's suffering. The persecution he endures both from pupils and staff helps the reader to gain a clearer understanding of the factors that led to this 'rupture', this drastic breach from normality.

This portrayal is a remarkable *tour de force* brought about not only by the horrendous bullying to which Szajkowski is subjected, but also by the subtlety of the monologues which reveal the various

[7] Donovan and his gang had created a malicious blog they called *Bumlog* in which they pretended to be Szajkowski writing his own blog and which was freely available on the school computer to both pupils and staff. (The title of this log is based on Szajkowski's nickname Bumfluff, a vulgar reference to his wispy beard.)

speakers' own limitations, prejudices and sometimes sheer malice. This last feature is particularly prominent with regard both to Travis, the headmaster, and to Terence Jones, the P.E. teacher (or TJ as he is referred to throughout the book and accordingly, in this analysis). In the hierarchy of villainy within the novel, Szajkowski is by no means in the top bracket. He may be the *causa efficiens* of the tragic outcome, but the *causa finalis* lies with the main bullies, Travis and TJ among the staff, and Donovan, as the leader of a 'bad pack', among the pupils.

Travis's obnoxious character is revealed right at the beginning of his interview with Lucia by his condescending attitude to her. After proudly flaunting his own philistinism by denouncing the humanities as a complete waste of time, selecting history in particular, which he regards as nothing more than the "the study of swords and stupidity and scandals", he arrogantly assumes that Lucia is not a university graduate and flagrantly flouts English rules of politeness by guessing her age. In one brief extract alone, a great deal of information is conveyed directly. The sociolectal register is moderately high, but his idiolect is also riddled with clichés and pretentious language, indicated here by my italics in the extract:

> You would not have attended university, *I assume*?
>
> Well, *I stand corrected*. And what, *pray tell*, did you read? No, don't tell me. It is clear from your expression. And, in a way, *my dear*, you are a case in point. Where has your history got you if not further back than where you began? You are, how old? Thirty? Thirty-two, then. (Lelic 2010: 18) [My italics]

It is clear from the beginning that Travis was biased against the new history teacher because of his dislike of the subject and it comes as no surprise at a later stage in the novel that we learn from Janet, the inquisitive school secretary, that Szajkowski's three predecessors had left in a cloud of disgrace, two of whom suffered a terrible crisis or nervous breakdown:

> The headmaster, he came to despair of him [Szajkowski]. History teachers, he would mutter, and it's true: we never did have much luck with history teachers. Amelia Evans, for example. She taught history before Samuel. And oh dear. What a shock she had. She came to us from a grammar school. An all-girls grammar school. She told the headmaster she wanted a challenge. She used those very words. I was sitting right here, a bit closer to the door maybe, and I heard her

> use those very words in her interview. Well. A challenge I suppose is one word for what the children gave her. A nervous breakdown is another. So there was Amelia and before her there was Colin Thomas, who it turned out was on a list that meant he shouldn't even have been within shouting distance of the children, and before that there was Erica, Erica something or other, a nice enough girl, I thought, until one day she just didn't turn up. Not a phone call, not a letter and not a sign of her ever since. And of course there was Samuel himself. (Lelic 2010: 273-274)

In other words, Szajkowski's failure as a history teacher says as much about the school (or, more precisely, about Travis) than it does with regard to his own shortcomings. We can see from Travis's description of his very first encounter with Szajkowski how his assessment of Szajkowski was very based on his extreme bias against history teachers:

> He had a beard, wispy and ill-considered. He was average in height, average in build, averagely turned out in every aspect of his dress. Distinctly unimpressive in other words but not offensively lacklustre either. *He looked, Inspector, like a teacher of history*.
>
> […] He did not smile when he took my hand and he gripped only the tips of my fingers. It was a woman's handshake, Inspector, and that I would say is when I knew. (Lelic 2010: 19) (My italics)

Not surprisingly, Szajkowski receives no support whatsoever from Travis when the former is subjected to grossly unfair treatment both from pupils and staff. Thus, Travis's character emerges as much from the highly differentiated dia/monologues as it does from the tragic concatenation of events culminating in the final catastrophe.

In contrast to the pomposity of the headmaster, the language of Szajkowski's other primary staff bully, TJ, is located sociolectally half-way between the crude slang of the pupils and the relatively educated register of the teachers. This also fits into both the teachers' and pupils' perception of TJ as a cross between an overgrown schoolboy and a member of staff:

> He's just a kid, TJ. He acts like one of the kids. He's always out there with them, playing football, playing basketball. (Lelic 2010: 53)

Like Travis, TJ took an almost immediate dislike to Szajkowski from their very first handshake. It is interesting to compare both accounts of their first impressions of Szajkowski. Like the pupils,

TJ seems to be incapable of expressing himself freely without using swear words and other coarse expressions, but, unlike the pupils, he tries to correct himself almost constantly as in the following extract, where he fails to complete the vulgar expression *like a limp dick*. Similarly, in deference to politically correct Britain, he makes a feeble attempt to correct his homophobic expressions. His obscene language may be conventional in the changing room, but he has difficulty adjusting to a formal register in answering questions in a police enquiry:

> Szajkowski's grip was as limp as his … I mean, it was a faggot's handshake. That's just an expression, by the way. It's not derogatory. You know exactly what I mean. (Lelic 2010: 36)

Similarly, TJ's description of Szajkowski's outward appearance contrasts with that of the headmaster. It is perhaps more vivid, but the description also bears a nonchalant disregard of the elementary rules of English pronoun usage and is replete with his inevitable obscenities:

> I realize me and him aren't exactly alike. He's about half my size and pasty and he looks a bit like Woody Allen but with a straggly black beard and without the glasses and not as old or into sex. Or maybe he was, who the fuck knows? (Lelic 2010: 36)

TJ thinks in terms of stereotypes and clichés, which makes him very defensive about his own subject, P. E., as he is quick to point out the importance of his specialism in the opening of his interview with May:

> Physical education, since you ask. I have a degree in sport and leisure sciences from the University of Loughborough. It's the best course of its kind in the country. (Lelic 2010: 34)

When (stupidly) asked by TJ to guess which subject he (TJ) teaches, Szajkowski's first guess is physics. TJ assumes that this is a deliberate insult as he takes it for granted that it is obvious that he is a PE teacher. Both assumptions could well be wrong on account of Szajkowski's general otherworldliness and on account of the convention in English politeness rules of assigning

someone to a higher status than actually might be the case[8], but whatever the reason may be, it set off a very violent reaction in TJ, which became a major factor in the final tragedy. TJ'-s reaction is extreme and couched in very strong language:

> If I had to guess, I would say . . . No, I'm going to go for . . . Yes, that's it. TJ, you teach physics.
>
> Cunt.
>
> I mean, excuse the French, but seriously, what a cunt. I should have thumped him one right there. (Lelic 2010: 38)

When this portentous conversation continues and Szajkowski hazards in a second guess that TJ might be a Latin teacher, TJ assumes that Szajkowski is blatantly mocking him so that his anger verges to the point of wanting to commit murder, despite the fact that there is nothing contradictory about teaching Latin and being an active participant in school sports[9]. However, this notion would confound both his limited intellectual reach and his universe of discourse based on stereotypes:

> Latin, he says. You teach Latin don't you. I tell you if it wasn't for Bartholomew Travis that would have been the end of Sam-Samuel Szajkowski right there. And look what trouble it might have saved. (Lelic 2010: 38)

After this inauspicious meeting with TJ, a whole series of dirty tricks are carried out against Szajkowski. Firstly, TJ fools Szajkowski into wearing his jeans on a fabricated 'genes' day, leading to Szajkowski's being sent home by the headmaster 'like he's a kid', according to Maggie's report (one of the teachers) with the result that Travis very reluctantly stands in for him

[8]When two or three possible occupations are indicated, it is polite to name the highest status one as a first guess – doctor rather than a nurse, porter or medical student; solicitor rather than secretary. (Fox 2005: 45)

[9] This was a particularly prevalent tradition in British public schools where most of the sports lessons were taken by (highly gifted) amateurs who often were holders of Oxford or Cambridge 'blues' before physical education became an established subject as illustrated in the following quotation: 'The British amateur tradition has worked against the idea of *studying* sport. If "war was too serious a business to be left to the generals", sport was too important for pedagogues or specialists.' (Holt: 1996: 1).

for the whole morning, teaching the very subject he dislikes the most. Next, TJ hands Szajkowski a forged notice sending him to the wrong classroom so that the headmaster, who is already hostile to Szajkowski, has once again to restore order to an unintentionally abandoned class.

Szajkowski also suffers extreme bullying from the pupils right from his very first disastrous lesson with the history class in which Donovan is one of the pupils. Szajkowski fails to correct Donovan when the latter makes fun of his name and Polish origin. This scene is graphically portrayed through the mouth of a 'sensible' schoolgirl[10]:

> I'm gonna swear now, just to warn you. Not me, I'm just gonna tell you what Donovan said. Is that okay?
>
> Shitewhatsir? says Donovan. Shitecoughski? And in the middle he does this little cough, which really means k'off. You know, fuck off. Anyway, we all know what he means and everyone starts sniggering and one of Donovan's mates, Nigel I think, he does a little cough too and then the sniggering turns to laughing. Bumfluff[11] tries to talk over it but everyone knows by then that this teacher, this tatty little bloke with his proper toff accent, he hasn't got a chance against Donovan. (Lelic 2010: 76-77)

Szajkowski then totally fails to gain control of the class. One key factor for his general failure at the school is the headmaster's total lack of support. He fails to react to the following litany of complaints:

> He tells Travis that he has been tripped, shoved, abused, hounded, spat at. He tells Travis that his bicycle has been vandalised, his seat stolen, his tyres knifed. He tells Travis about the graffiti he has seen, the notes he has discovered in his pigeonhole, the text messages he has received. He tells Travis again what the kids deposited in his briefcase. (Lelic 2010: 101)

The quotation's final sentence refers to an incident when a pupil had deposited a stale turd in Szajkowski's briefcase. Szajkowski discovers this on opening his briefcase in the staffroom and

[10] This scene is redolent of Ursula Brangwen's loss of control of her class in D. H. Lawrence's novel *The Rainbow*, but in her case there were clear sanctions for unacceptable behaviour at the school and so, unlike Szajkowski, she eventually managed to gain control of her disruptive class.

[11] This obscene and embarrassing nickname is based on the wispy nature of Szajkowski's beard. (See footnote 6)

foolishly allows the pungent item of excrement to drop on to the floor to the consternation of the members of staff present at the time. Even worse for Szajkowski, TJ enters the staffroom at this inopportune moment with the result that TJ gleefully reports the incident to as many pupils as possible. Soon afterwards the whole school knows about the despicable and humiliating trick played on Szajkowski. This last episode could be classified as the culmination of the first stage of the bullying to which Szajkowski is subjected.

The staff versus pupils football match involves even more serious bullying and thus could be seen as the second stage of Szajkowski's suffering. The description of the match is given by Gi (short for Gideon), one of the Donovan gang. His dia/monologue is full of expletives, sexual and racist innuendo and reveals a total contempt for authority, particularly with regard to Lucia, since he uses offensive, insulting and sexist expressions such as 'Don't get your tits in a twist' (Lelic 2010: 168) ,'Well, you should of fucking said so,' (Lelic 2010: 174) and 'Are you gonna get your period if I tell you the score?' (Lelic 2010: 174). These extreme expressions were used in reply to what the reader supposes to be some irritation on Lucia`s part with regard to Gi's crude narration of the events from his point of view. During the match, Donovan stamps on Szajkowski's foot with his football studs, pulls down Szajkowski's shorts in full view of the school and, finally, Donovan and Gi deliberately cause Szajkowski serious injury to his knee, ankle and fibula:

> Don got his knee. I got his ankle. Not quite simultaneous but near enough. The sound it made was like ice cubes. You know, like when you drop ice cubes in a warm glass of Coke. [This would presumably be the sound of his fibula shattering.]
>
> I got up. Don got up. Bumfluff stayed down. He was squealing again. Actually, he was screaming. He was on his back and he was writhing. (Lelic 2010: 176)

Possibly even worse than the physical violence endured by Szajkowski is what could be classed as the third stage of the bullying, which is the mental torture caused by *Bumlog* on which the Donovan gang mocked Szajkowski's Polish origin (despite the fact he was second generation British) and cruelly humiliated him with obscene sexual innuendos, some of which referred to his former girlfriend Maggie:

> Day forteen
>
> Somethinged myself 2 sleep last nite. Couldn't find my Thing at 1st but kept thinking about Maggie and up it popped. One day i hope she will let me touch her bottom. Its big and round and probaly doesnt have much fluff on it at all. Even if it was fluffy i wouldnt mind. I would stroke it and hold it and rub my beard against it. (Lelic 2010: 195. Misspellings as in the original)

Even worse, when Szajkowski returned from hospital a week later, he must have been aware that the whole school knew about the *Bumlog*, because they made cruel references to it:

> —Oh yeah, he must of done. He must of heard people talking. I mean, all the kids, all the teachers — everyone read it. After the game, he was only away for about a week. He came into school on crutches. And during class and that, all the kids would be dropping hints. You know, going, nice post, sir, or, how was hospital, sir, or speaking in a Polish accent and repeating the stuff they'd read. He must of known. (Lelic 2010: 196)

The reader can assume that it must have been at this point that Szajkowski began to hatch his wild plan of revenge. One clue was the fact that he had taken a revolver to school, stolen from a German soldier by his grandfather during the Second World War. Ostensibly, it was intended to illustrate a history lesson, but it later became the murder weapon. In Lucia's interview with George, a homosexual R. E. teacher who shows genuine concern for Szajkowski, it emerges that Szajkowski pretended to fire the gun at TJ in the staffroom while shielding it from view behind his briefcase.

In the final outcome, Szajkowski kills Vicky, a teacher with whom Szajkowski had little contact. The whole school believed he was aiming at TJ whereas Maggie was convinced he was

aiming at her as she had dropped him as a special friend and, instead, had a brief relationship with TJ, Szajkowski's worst enemy amongst the staff. Lucia, however, is convinced that he was aiming at Travis. In the same interview, George had noticed that Szajkowski had been acting very strangely, neither washing himself nor changing his clothes, with the result that he exuded a distinct smell. Similarly, on the Monday before the catastrophic Wednesday assembly, Janet, the school secretary, also found his behaviour strange. At this point, she relates that he believed that the Donovan gang were after his blood (which was perhaps the final straw and the final stage of the bullying) and he had desperately wanted to see the headmaster, who fobbed him off as usual with useless clichés such as 'get a grip of yourself.' Szajkowski had also ceased to be polite and had taken a class without any intention of teaching or controlling them.

The final outcome, even though known from the outset, has a cathartic effect on the reader as the tension caused by the bullying becomes unbearable. Lucia's conviction that Szajkowski was aiming at Travis would seem to make the most sense, because Travis was the only one who had the power to stop the bullying, but had resolutely and consistently laid the blame on others. However, the reader is free to speculate as to who was the intended victim – Travis, TJ or Maggie - and thus the novel belongs more to a specifically literary tradition than to the detective novel genre.

The result of Lucia's *whydunnit* investigation is that Travis is the one who bears the greatest guilt for the awful events that happened in his school as in her accusations:

> 'There is plenty of blame to go around, Mr Travis. The simple fact is that you could have acted to prevent what happened but you did not. More than that, you were obliged to act. You knew — you know — about the bullying that goes on in this school. You know who the victims are and which children, which teachers, are responsible.' (Lelic 2010: 204)

Travis derisively rejects Lucia's accusation, even though it was based on a thorough investigation of the case, and he indirectly threatens her with legal action, as he is in cahoots with Lucia's superior. At one level, the investigation is a success because Lucia has found out what must have driven Szajkowski to despair and also who is the real culprit responsible for the dysfunctional atmosphere in the school.

In addition to the main plot, there are two sub-plots: the bullycide of Elliott, the ginger-haired boy with a disfiguring birthmark and the bullying Lucia has to endure from her colleagues, in particular from Walter who is portrayed by the author as an extremely obnoxious individual on account of his constant sexist verbal and physical bullying. It is beyond the scope of this essay to analyse the sub-plots, except to note that they add to the tension and to the motivation of Lucia's involvement. The bullying Lucia has to endure at the CID unit, which includes an act of physical sexual violence against her, as well as a constant barrage of sexual innuendo, helps to explain her deep involvement in both Elliott's bullycide and Szajkowski's murders and suicide. At the same time, it is shown that Lucia is no weakling and stands up to her bullies remarkably well and with humour, as in the following extract when Walter, an ugly, obese and sexist bully, pretends that Lucia (whom he nicknames *Lulu* deliberately to annoy her) is sexually interested in him:

> She turned. 'What's your problem, Walter? What is it that you want to say?'
> 'It's our problem, Lulu. Yours and mine. It's my girlfriend,' he said. 'I think she knows.'
> 'Your girlfriend?' said Lucia. 'Didn't she burst?' (Lelic 2010: 29)

Even though she is able to stand up to the bullying in the office as in this humorous reference to a sex doll (Walter's supposed girlfriend), she is often reduced to tears when out of sight. There is also an ugly incident in the car park when Walter pins Lucia to the ground and exposes himself to

her in a highly threatening fashion, but recourse to her chauvinist superior would be as useless for Lucia as Szajkowski's plea for help from Travis.

Bullying pervades the whole novel because in addition to the incidents referred to in this study, it turns out that Szajkowski had bullied his younger sister: other schoolchildren refer to being bullied in their reports; Donovan's father not surprisingly is also an aggressive bully particularly with regard to his wife; another pupil had been urinated over by Donovan and his gang in the school bus and so the list goes on. However, because of the dia/monologue technique the novel never becomes too depressing as the reader is invited to act with Lucia as a detective in order to work out what was really happening in this highly rated, though dysfunctional school.

From the various dialogues, particularly with regard to Szajkowski's own cruel treatment of his slightly mentally retarded sister, it emerges that Szajkowski was not a very 'nice' man, but, if he had been 'nicer', he would have been utterly broken by the school without taking revenge and would have left as a defeated victim, as had happened to at least two of his predecessors. There would have been no drama and no novel, of course, and the school would have continued its adverse course, unconcerned. It takes a fictional victim (and perpetrator) like Szajkowski to create the 'rupture' from outward respectability as in Travis's portrayal of the school as a centre of excellence in order to provide a focus for the true horror simmering and festering below the surface in the vicious bullying which pervades the whole school.

The novel has a clear and important message - worse even than Szajkowski's exceptional, momentary and catastrophic breach with normality - is the general phenomenon of bullying which destroys individuals (sometimes literally) on a silent, hidden and daily basis. Thus, it can

be seen that the novel is by no means a conventional detective story. It is a distinctive piece of contemporary literature, which not only shows extraordinary linguistic versatility and psychological subtlety, but also deals with one of our most serious contemporary problems, particularly within British institutions. Indeed, it can be argued that Lelic's novel *Rupture* can hold its own amongst the best exemplars of the detective novel of deviance[12].

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[12] The novel has already been recognised as an outstanding contemporary literary work as it has won the Betty Trask Award 2011 and has been shortlisted for the CWA John Creasey (New Blood) Dagger Award 2010, Galaxy National Book Awards 2010 and 'longlisted' for the Theakstons Old Peculiar Crime Novel of the Year Award as well as for the Desmond Elliot Prize 2010. It has also been selected for the Financial Times Books of the Year 2010, for the New York Times Notable Crime Books 2010 and Lelic has been named one of Amazon's Rising Stars 2010.

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