

15 Criminals as Heroes: News Media

Rhetoric in the Heineken Kidnap Case

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15.1 Introduction

Aristotle distinguished three rhetorical genres: the political, the judicial, and the ceremonial. From a rhetorical perspective, crime news at first sight belongs to the genre of judicial oratory: the rhetoric of the court of law, where guilt and innocence are at stake. When we take a closer look, however, we find that this categorization is mistaken: although crime reporters and criminal lawyers share the broad subject matter of crime and punishment, their audiences and consequently their rhetorical aims diverge. Unlike lawyers, journalists are not concerned with the judicial niceties of applicable laws and admissible evidence, nor do they seek to convince a judge or jury. The news audience consists of spectators. A lawyer's plea calls for a decision, a news report does not. By telling stories about topical events, news does more than convey information, it also promotes certain values: in this sense, it is a moralizing form of discourse.

This places crime news in the genre of ceremonial rhetoric, i.e. the oratory of praise and blame (Timmerman 1996). Originally conceived of as speeches for special occasions, such as funerals or inaugurations, the concept has also been applied to the rhetoric of news. We take our cue from Ettema and Glasser (1988:25), who argue that investigative journalism, although at first sight like political rhetoric, is more akin to ceremonial rhetoric, because it promotes righteous indignation rather than concrete policy choices.

Crime news, then, tells exemplary stories about victims and villains. Often, but not always, virtue is exemplified by victims and vice by criminals, when ideal, Little Red Riding Hood-like innocence meets stereotypical Big Bad Wolf-like brutality (Christie 1986; Koetsenruijter & Vanderveen 2011). But these are not the only flavours: from time to time, the media also construct that headline-grabbing hybrid character, the *criminal hero*.

Criminal heroes break the law, but reap admiration for their cunning,

guts and magnanimity. The archetypical outlaw hero, is, of course, Robin Hood. His story is made up of motifs – e.g. that he steals from the rich and gives to the poor, and only kills in self-defence – that feature in other criminal hero narratives, including those in present-day news reports.

In order to analyze the rhetoric news media use to construct the type of the criminal hero, we studied one of the most famous criminal cases in recent Dutch history: the kidnapping of beer brewer Alfred Heineken and his chauffeur Ab Doderer in 1983. At the time, police officials complained that the press had ‘glorified’ the kidnappers. In retrospect, their halo shines even brighter: recently dubbed ‘The Big Bang of Dutch Organized Crime’ (Kivits & Jaarsma 2010¹), the case is inscribed in Dutch cultural memory. In 2011, it was made into a movie, *The Heineken Kidnap*, starring Rutger Hauer as Freddy Heineken.

We sought to answer the following questions. By what means and to what extent did the news media represent the Heineken kidnap and its perpetrators as heroic? And, more specifically, to what extent does the media representation of the Heineken kidnappers match the standard Robin Hood narrative?

After a brief overview of our case, we will discuss theories dealing with criminal heroes, focusing on the rhetorical, mediated nature of these criminals rather than on their real-life exploits. Next, we will describe the set of methods we used to analyze the news coverage. Our results section focuses on the shifting roles assigned to the three main groups of protagonists: Freddy Heineken and his driver, the kidnap gang, and the law. Their ethos, as we will show, was shaped both by their acts and by rhetorical, discursive and narrative traditions that predate this particular crime story.

At this point, a word is in order about our understanding of ethos. In the Aristotelian sense, ethos refers to the qualities that make the orator credible in the audience’s perception: expertise, virtue, and goodwill. Since under Greek law defendants represented themselves, Aristotle did not need to distinguish between the defendant’s and the orator’s ethos. Cicero and Quintilian, on the other hand, practising rhetoric under a different legal system, where a *patronus* spoke on behalf of the defendant, do make that distinction (Calboli Montefusco 1994, pp. 71–73). The patron needs to establish his expertise, virtue, and goodwill towards the audience, the defendant merely

¹ All translations from the Dutch are by the authors.

needs to come across as virtuous. It is this sense of good moral character that is central to our analysis, which focuses on the criminals' ethos, not the journalists'.

15.2 The Heineken kidnap case

In late 1983, five men from Amsterdam kidnapped Alfred Heineken, at the time the owner of the Heineken brewery, and his driver Ab Doderer. In the three weeks that followed there was much public attention for the case, which culminated in the paying of an enormous ransom, and the freeing of both victims by the police. Soon after, police caught three of the five kidnappers and found a large part of the ransom. The remaining two kidnappers, Cor van Hout and Willem Holleeder, escaped to Paris. This turned out to be a brilliant move, since the extradition treaty between France and the Netherlands did not cover kidnap or extortion. So even after they were arrested in Paris, the kidnappers could not be extradited on these charges.

The judicial struggle to get them back in the Netherlands lasted two and a half years. Meanwhile, they were being hosted in hotels that were paid for by the French government, which could not legally extradite or imprison them. Eventually, the kidnappers were extradited under a new treaty, and sentenced to eleven years in prison.

15.3 Theorizing the criminal hero: Beyond Hobsbawm's social bandits

The phenomenon of Robin Hood-like heroic outlaws had been known for some time (e.g. Klapp 1948), but remained under-theorized until British social historian Eric Hobsbawm kick-started the theory of criminal heroes by coining the concept of social banditry in his 1959 study *Primitive Rebels*. Elaborated in *Bandits* (1969), this category comprises 'peasant outlaws whom the lord and state regard as criminals, but who remain within peasant society, and are considered by their people as heroes, as champions, avengers, fighters for justice, perhaps even leaders of liberation, and in any case as men to be admired, helped and supported' (Hobsbawm 1972, p. 17). Voicing peasant discontent, these bandits functioned as a form of pre-political protest: in feudal times, without access to modern political institutions such as trade unions, political parties, let alone universal suffrage, bandits stood up for peasant rights.

Hobsbawm's examples include the *haiduks* in the Balkans, the *dacoits* in India, and the outlaws of the Wild West – rural rebels in peasant socie-

ties. In his Marxist view, all of them, moreover, belong to the past, since the structural conditions that generated social banditry have long since disappeared (Ibid., p. 19). Now political awareness permeates to all but the most remote locations in the world, oppressed farmers have better means at their disposal to effect social change.

Although Hobsbawm's social bandit theory opened up new perspectives on the history of crime and still inspires scholars in various disciplines, it has also engendered a great deal of controversy among historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and folklorists. Their criticism is threefold. First, historical social bandits were not as social as Hobsbawm preferred to see them: very few actually fit the model. Instead of championing the cause of the oppressed, bandits often teamed up with landlords and terrorized the peasantry. In fact, official protection was crucial to their success (Blok 1972; Sant Cassia 1993; Slatta 2004).

Second, and more important for our angle of inquiry, Hobsbawm has been taken to task for failing to distinguish clearly between bandits and stories about bandits, using folklore and elite fiction – often published many years after the alleged facts – as sources of information about the historic actions of bandits, instead of contemporary police and trial records. Evidence of social protest can indeed be found in popular accounts of banditry, but it can never be taken at face value (Balkelis 2008; Blok 1972; Slatta 2004; Wagner 2007). In order to understand the social bandit phenomenon, or the broader category of criminal heroes, the various representations themselves, and their relation to social reality, must be made the subject of analysis (Wagner 2007, p. 358).

England's most famous highwayman, Dick Turpin, for example, is not remembered for killing the man who came to arrest him (which he actually did), but for riding from London to York overnight on his horse Black Bess, which he did not. Turpin did not possess a steed of that name; the famous ride derives from a novel published a hundred years after Turpin's death, which cast the eighteenth-century highwayman in a nineteenth-century mould. His contemporaries did not regard him as a hero (Sharpe 2005, pp. 153–160).

In this way, mediated images of bandits are shaped and reshaped to serve current interests – as they still are: the third and final point of criticism of Hobsbawm's theory is that stories about social bandit-like criminals still arise (Kooistra 1989, pp. 29–30, 160–176). Examples include 1930s gangsters like John Dillinger and Bonnie and Clyde (Beverly 2008), British me-

dia icons of the Sixties the Kray twins (Jenks & Lorentzen 1997; Pearson 2002), computer hackers (Brunvand 2000; Hollinger 1991; Seal 1996, pp. 194-197), Mexico's narcotraffickers (Edberg 2001, 2004), and gangsta rappers (Roks & Staring 2008).

In the West, feudal societies belong to the remote past but criminal heroes are still with us. What explains their continuing appeal?

15.4 Audacity

The appeal of criminal heroes may be explained in part by the sort of structural economic conditions that Hobsbawm focused on. During the Depression, charismatic criminals like John Dillinger reaped admiration for robbing banks – symbols of capitalism (Kooistra 1989, pp. 119-132; cf. Nadkarni 2000).

These conditions explain why certain criminals become popular in specific periods, but it does not fully explain why these stories should appeal to an audience that is not afflicted by these conditions. Neither do these structural conditions explain why routine coverage of thefts and burglaries is a news staple. Pondering this last question, Katz (1987) and Dahlgren (1988) argued that crime stories appeal to ordinary law-abiding citizens not as an expression of political protest, but as a daily moral work-out, during which readers may identify with criminals. Read like this, crime news provides a means of vicarious transgression. Without approving the crime, readers may admire the criminal's competence and daring. The key positive value, identified by both Katz and Dahlgren, is *audacity*:

Some acts and/or the means by which they are carried out appear to us as particularly rash, bold and daring. Others can be more brash, insolent and brazen. Both versions embody what I call audacity. While the morality of the act is never condoned, one can often detect an undercurrent of mild admiration for the audacious (Dahlgren 1988: 201; cf. Katz 1987: 50).

If mundane crime news holds these rewards, we may assume that long-running coverage of big-scale crime exerts an even stronger pull on the reader.

Katz and Dahlgren's assessment of crime news chimes in with the media-wise branch of criminology known as cultural criminology, whose proponents stress the appeal of transgressive behaviour, both as act and as representation (e.g. Presdee 2000). In fact, one of cultural criminology's central tenets is that in late modernity the boundary between act and representation

has become blurred: 'real' people and their acts cannot be distinguished from their media reflections, so criminals appear to us as mediated images in an infinite hall of mirrors (Ferrell 1999). Hence, cultural criminology urges us to be attuned 'to image, symbol and meaning as dimensions that define and redefine transgression and social control' (Ferrell, Hayward & Young 2008, p. 130). Consequently, what is needed if we want to study criminal heroes, is a more sophisticated understanding of the interweaving of criminal behaviour and media stories than is found in Hobsbawm's work.

15.5 Establishing ethos through narrative

So far, we have mostly dealt with the *why* of criminal heroes. It is time to turn to the *how* (cf. Kooistra 1989, pp. 27-28): by what means did the news media define and redefine the transgressive acts of the Heineken kidnapping?

Criminal heroes exist by virtue of the way their stories are told. Various actors shape these stories: law personnel, journalists, the general public, criminal subcultures, and the criminals themselves. The storytellers use folktale motifs, gangster movie clichés, news media stereotypes and other cultural resources. The narrative device that has received the most attention from scholars is the series of motifs that make up the Robin Hood narrative. First listed by Hobsbawm (1972, pp. 42-43) and amended by Seal (2009, pp. 74-75), the following twelve motifs are the building blocks from which criminal hero stories are constructed. The stories may not contain all motifs, but these are the recurrent elements found in the narrated lives of a hundred outlaw heroes from different time periods and various parts of the world (Seal 2009, pp. 68-70).

The hero does not choose to live outside the law, but is forced to by injustice (1). He (female outlaw heroes are quite rare) is supported by one or more oppressed social groups (2). He rights wrongs (3). He acts honourably: he only kills in self-defence or just revenge and does not harm women (4), he may be courteous to his victims (5), he steals from the rich and supports the poor and the weak (6). A master of disguise, he outsmarts the authorities, and once captured he proves himself an escape artist (7), frequently employing some form of magic (8). He is brave and strong (9). Only betrayal can bring him down (10) and he dies as he lives: bravely and defiantly (11). His demise may be disputed: he is said to have escaped and still be alive (12).

For criminals to be recognized as criminal heroes by the news audience, these motifs need not all be present. The criminal hero stereotype, we

surmise, functions like a frame (Gamson & Modigliani 1989; Van Gorp 2007). Frames typically consist of a core idea that may or may not be manifest (e.g. what is the nature of this issue? On what moral basis should we judge it?) and a number of discursive devices that are manifest, but need not be present in all texts containing the frame. One of these devices can be potent enough to 'trigger' the entire frame in the reader's mind. As Gamson and Modigliani put it, a *frame package* 'offers a number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame and positions in shorthand, making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, of other symbolic device' (1989, p. 3).

Although stealing from the rich and supporting the poor is the most readily recognized motif, every individual motif expresses the core idea of a supremely skilled rebel of high moral character, rightfully resisting the powers that be. From a rhetorical perspective, most of these features serve to exonerate the criminal and at the same time incriminate his victims and the law: the standard criminal hero narrative reverses the ethos of the criminal and that of his victims and the law authorities in many ways.

Ethos, however, transcends the level of narrative: the characters' ethos is shaped by more than their acts. Ethos pervades both discourse and visual rhetoric. Persuasive elements are found in the presentation as a whole, e.g. in the use of full quote versus paraphrasing, in qualifications like *daring* or *brutal*, in the importance signalled by headline size and page position, and in the use of pictures and maps. These, too, are part of the journalist's rhetorical toolbox. In the end, social meaning is created by the ensemble of narration, image, and discourse.

Consequently, answering the questions how and to what extent the news media constructed the Heineken kidnappers as heroic, necessitated a combination of narrative, discourse and visual-rhetorical analysis.

15.6 Method

Given the sheer amount of news items concerning the Heineken kidnapping, we limited our sample to a little over three years worth of coverage, 10 November 1983, the day following the actual kidnapping, until the sentencing of kidnappers Cor van Hout and Willem Holleeder on 19 February 1987. The sample consists of the coverage in four major Dutch dailies (*Trouw*, *de Volkskrant*, *Het Parool*, and *De Telegraaf*), totalling 644 news items. These were photocopied from newspaper archives, enabling us to analyze both ver-

bal and visual elements of the original publications. Additionally, four journalistic book-length treatments of the case were analyzed (De Vries 1983, 1987; Van den Heuvel & Huisjes 2008; Kivits & Jaarsma 2010). Both news coverage and books were repeatedly worked through according to the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

Although our angle on this case is criminals-as-heroes, our initial exploration of the research material focused on both positive and negative qualifications bearing on the ethos of all main groups of actors: the criminals, the victims, and the police. These qualifications could be clustered into ten traits. The criminals were variously described as audacious and clever, in control, humane or inhumane, and as victims of bureaucracy. The range of qualifications for the victims was much narrower: these were either pitiful or rich and powerful – and hence not to be pitied. (This, of course, only applies to Heineken, not to his chauffeur). The police and other law officials, finally, were powerless, or worse, bumbling, or they acted with dedication and force.

At times, these qualifications are explicitly stated, but more often respect and even admiration for the kidnappers, for example, shine through in apparently factual descriptions like: ‘The entire hijacking took less than ten minutes’, i.e. the crime was very well prepared. These qualifications were subsequently coded for in the entire sample.

15.7 Results: three phases

Although we set our sights on the criminals, they did not emerge as the main news characters during the entire period of the kidnapping and its aftermath, which can be divided into three phases, each starting with a landmark event: the abduction, the police raid, and the arrest of the two kidnappers still at large. In the Heineken kidnap coverage, attention for the criminals, the victims, and the law shifts from one to the other as the story unfolds, and so does the protagonists’ ethos. In fact, when the ethos of one party rises, the other’s falls. Thus work the scales of journalistic justice.

For each phase, we describe the ongoing construction of the protagonists’ ethos and we list the extent to which the twelve motifs that make up the Robin Hood narrative are in evidence.

15.7.1 Phase 1: The kidnap – pitiful victims

After the abduction of Heineken and Doderer the media focus their attention on the victims. They were, after all, the only known factor in the story:

‘pending the investigation’, the police did not release any more information than strictly necessary and the kidnappers were still faceless.

The first few days a number of articles, almost resembling obituaries, describe the life and deeds of Alfred Heineken and, to a lesser extent, his driver Ab Doderer. Although their victim status is foregrounded, other features are highlighted too. Heineken is fabulously wealthy and moves in high society circles; he is a personal friend of Queen Beatrix. Although his celebrity is stressed rather than his power, this makes him less of an ideal victim (Christie 1986).

The police were either described as doing their work, or as being outsmarted by the kidnappers. By referring to sensational kidnappings in the preceding decade, the swift and puzzling delivery of a letter with instructions and several indications that the kidnappers had prepared the assault thoroughly, the press suggests the kidnapping to be the work of organized, professional criminals. Although at this time still faceless they are portrayed as very much in control. Perhaps the strongest example of this were the personal ads the kidnappers used as means of communication. In these ads, the kidnappers referred to the police as ‘the hare’, naming themselves ‘the eagle’.

Although news coverage during this phase is a far cry from the full-fledged criminal hero narrative, echoes of this tradition can be discerned from day one. One example must suffice here. The day after the kidnapping, the front page of the Amsterdam daily *Het Parool* (10 November 1983) voices empathy with the plight of Heineken and Doderer, stresses the police’s powerlessness – and expresses tacit respect for the kidnappers’ audacity. Note, too, the suspense created by the historical present and, in the last sentence, the use of point-of-view – from the outset, the press situates the criminals in the realm of *great stories*:

The assailants and their prey, worth a ransom of millions, are flown. Everything has taken place in less than ten minutes. (...) Only now the entire police machinery starts to move. The Amsterdam police chief realizes that he is faced with perhaps the biggest kidnap case in the history of Dutch crime. (*Het Parool*, 10 nov. 1983)

These elements paint a picture of the kidnappers as ruthless professionals, the police as well-intentioned but slow and in awe of the criminals, and Heineken as a decent and very rich man (he is rather irreverently described as a ‘beer giant and multimillionaire’). From day one, the cards are dealt.

Of the twelve Robin Hood motifs, only a few are recognizable, and those only in part: the criminals have kidnapped one of the richest men in the country (#6), they outsmart the police (#7) and their actions demonstrate their bravery (#9). The element of supporting the poor is completely absent, but their choice of target, one of the country's richest men, is in line with the criminal hero's code. Still, during this phase, few narrative elements inspire sympathy for the criminals.

15.7.2 Phase 2: Denouement – the police triumphant

This phase started on 30 November 1983 when the police, having learned the kidnappers' identity through an anonymous tip, raided their hiding place. After finding Heineken and Doderer in the cleverly hidden cells, the police proudly gave a press conference. They had found the victims unharmed, caught two of the criminals and were expecting to arrest the others shortly. Furthermore, within a month they found a large part of the ransom and one of the kidnappers still at large turned himself in. Correspondingly, the ethos of the police peaked and the kidnappers' ethos plummeted.

Now, it was time for the actions of the police to be characterized as 'resolute' and 'spectacular'. The Netherlands' largest-circulation daily *De Telegraaf* complimented the police on their 'first-rate achievement. Unbridled energy went hand in hand with apparently limitless resourcefulness'. (1 December 1983)

In tandem with the ethos of the police, the victims' ethos rose when details became known about the 'medieval conditions' under which they had been kept prisoner, chained to the wall, on bare mattresses, and without medication for Heineken's heart condition. However, apart from a quick press conference after their release and a short press statement, both men shunned the media. Consequently, the victim angle rapidly lost its appeal.

The remaining storylines being those of the kidnappers and police, and most of the police story already revealed, the focus of the press shifted to the chase of the two kidnappers still at large. The criminals were described as 'gangsters', belonging to a 'mafia-like' 'clan'. *De Telegraaf's* 1 December 1983 front page reads like a 'wanted' poster, announcing 'HUNT FOR GANGSTERS', and helpfully providing mug shots of the kidnappers still at large.

For all their brutality, the kidnappers also earn a grudging admiration from their adversaries:

[Chief inspector] Sietsma (...) expressed near-open admiration for the kidnappers' thorough preparation and timing: 'It was so well timed that in the initial phase establishing their exact escape route presented us with a mass of problems' (*Het Parool*, 1 December 1983).

Of course, this admiration from the police could also be viewed as an attempt to explain why it took them so long to find the criminals.

All in all, in this phase the kidnappers come across as nasty and greedy, involved in shady dealings, as show-offs in shiny cars and as brash pub-crawlers. At the same time, they are characterized as cowboys ('*vrije jongens*') and working-class lads ('*jongens van de gestampte pot*'), loud-mouthed but kind-hearted. News reports stress their loyalty and defiance. The publication of their pictures, names, and nicknames changes the kidnappers from a faceless group into a number of distinct individuals – and colourful individuals at that – whose story had still not reached its end. As we enter the third and longest phase of the Heineken kidnap coverage, the criminal hero theme builds up.

Of the twelve Robin Hood motifs, several are in evidence. Their cunning (#7) and audacity (#9) were widely recognized, even by the police, they had succeeded in bagging a rich ransom (#6), and they were betrayed by an anonymous informer (#10).

15.7.3 Phase 3: Aftermath – outlaw heroes

The third phase of the coverage started in early 1984, with the arrest of Willem Holleeder and Cor van Hout in Paris. Extradition is expected to bring a swift end to the case, but in an unexpected twist their lawyer discovers that the extradition treaty is outdated. Under the treaty the men could only be extradited to the Netherlands on secondary charges, not for kidnapping or extortion. In a counter-move, the Dutch Department of Justice withdrew its extradition request. The kidnappers were now illegal aliens in France, but they had not committed any crimes there and could not legally be extradited to any country. They were released from prison and consigned to house arrest in a hotel.

The Dutch Department of Justice was, in the eyes of the press, clearly annoyed:

Just how sour the release of the two [kidnappers] tastes to the Department of Justice, became apparent when a comment was sought: 'We have duly

noted the decision. No more, no less', a spokeswoman said. But surely you can comment on that decision? 'No, that decision is not our business', the woman snapped (*Trouw*, 9 December 1985).

The kidnappers had hoped to get away with a short prison sentence, so they were none too happy with the Department's move either. They even accused the Department of Justice of 'foul play'.² And indeed it was hard to sell: the Netherlands' most wanted criminals saying 'arrest us', and the Department dropping the charges. It looked like the kidnappers had just outsmarted the law. They were grinning for the cameras drinking Heinekens; outlaws in a literal sense, halfway across a legal Rio Grande separating them from freedom.

During the first phase, the press had focused almost exclusively on the victims. In the second phase the police were cast as the central characters. In the third phase, these actors became less prominent and their ethos declined. The police faced accusations of sloppy work and corruption. Their position in the news stories was taken up by the Dutch Department of Justice, a faceless institution that met with little sympathy from the press. 'Department of Justice Cheats French over Kidnappers' Extradition', a *Volkskrant*-headline read (28 April 1984). 'Heineken Kidnappers have nowhere to turn to; 'Finding Refuge would still Spell Exile', *Het Parool* (10 December 1985) sympathized.

The victims persisted in their media silence, but the fact that Heineken donated large sums of money to the Amsterdam police and had his private security force harass the kidnappers hurt both his ethos and that of the police. At the same time, it boosted the criminals' ethos, who were now perceived to hold out against the law forces of two nations and the power of big money.

The third phase was clearly for the kidnappers. Willem Holleeder and Cor van Hout were now 'famous criminals' under 'hotel arrest' in France, untouchable by the furious Dutch Department of Justice. They spoke with the press about the kidnapping from their point of view, which changed the perception of the crime, the victims and the perpetrators. More and more they were typified as tough guys with a good heart who shared values like loyalty, friendship, common sense and perseverance. The notion gains currency that the kidnappers were 'blood brothers' ('gezworen bloedgabbers')

² E.g. *De Volkskrant*, 9 December 1985.

who wanted to hit the jackpot with a crazy scheme that almost worked and that was not intended to cause physical harm.

When, in a surprising twist, the French Justice Department tried to house the criminals on a French Caribbean island, and Van Hout and Holleeder find themselves chased from island to island by the inhabitants and pursued by reporters and Heineken's private police, the press increasingly reports the news from the criminals' perspective. 'Gangsters' and 'Mafiosi' no longer, they now see themselves described as the 'alleged Heineken kidnappers'. A *Parool* headline reads: 'Cor and Willem bounced between islands in the French West Indies' (15 February 1986) – the press is now on a first-name basis with the kidnappers. In the end, the news media were rooting for the criminals.

Newspaper headlines suggest that their victory is complete: 'Heineken Kidnappers Seem to have Evaded Department of Justice' (*Trouw*, 14 February 1986); 'Overjoyed about Guadeloupe Refuge' (*Het Parool*, 13 February 1986, quoting Van Hout and Holleeder's lawyer). Their adventures are the stuff of crime fiction:

George Simenon, the creator of Chief Inspector Maigret, could not have conceived of a more perfect scenario. Two Dutch kidnappers, millions of guilders in ransom money still missing, a French prison cell, neat little hotels, and finally, the tropical sun of Guadeloupe (*Trouw*, 14 February 1986).

Eventually, Cor van Hout and Willem Holleeder were returned to France and extradited to the Netherlands under a new treaty in November 1986. The 1987 trial and their sentencing and imprisonment seem to mark the end of the Heineken kidnap coverage and fatally damage their status as criminal heroes. As he was leaving the stage, however, Cor van Hout tossed a PR bombshell over his shoulder that effectively destroyed most of the efforts of the law authorities to win the ethos contest: a book-length account of the preparations, the kidnap and its aftermath, as told by Cor van Hout to crime reporter Peter R. de Vries.³

De ontvoering van Alfred Heineken ('The Kidnap of Alfred Heineken') drew an indignant reply from the Amsterdam police. A spokesperson mentioned the 'danger [...] that many will now look upon Cor van Hout

³ On Peter R. de Vries as a Dutch folk hero in his own right, see Reijnders 2005.

as a hero. Quite the contrary, he is and always will be a criminal who has to answer for detaining two persons against their will'. (*Het Parool* 14 april 1987) In spite of this criticism, the book proved a success, selling more than 300,000 copies to date, which is exceptional for Dutch standards (Van den Heuvel & Huisjes 2009). The book consolidated the public image of Holleeder and Van Hout as exceptionally audacious criminals at the very moment when they disappeared behind bars for a number of years and nothing much was heard from them.

In this book, the criminal hero theme reaches a crescendo as it ties together the majority of the narrative motifs in one book-length story told from a sympathetic point of view. More than the newspaper coverage does, *De ontvoering van Alfred Heineken* shows the criminals operating – as folklorist Graham Seal so aptly puts it – ‘outside the law, but inside the lore’ (1996, pp. 197–201).

This sympathetic book-length portrait builds on the increasingly ‘heroic’ newspaper coverage, part of which flowed from the pen of Peter R. de Vries. His changing rhetorical construction of the protagonists’ ethos is indicative of the more general shift. After the police raid that freed the kidnap victims, De Vries published his first book about the case (1983), adopting the more traditional perspective of the police, strongly denouncing the kidnappers’ deeds. The 1987 book, written from the perspective of the perpetrators is the culmination of a process of media and public fascination. Following all publications chronologically it is clear that fascination grew gradually, culminating in the 1987 De Vries book. The cultural image of the criminals is solidified in subsequent books (Van den Heuvel & Huisjes 2006; Kivits & Jaarsma 2010).

The long drawn-out aftermath of the Heineken kidnap brought the Robin Hood narrative more to the fore than did the previous episodes. Newspapers dwelt on the unequal struggle between the criminal underdogs and the Dutch and French states, whereas the De Vries book sketched in the background details from a sympathetic perspective. Unlike Robin Hood, the Heineken kidnappers were not forced into a life of crime by cruel overlords (motif #1), but they did know hardship and poverty in their youth and news media expressed sympathy when they were persecuted by the law. Although not supported by an oppressed social group (#2), they spoke of themselves as belonging to the common people, and so did journalists (*jongens van de*

gestampte pot: 'working-class lads with their heart in the right place'). As for acting honourably (#4): they did not kill and in the De Vries book, Cor van Hout expressed dismay about the criminals who had kidnapped a woman and empathized with the plight of poor Ab Doderer.

As in the second phase, the criminals' cunning in evading the police and their audacity (#7 and 9) featured most strongly. They did not go down bravely in a final shoot-out (#11), but Van Hout and Holleeder remained defiant until the end. The last motif (#12, the hero's demise may be disputed: he is said to have escaped and still be alive) can be recognized in the escape of kidnapper Frans Meijer in 1985. He remained at large for well over a decade, until he was arrested in Paraguay in 1998.

15.8 Conclusions

What conclusions can be drawn from this exemplary story? First, although the Heineken kidnap coverage does not completely match the standard Robin Hood narrative, the majority of the twelve motifs can still be recognized. Although the kidnappers treated their victims brutally and did not distribute the loot among the poor and needy, their story prominently features a number of criminal hero motifs. The kidnappers turned to crime partly because of a poor childhood and they receive moral support from the community they belong to (motifs #1 and 2). Their adversaries – the law and Heineken's private security force – are morally flawed (#2). Living by a certain moral code, they did not kill and targeted a rich and powerful man (#4). Their crime was executed with panache and for a time, they outsmarted the law (#7 and 9). Only betrayal brought them down and they went down fighting (#10 and 11). One of them, Frans Meijer, initially turned himself in, then escaped and remained at large until 1998 (#12).

In addition to these traditional narrative sequences, a variety of verbal and visual means are employed to paint the moral character of the criminal heroes. Positive qualifications like 'daring' and 'spectacular' stress their audacity, drawings of the hidden cells speak to their ingenuity. Pictures of Holleeder and Van Hout sticking it out in France and in the West Indies emphasize their defiant outlaw status.

Crime reporting, as we said at the outset, has more in common with ceremonial than with judicial rhetoric. It is a form of moralizing discourse that educates and inspires by telling exemplary stories. This crime story celebrates individual audacity of common people at the expense of state and

business power. The Heineken gang do not fit the criminal hero stereotype perfectly, but it can be argued that the individual narrative motifs may have been sufficient to evoke the entire criminal hero story.

The rhetorical perspective on criminal heroes avoids Hobsbawm's conflation of story and historical fact, and broadens the scope from narrative analysis to a combination of narrative, discourse and rhetorical analysis. This is not to say that we do not need to look beyond the text. As our analysis shows, outside events and decisions by potential news sources influenced the extent to which the Heineken gang were represented as criminal heroes. The cards were dealt from day one – but they could have been played differently. The decision of Heineken and Doderer to remain silent, and particularly the decision of Cor van Hout to collaborate with crime reporter Peter R. de Vries both benefited the criminals' heroic ethos.

The approach employed in this case study needs to be extended in several ways. Other cases offer scope for historical and cross-cultural comparison. As we write, 'hacktivist' Julian Assange of Wikileaks fame is variously described as a modern-day Robin Hood and as a cyber criminal. The Heineken case itself could be extended with a study of the criminals' shifting fates in Dutch cultural memory (cf. Basu 2011 on Australia's number one outlaw Ned Kelly), particularly in light of Holleeder's later status as the Netherlands' most notorious criminal (Smeeing et al. 2011). As this case study focuses on newspapers and books, other media – television, radio, magazines – should be taken into account too. Internet discussion boards and the comments sections on news sites offer opportunities to contrast the way audiences construct criminals as heroes with their representations in news coverage (Cavaglion 2007; Kalmre 2005; Schmitt 2012).

We expect that scholars of rhetoric, crime and journalism, too, will remain fascinated by these moral tales in which admirable qualities are exemplified by men who lead criminal lives.

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