

The Folklore Detective Forensic Narrative Analysis

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Article abstract

This essay will provide an overview of the work of narrative criminologists and how that scholarship overlaps with the work of narrative folklore. Criminologists have long relied on stories as an essential aspect of their work, but “narrative criminology” only entered scholarly conversations of criminologists in the 2000s. Drawing on the case of the West Virginia co-ed murders in 1970, I will demonstrate how narrative criminologists and folklorists might work together to create a new methodology that I’m calling forensic narrative analysis.

THE FOLKLORE DETECTIVE

Forensic Narrative Analysis

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The West Virginia University Co-ed Murders

On January 1970, Karen Ferrell and Mared Malarik were first-year students at West Virginia University (WVU). One Sunday evening they ventured into town to see a movie, and decided to hitch-hike back to their dorm. It was common practice for college students to hitch rides between the two campuses of WVU, which are nearly two miles apart. Busses ran on an inconsistent schedule, and the woman decided they'd rather not wait outside on a bitter cold winter's night. It had started to snow.

A couple who went to the film with the women saw them get into the front seat of a late model white sedan and drive away. It was the last time anyone saw Ferrell and Malarik alive.

Criminologists have long relied on stories as an essential aspect of their work: victims report crimes, suspects have alibis, law enforcement officials construct hypothetical narratives of crime events, and attorneys build narratives of defense and prosecution. It's surprising that the idea of a "narrative criminology" only entered scholarly conversations of criminologists in the 2000s when scholars in the field began to examine how narratives influence criminal and other harmful actions (Pressler 2015; Colvin 2015; Joosse, Bucerius, and Thompson 2015). Equally surprising that with few exceptions, like Eleanor Wachs' "The Crime Victim Narrative as Folklore" (1982), *Crime Victim Stories* (1988), and Elaine Lawless' 2001 book *Women Escaping Violence*, folklorists have largely overlooked crime narratives as a subject of study. When they have examined folklore and crime, the crime narrative was often secondary to the folklore topic under study. Thus, we have legend scholars examining organ theft and

cannibalization (Campion-Vincent 1997; Ellis 1989; Samper 2002); narco and murder ballads (MacDowell 2012; Burt 1959) and narratives of folk heroes and anti-heroes (Braddy 1948; Cavaglion 2007; Seal 2009).

This essay will provide an overview of the work of narrative criminologists and how that scholarship overlaps with the work of narrative folklore. Drawing on the case of the West Virginia co-ed murders in 1970, I will demonstrate how narrative criminologists and folklorists might work together to create a new methodology that I am calling forensic narrative analysis.

Narrative Criminology

Narrative criminology as a research field emphasizes how the importance of narratives, particularly personal narratives, influence criminal and other harmful action. The “narrative turn” in criminology is a recent phenomenon (Pressler 2015). Narrative criminologists “are interested in what stories *do*—specifically, how they affect crime and other harm—and not principally in what they *reveal*. For narrative criminologists, subjectivity, which is always forged discursively, is *the* analytic focal point” (Pressler 2015: 139, emphasis in original). This work also considers how works of literary fiction with incarcerated offenders complement and extend the methods of social science. Using literary fiction and its representation of the “normal human condition as good and bad (rather than good or bad)... and literature models a less reductive and therefore less brittle narrative mode which might support resilience” for the offender in their life after incarceration (Colvin 2015: 223).

Narrative criminology can also involve strategies to avoid criminal action. For example, Paul Joosse, Sandra Bucerius, and Sara Thompson (2015) examine the narratives with which young Somali-Canadians resist terrorist recruitment by imagining the “al-Shabaab terrorist organization as ‘bogeyman’ and the bogeyman’s victims as “weak, child- like, vulnerable and helpless” (825). Lastly, narrative criminology is also a research method that uses very similar approaches as narrative analysis by folklorists and literary scholars, analyzing how plot lines are constructed, the roles assigned to characters and the how and when stories are composed (Pressler 2015).

If one takes a deeper look at the history of criminology, it is clear crime narrative is nearly as old as criminology itself. Victims and witnesses tell stories of what they saw or experienced, police develop theories of crimes that are themselves narratives, and the accused create narratives via

alibis and confessions. Indeed, criminologist spearheading the narrative criminology movement have also acknowledge what Lois Pressler identifies as the precursors to the field, such as Maruna's (2001) study of the influence of narrative on repeat offenders, and Toch's (1993) study of the criminal's "war stories" that are shared by violent offenders.

The edited volume *Narrative Criminology: Understanding Stories of Crime*, was published in 2015 and remains the seminal work in the field. The contributors to this volume analyze their materials using the same narrative scholarship and methods that folklorists would find familiar: qualitative interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, written archives, and they scrutinize narrative structure and meaning by analyzing genres, plots, metaphors, and other components of storytelling. The book sets out to examine how criminals understand certain types of crime to be less moral than others, and how violent offenders and drug users come to understand and resist their identity as "criminals" by creating alternative personal narratives that explain and justify their actions. Narrative criminology also interrogates "cultural narratives" or what folklorists might refer to as "master narratives" that motivate and legitimate harm. As a folklorist, I was pleased to encounter a new area of interdisciplinary study that seriously examines narratives and storytelling, but it overlooks a more practical application of our research: using narrative analysis to better understand how narratives are used in the criminal justice system and how applied narrative analysis can shed light on the workings of the criminal justice system. The Innocence Project estimates that approximately 1% of the current U.S. prison population is wrongly convicted¹. The scholarship of wrongful conviction is a growing body of scholarship, one that criminologists have suggested is ripe for improved "theoretical grounding and methodological sophistication," and there is a need for new conceptual frameworks (Norris and Bonventre 2015).

I propose an applied narrative criminology that employs a critical narrative analysis to better understand how stories are interpreted and employed in criminal cases with an emphasis on whether or how those narratives are supported by evidence of the crime. As I will demonstrate below, there is a tradition of prosecutors and the police building a case narrative around a primary suspect. These narratives often overlook or ignore key evidence that contradicts or invalidates the case narrative. In contrast, I argue, and will demonstrate, that crime narratives should be derived from evidence (physical, forensic, eye-witness, documentary, or

1. <https://www.innocenceproject.org/how-many-innocent-people-are-in-prison/>

testimony). I call this emerging methodology Forensic Narrative Analysis. Folklorists have the distinct ability to offer a fresh look at crime narratives because we routinely and critically analyze narratives themselves and have a large body of narrative theory to bring to the task. To demonstrate how forensic narrative analysis works, I will examine the West Virginia University (WVU) Co-ed murder case and merge narrative analysis with the available evidence from the criminal proceedings.

WVU Co-ed Murders

WVU's main campus is located in Morgantown, West Virginia and consists of three smaller campuses: downtown, Evansdale, and the Health Sciences Center. Karen Ferrel and Mared Malarik were in the second semester of their freshman year when they disappeared on Sunday, January 18, 1970. Ferrel and Malarik lived in a dorm about mid-way between the downtown and Evansdale campuses. In the early 1970s, WVU provided bus service between the campuses, but January 18 was a cold and snowy evening, and the women decided to hitch a ride, which was a common practice. They were picked up by a driver, as reported by a couple who had been out with the women that evening. They were last seen entering a light color late model sedan and driving toward their dorms (Bragg and Bragg 1993; May 1970).

West Virginia University still enforced curfew for women in 1970, so when Karen and Mared did not return to their dorms, the Dean of Women notified the West Virginia State Police and a statewide alert was issued. The day after their disappearance there was a possible sighting of the women entering a tractor-trailer at a truck stop in Ripley, a small town about 150 miles southeast of Morgantown. The truck driver was located and he reported that he had given two women a ride from Ripley to Charleston, West Virginia, stating that the women were en route to Kentucky (Stacy 1970). This report shifted the focus of the investigation from a suspected abduction to the possibility that they women had simply decided to leave on their own volition. It was not entirely unexpected for a first-year college woman to decide to drop out of college after their first year to get married. The newspapers, police reports, and university statements from the time all indicate that for the first two weeks of the investigation, the police were not convinced that Ferrell and Malarik had met with foul play (May 1970; Ryan 1970; "Letter Clue," 24 January 1970, p. 1B).²

2. The archival collection of the WVU Co-ed case includes the trial transcript from the 1981 trial of Eugene Paul Clawson and every news article published in the

There was no sign of the women for the following six weeks when a young boy found a purse along a road south of Morgantown in March and the police identified it as the property of Mared Malarik. At the same time, the police followed a variety of strange leads, including a series of letters from a writer who identified himself as "Triangle" and claimed to have information on the whereabouts of the victims' bodies and other important case information. Other personal effects were found in the same area of Malarik's purse, leading some to believe that the women had tossed their purses, sunglasses and prescription bottles out the window of their abductor's car as a way to create a trail (Bragg 1993; *The Dominion News* 1970a; 1970b).

While the community had doubts about the way the investigation was handled, it was also clear to some officers in the Morgantown City Police and West Virginia State Police that the investigation was not being taken seriously. Finally, the Morgantown Police, with assistance from the National Guard and the State Police were able to locate the bodies of women in a shallow grave in a remote wooded area about 10 miles south of Morgantown on April 16, 1970. The women were fully dressed and there was no blood at the scene. Both women had been decapitated. Their heads were not found at the scene, and to this day, they have never been located.

After the women's bodies were found, the case went cold. Although there are a number of different suspects in consideration for the crime, no arrests were made. State Trooper Preston Gooden, a lead investigator in the case, was dismissed in April 1971 when he reportedly gave a speech in Morgantown stating that then West Virginia Governor Arch Moore asked investigators to lie to the parents of Mared Malarik about progress in the case (*The Dominion News*, January 2, 1972, p. 2). Then in January 1976, Eugene Paul Clawson told the prison guards in the Camden, NJ prison, where he was being held on rape charge, that he wanted to make a confession. Until this time, Clawson had not been a person of interest in the case.

Forensic Narrative Methodology and Analysis:

In the case of the murders of Karen Ferrel and Mared Malarik, I draw on archival materials, the evidence presented at Eugene Paul Clawson's trials, news reports, and some of the behind-the-scenes investigations that took place on behalf of the Morgantown City Police and West Virginia

Morgantown paper about the case from, *The Dominion News* (morning edition) and *The Dominion Post* (evening edition) in 1970, 1971 and 1976, 1977 and 1980 and 1981.

State Police. These include case files entered into evidence during the trials and interviews that investigators conducted since the women disappeared, and an in-depth investigative podcast: *Mared and Karen: the WVU Coed Murders*³. I also interviewed Retired State Trooper Richard Hall by phone on March 2, 2010.

The purpose of the forensic narrative analysis is to determine how the narrative case squares with the available evidence of the case, so at its most basic, does Clawson's story of Ferrel and Malerik kidnapping and murder in his 1976 confession align with evidence that police collected in the previous five years? In addition, this analysis examines the structure of Clawson's story. As you will see in the transcript that follows, Clawson's confession is distinguished by multiple points of interruption and questions of clarification by the interrogating officer, Camden County Captain Franciesco Senatore. West Virginia State Trooper Richard Hall was also present at the confession, but did not speak during the proceedings. Nevertheless, Clawson's story does map out his alleged actions on January 18, 1970 and presents a body of material for a narrative analysis.

The Narrative Case against Clawson

The WVU Co-ed murders shook the Morgantown community to its core. After six years with no arrest, Clawson's confession was viewed as *the big break* for investigators and the community alike. His confession is a disturbing tale of kidnap, rape, and murder. The confession transcript below was given as a sworn statement by Clawson and was presented at his first trial, in 1976. The same confession was read aloud at this second trial in 1981 and was part of the court transcript. The information below is taken from the court transcript of Day 1 of the State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981.

Clawson begins his story of events of January 18 saying:

"Well, I drove down there [Point Marion, PA] from Philly to visit my mother; and I had a '61 black and white Buick. I left that at my mother's house, and I hitchhiked to Pittsburgh. I had a friend who lives there. He's an ex-convict, and his lives on Centre Avenue, but I couldn't find his house because I never been there before. I wasn't familiar with Pittsburgh. "I think it was a 1970 Chevy; and it was cream-colored, I think. It was either in a shopping center or a hotel drive or parking lot. I drove, you know, back through Point Marion and while—you know, I kept the car for a few days

3. <https://www.coedmurders.com/>

before I went to Morgantown with it.

"I was cruising around looking for somebody to pick because I can't have normal sex with nobody. I have to have abnormal sex. I have to force people to give me what I want or I don't have no ejaculation, no erections or nothing. I was just riding around looking for somebody to pick up. I seen a couple girls on the corner hitch hiking. I don't know what the street was. It was Willey Avenue or something."

Clawson stopped and offered the women a ride, and both entered in the front seat and closed the car door. He said:

"After I got away [pulled away from the curb], I didn't want—I told them—I glanced, and saw the two people after I got a block up the street. I put a gun on them [the women] and made them lay down on the floor, the floor of the car. I told them if they didn't get down to the floor, I'd blow their heads off. So they got down on the floor. I drove with them. I got off that street, but I don't know what street I got on. I don't remember because I just know that I drove for a good ways. It must have been over twenty miles. It seemed like it anyways.

"After I drove on this other road for so long, a good ways, then I got off on the side road. That's where—it was some woods, remote. It was remote because I couldn't see the main road where turned off from where I was at. I parked with them."

At this point in his confession, Captain Franciesco Senatore asked, "Let me get this straight. You say you picked them up and drove down a road. What this a concrete road you drove down?" and Clawson replied:

"Yes, the road I drove on was a main road of some kind but...I don't know where it went or nothing. I can't—I don't know how to read rulers, and I don't know how to read like a compass. I can't read no compass, and I don't know whether I'm going north or south. I never learned to read a compass or ruler.

"The only road I know near Morgantown or West Virginia is High Street. I know High Street in Morgantown and 119. That [119] goes right on through Uniontown. Well, it don't go right through Uniontown. You have to—when you get to Uniontown, you go down Route 40 and then go to the left through Connellsville, Pennsylvania. But that's the only highway I really know in West Virginia, period, is 119. That's the only one I'm familiar with.

"I parked in the woods, and I made the one girl get up, and I put handcuffs on her, and I hooked the handcuffs under the seat of the care because it was like little spring or hook, part of the seat under there where you can hook it. [the front seat]

"...Then I made the one girl crawl over top of the seat and into the back. I handcuffed the one because I didn't want her to run off.

"I didn't want her [the woman in the front seat] to run. The other one, I had a gun on. I didn't she she'd run because I had a gun. ...I made her get undressed. I had abnormal sex with her. I ate her pussy. I licked her butt. I screwed her in the butt. I made her get down on me. Then I had sex with her on the front of her vagina."

At this point, Captain Senatore asked if both Clawson and the woman in the back seat were completely undressed, and he replied:

"We was both naked. The clothes were on the backseat floor of the car. [The woman in the front seat] She was dressed. I didn't make her take her clothes off. I didn't want to handle both of them at the same time. The other one, after I got done having sex with her, I was still hot because whenever I force somebody, I just stay hard. I didn't get enough right away."

Captain Senatore interrupted Clawson, saying, "Let me ask you, did these girls say anything to you? Did they plead?" To which Clawson responded:

"They pleaded with me. That just made me harder. That excited me more. They asked why I was doing that to them, and I don't know, different stuff like that. But I just told them to shut their mouths and I talked very nasty to them. I think I slapped one of them before she disobeyed me, but I think I slapped her for talking. I didn't want her to talk.

"[After I got done with the first girl] I made her get in the front with me because I didn't want her jumping out of the car, getting out of some kind of way, out of the car. So I unfastened the other girl. I made the one that was naked get back down on the floor and I fastened the other one and just took the handcuffs off her and told her to get naked, get her clothes off. The clothes she took off were on the floor in the front seat. Then I made both of them get in the back seat, but I kept the handcuffs on the one in the front. I handcuffed her hands in front of her. I made her get in the back seat, both of them. Then I made them have unnatural sex act with themselves. I made the blonde—I made her get down on the other girl. I

made her get down on her knees between the girl's thighs, and I made her get down with her mouth on the other girl. And I couldn't resist her butt. It was just sticking up in the air. I put my mouth on it. I wet it, and I just ran my penis up her rear. But I told her if she screamed, I would kill her or if she took her mouth off the other girl, I would kill her. And when I rammed it in, she screamed, she hollered and when I got done doing what I was doing to her in the rear, I slapped her in the face a few times pretty hard because she disobeyed me. Then I made the other girl do the same thing to her [made them change positions].

"After [the rapes] I told them to get dressed. But I may have took the panties and bras. I don't know because the panties and bra turned me on. They made me hard, whether it's the panties and bras. Then I got them outside the car and shot one of them in the head."

Captain Senatore then said, "Let me ask you one question. You didn't shoot them right alongside the car?" When Clawson answered "no," he asked, "You're saying no, you walked them back into the woods? And you shot one of them, you say?"

Clawson responded:

"I shot her in the head. When she fell, she pulled the other one down or knocked her off balance, and when I shot her all I did was graze her because it didn't kill her. She was laying on the ground moaning and whimpering and begging, and it just excited me sexually, and I ran back in the car and got the machete. It was underneath the seat, and I went back and I chopped her head off. The one—she was wounded. And I chopped the other one. I cut her head off, too.

"I reached climax because the blood excited me. I dragged their bodies back to some dead branches or logs or something, and I covered them up."

Captain Senatore asked, "Let me get this straight. You say now you dragged their bodies"? and Clawson responded:

"I didn't carry them. I did drag them. I thought I told you before."

Captain Senatore asked, "You dragged them further back into the woods then?" Clawson responded:

"Yes, there was like a clearing there, and it was on the other side of the clearing where these old logs or whatever they were, branches or something was."

Finally, Captain Senatore asked, “Did you drag them both at one time?” and Clawson responded, “No, One at time.” Captain Senatore then asked, “What did you do?” Clawson answered:

“I ran back in the car and I got the machete out from under the seat. It was underneath the seat, and I went back and I chopped her head off.” Then he clarified, “The one—she was wounded. And I chopped the other one. I cut her head off, too. ...I reached climax because the blood excited me. I dragged their bodies back to some dead branches or logs or something, and I covered them up. ...I put them on their back[s] and covered them up with logs.

“Before I covered them up, thought, I took some stuff off them. I think I took—I don’t know if it was a class ring or what it was. It was something like that and some kind of necklace. I’m not sure, but I think I took a watch, too. But I don’t know what kind. I don’t remember what it was or nothing.”

Seeking clarification, Captain Senatore said, “So you took a ring, a watch, and a necklace? Right?”

Clawson responded:

“I think I took a necklace of some kinds. I’m not certain. I had a neckace.I know I had had a necklace. I don’t know, three or four days after that, but I don’t remember where I got it at. I don’t know where I got the necklace. I don’t recall buying it from nobody.”

Then Captain Senatore asked, “What did the necklace look like? Did it have anything hanging on it? and Clawson responded:

“I don’t remember. I just know I had one. I think it had something on there. I think it was like a chain with something on it. I don’t know. I’m not sure.”

Captain Senatore asked, “Now were these articles taken off one girl, or where some taken off each? Do you know?” and Clawson said:

“I don’t know. I just know after I did it and I had the climax, I got—I don’t know what happened. I must have come into my other body because I got scared and all I wanted to do was get away, and I don’t know what I did. I don’t know who I took them off of. I don’t remember.”

At this point in the confession, Clawson’s narrative became less detailed and fluid as Captain Senatore asked multiple questions about the disposition of the bodies: Senatore asked for clarification on the position of the bodies,

saying, "Now you mentioned earlier that you laid them on their backs. Do you mean you laid them literally on their backs?" and Clawson said:

"I just dragged them. I dragged them by their feet, but when I got back there, I put their head up this was from me—not their heads, but their stumps, the top part of their body. ...Away from me."

"Which would put them—now, your car is behind you? That would mean their feet are facing the road?" Senatore asked.

"That's the way I put them," Clawson said.

"Did you put them close together?"

"I don't think I laid them right side by side. Maybe a little distance, but not far apart. I just wanted to get out of there."

Then Senatore asked what he used to cover the bodies, and Clawson said, "Logs, dead branches or something. I think it was logs. It looked like somebody had been cutting something back in there, trees or something."

"Gene, now what did you do after you cover them with the logs?"

"I went back to my car."

"And did you take anything back to the car with you?"

"I took the heads. Up where the car was at. I found a rag, a large rag, dirty rag, and I put their heads in it."

"Was this rag on the ground, or did you get it out of the car?"

"No, it was on the ground?"

"There was rages on the ground?"

"There was just one rag on the ground, a large rag; and I picked that."

"And you picked their heads up?"

"I put their heads in the back seat, and I drove."

"Excuse me, Gene, did you take anything else?"

"Pocketbooks. I threw one out. I took one. I don't remember seeing two pocketbooks. I know I took some papers out of one, but it had—I think it had a Jersey address on it, some kid of identification paper; and that's what I put under the steps of my mother's..."

"Did you take the pocketbook in the car with you?"

"I didn't take it. It was in there."

"It was left in the car?"

"Yes, it was in the car; and after I got a good ways down the road some place, I stopped to take a leak and I threw it out—just threw it out along the road."

"You pulled over to the side of the road to take a leak? Did you walk to the side of the passenger's car to take a leak?"

"No, I threw the pocketbook over."

"You stopped your car and got out of it? Did you take a leak right on the driver's side on the street?"

"Yes."

"Now what did you do?"

Clawson said:

"I drove back to Morgantown. I got on 119, and I'm down on 199 to Sunnyside. I got on 119 (a road that leads to Morgantown) to Sunnyside. I drove up 119, like towards Pittsburgh, to a place call Sunnyside Inn or Welcome Inn, and there's a road that turns right there. It's a back road. I went down this back road to another road about maybe 3 or 4 miles down this—it's a dirt road like. It turns left. It goes down into a camp down there, Camp Linwood. I turned left and it's Storktown Road, and it's still in West Virginia, but it runs right into Pennsylvania. And I drove down there until I got to Conn Hill or—well, Conn Hill Schoolhouse, the road that goes—when you get to the top of this hill on Storketown Road, there a little dirt road that turns left past my mother's house, but if you're coming down the back road, it's a right. and I pulled in there. It's a dead end. There an old schoolhouse called Conn Hill Schoolhouse. It's all rotted.

"I parked in there, and I had sex with the heads. I got naked in the back with the heads, and was playing with myself, and I had the heads between my thighs and I ejaculated on the mouths. Then I got dressed again, and I wrapped the heads back up, and I walked through the woods. It's like a little glade, but it's not no mile. It ain't even a half mile to the top where this little glade, where the flat is."

Here Captain Senatore asked, "It's quite a walk?"

"it's not quite a walk. It's not very far," Clawson answered."

"Not very far?"

"But anyway, I got up on these flat holes, two or three holes up there in the ground, because they've been there since I was a kid, and I just through both heads and the rag down and all in one of those holes with the gun."

"Was the gone in the rag, too?" Senatore asked.

"No."

"You threw the heads in first and then the gun?"

"No, I threw the gun in first and then the heads."

"And the rag and all went down in?"

"Yes."

"Then what did you do?"

"Then I went—I got on Storktown [sic]⁴ road and went down a little towards Point Marion. But I didn't take the car to my mother's house. I parked it up right on the curb by my house. We have an orchard, a cherry orchard, and I walked down. My brother's car wasn't there, so I know he wasn't home. I took the machete and I washed it off, cleaned it, and I took it back into his house. I went back into my mother's house. She was sleeping. She always left the door open for my brother or me if I was there. She never locked it, so I didn't have no trouble getting in. There was nobody up, and my brother wasn't home. I took it and put the machete back in his room where I got it at."

"Will you describe the machete for me," Captain Senatore asked.

"It's about like this."

"You're indicating with your hands approximately two feet long?"

"I don't know. I can't tell you," Clawson said.

"What kind of a handle did it have?"

"It had a black handle about this long with a rawhide string in the hole. It had a string in the end of the handle. You could put your hand through the string and hold onto the handle."

"Do you know what the handle was made of?"

4. Storktown Road does not exist in Point Marion. It is likely that the transcriptionist misheard Clawson say Stewartstown Road.

"I don't know if it was hard plastic or what, like pistol grips."

"It had a regular grip on it so you wouldn't grab the blade? It had a handle?"

"It had a handle."

"And around the handle, it had a rawhide lacing to put around your wrist?"

"Yes."

"Now what did you do, Gene?"

"I took the car. This was here about—it might have been 3 something in the morning. Drove to Pittsburgh with the car, and I parked it."

"Excuse me, Gene. When we were talking to you earlier, you said you hid some papers in the house. Do you want to tell us about that?" Clawson responded:

"Yes. I did. My mother has another house that's not far. It's about from here to the curtain away from my mother's house, this other house. It's only three rooms, two rooms upstairs and a kitchen downstairs. No basement. Well, down under the stairs in the kitchen there was like, you know, I used to crawl back ther and hide when I was a kid, from my mother. You crawl under the steps. I pried an old rotten board up because the floor was rotten and stuff. I took off of the girls is where I put it in there, along with the handcuffs that I had because I had taken them off the girls."

"Then I took and went back up the road and got in the car and took the car to Pittsburgh and abandoned it. I got rid of it."

Captain Senatore asked, "Do you remember where you left it in Pittsburgh?"

Clawson responded:

"I left it in the parking lot or some place in Pittsburgh. I don't remember where, a hotel. I don't know where I left it. I don't remember. I don't know whereabouts. I just left it in Pittsburgh. I know it wasn't in a main part of town."

When asked about the distance from Pittsburgh to Morgantown, Clawson said, "I don't know. It's forty-five miles, I think, from—what is it—fifty some? I know it's forty-five miles, I think, from Pittsburgh to Point

Marion or Pittsburgh to Uniontown; and Uniontown is sixteen miles from Point Marion, and Morgantown is nine miles from Point Marion."

Then Captain Senatore changed the subject, asking, "Tell me about the car again."

"It was a—I don't know the year. I assumed it was about a 1970 Chevrolet; and it was light colored, looked cream to me."

"What did you do after you abandoned the car?" Senatore asked.

"It had blood in the back seat."

"There was blood on the back seat?"

"Plus, I had blood on my thighs; but I left it on there."

"What did you do after you got to Pittsburgh?"

"I hitched back to Point Marion."

"Where your car was parked?"

"It was in my mother's yard."

"Then what did you do?"

"I didn't do nothing. I just stayed there a few days."

"I mean, you went in the house?" You went to bed?"

"Oh, yes."

"You said you had blood on your thigh?"

"I washed. I took a bath."

"How about your clothing? Did you have any blood on your clothing?"

"I had blood on my clothes, too. I washed my clothes."

"Did the blood come out?"

"It almost come out. Almost always. Just real dim spots. You couldn't tell."

"Where was the blood on your clothes?"

"I had blood all down my pant legs, and I had boots on at the time, not hunting boots. These were black boots that came up to out here with a zipper on the side. I had blood on them. I had blood on my hands. I had blood on my shirt. Of course, blood flew."

"They bled quite a bit, did they?" and Clawson said:

"Yes, then I had blood on my thighs and stuff and on my penis from having the heads in the car, from being naked with the head in the car. I washed my stuff, but it, the stains—well, like the shirt had a lot of blood on it. The sleeves and stuff had a lot of blood on it, and I got rid of the shirt. I burnt that up out in the pit. My brother had a hole down in there behind the house. That's where he burnt stuff. I burnt that up."

"There's a hole down behind your brother's house?"

"It used to be," Clawson said. "He had dug a hole behind there. He probably covered it up. He may have covered it up. I don't know. But it used to be there. That's where he used to burn stuff, trash."

"You took some of your clothing down there and burned it?" Captain Senatore asked. Clawson responded:

"I burned the shirt. But the pants—I washed them, and it had the stains still in there. But they weren't as noticeable. I put bleach and stuff in the water, and my mother had an old-fashioned washer. It was the kind that had the wringers. I was there two weeks all together. I went back to Philly. I sold the car. I traded the car to a guy. I don't know his name. My brother knows him because he went over there with me. My car, the Buick."

"Gene," Captain Senatore said, "you said you stayed a couple weeks. Is it possible you only stayed a couple days?"

"It's possible. I don't remember."

"Think back. Do you know what day of the week this was that these girls got killed?"

"It was on a weekend."

"When we were talking..."

"Because I heard one of them say something about—well, when I first picked them up, they told me they were going to this—I don't know the name. I forget what it was they told me."

"They were going where?" Sanatore asked.

"Some dorm on this other road."

"You're saying 'dorm'?"

"Dorm, college, university."

"Were these college girls?"

"University."

"Where these college girls?"

"University. They said they were going to the University. They go to the University, they said. I don't know if they did or not."

"You asked them where they were going; and they said, 'Yes, I'm going to the dorm'?"

"They told me the name of the building, but I forgot the name of the building or what street it was on. But I forgot," Clawson said.

"But it had something to do with a college? Is that correct?"

"Yes, university."

"Is there a university in that town?"

"I think they got a university or something there, college. Morgantown University [sic]."

"And they told you they were going—they used the word 'dorm,' right?"

"Dorm," Clawson said.

"Do you know what 'dorm' means?"

"Yes, dorm is where you stay at."

"College people stay at?"

"Yes."

"Did they actually tell you they were students, or didn't you get a chance to talk to them?"

"They told me they wanted to go to this building. They gave me the name of the building and what street it was one, but I don't remember. I forgot."

"I don't want to get you excited," Captain Senatore said, "but did they say they were students or didn't they?"

"I don't recall. They were talking before I made them lay down, and they were talking about classes tomorrow."

"Now, again, because when we were talking verbally when you first came up here, you did mention a day of the week to me. Can you remember what

day of the week you had said to me earlier that you said it was?”

“I thought it was a Sunday,” Clawson said. “I don’t know.”

“Sunday?”

“I don’t remember.”

“Well, that’s what you said to me earlier. You did say when you were telling me earlier it was a Sunday. Okay. Now, Gene, of course, you’re from Morgantown?”

“I was born there.”

“Did you at any time, either in Pennsylvania or New Jersey or anywhere at all, read anything about this in the newspaper?”

“I don’t read books on the street.”

“I said newspapers.”

“No, I don’t read newspapers on the street either. I don’t even read car ads on the street.”

“Did you ever read anything about this in any type of magazine?”

“I haven’t seen no magazine.”

“Did you ever discuss this with anybody when you were at home? Now your mother died like the following year?” Clawson answered:

“No, I never discussed it with anybody at home. But shortly after it happened, I think that’s when I decided to leave town was a couple days. Like I said, I was just remembering my brother. My brother was talking about the—I think he told me not to go to Morgantown and try to pick no girls up because somebody—or some girls—were missing from there, from the University or something. Something like that, he told me.”

“Your brother told you this?” Captain Senatore asked.

“Yes.”

“This is a couple days after this happened?”

“Yes.”

“And he said don’t go to Morgantown?”

“Yes. I think I left shortly after that because the car I traded for—the transmission was no good; and I couldn’t drive back; so I went back on

the bus.”

“Do you know when these girls’ bodies were found?”

“No.”

“Do you have any idea?”

“No, I don’t know that.”

“Do you know if they were found the following day or next week or . . .”

“I don’t know when they were found.”

“You don’t know?”

“I don’t know whether they’ve been found.”

“You don’t know whether the bodies were found?”

“My brother never told me nothing. I never talked to him about it other than that day that he told me a couple of girls were missing from Morgantown.”

“If the bodies weren’t found, do you think you could take the police to where the bodies were? Do you think you could find the location again?”

“Maybe. I’d have to see the roads. Things change.”

“You know where the heads are. You can take them to where the heads are?”

“The heads.”

“But you’re not sure if you could take them to the bodies?”

“I was speeding that night. I’m familiar with where the heads was at because I played there as a kid. But I’m not familiar about Morgantown or around Morgantown. The only place is—whenever I lived around there, when I ever really hung out, was most of the time when I was a kid. I mean, in my teens, was Osage; and they had—I used to go to these bars up there. I think they had one called the Bunny Hop and West Virginia Inn; and if I’m not mistaken, they have one called the Silver Dollar. And I used to hang out a lot up in there.”

Captain Senatore asked, “And you’re saying you don’t know if these bodies have been found yet?”

“I don’t know” (*State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson*. Court Transcript, 1981).

Forensic Narrative Analysis

Clawson's confession implicated him in several aspects of the crime that were known to detectives (the kidnapping, murder, and disposition of the bodies). Clawson stated that he'd clocked out of his job in a Weyerhaeuser lumberyard in Philadelphia at 2:11 PM, got in his car and drove 300 miles to Point Marion, Pennsylvania, his hometown. He then hitched a ride 60 miles to Pittsburgh where he stole a car. Clawson then claimed to drive the stolen car 75 miles to Morgantown and so that by around 10 PM he was offering a ride to Mared Malarik and Karen Ferrel "looking for someone to pick up." Because he claims to have committed the crime with a machete that he took from his brother's room and other items (flashlight, handcuffs, and a handgun) in Point Marion, he presumably hitch-hiked carrying these items with him. Morgantown was an ideal place to look for a victim, a small town populated by college-age young women, for whom hitch-hiking was a common practice in 1970.

Once the women were in the car, he kidnapped them at gunpoint, took them to a secluded spot off a remote rural road where he orchestrated a complicated sexual assault involving one woman in turn, then both of them together. Afterward, he alleged to have forced the women to dress themselves, then he handcuffed them together. He walked them into a wooded area off a seldom-used road, then shot one in the head, killing her. He aimed to shoot the second woman, but the first woman's body weight pulled her down, and he only grazed her with the bullet. Clawson then said he returned to the stolen car, retrieved a machete and cut off the second woman's head (while she was still alive), then repeated the decapitation of the other victim.

Clawson then said he dragged the women into a clearing and covered their bodies with logs, rocks and other debris, the wrapped their heads in a rag that he found on the ground near the place where he committed the murder, and drove the car back to Point Marion. He stated that he had taken their heads to show his brother, but his brother wasn't home, so he threw them away, along with the gun, in abandoned mine near Point Marion.

From the start, several police officers working the case had doubts about Clawson's confession and his inability to identify locations or landmarks of crucial incidents in the abduction and murder. For instance, he was unable to identify the location where he stopped to offer a ride to Ferrel and Malarik, and he misidentifies the materials he used to cover the bodies. Further, detectives doubted he was able to move large stones, logs and debris

to cover the bodies without assistance.

In order to verify Clawson's story, the State Police asked him where he disposed of the women's heads. He directed them to a crevice in an abandoned mine near Point Marion, PA. After several failed attempts, search teams found several animal nests laced with human hair. The nests were dissected, and 150 strands of hair were found and determined to be from two different people, one with brown hair, one artificially colored blonde. However, none of the hair had roots, and had clearly been cut, rather than pulled from a scalp. Neither the actual heads or the gun Clawson claimed to have used were ever recovered.

Clawson recanted his confession in May 1976, saying he made up the stories after reading about the girls in the December 1975 issue of *Detective Cases Magazine*⁵. *Detective Cases* was one of several pulp magazines available at newsstands and grocery stores that offered accounts of true crimes and police procedures. ⁶Clawson said his cellmate in the Camden County jail helped him fabricate the confession because Clawson thought if he were arrested in West Virginia and then acquitted, he could also get out of serving time in New Jersey. In his first trial Clawson said of the confession:

I made the confession because I had been sitting in the jail for two years and it was December '75. I read an article in two different magazines concerning the coed murders and I felt that if I, you know, if I could make the officials in West Virginia believe I was guilty and I could get indicted for it and brought down: here, Jersey, due to the fact the charges down ere are bigger than the ones I had in Jersey, Jersey would drop the charges against me. And then when I got down here I felt I could prove my innocence and then I would have no more time. That's why I did it. (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981)

Despite recanting, the Monongalia County prosecutor's office moved forward and charged Clawson with two counts of first-degree murder; he

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5. The story was also published in February 1973 in *True Police Cases*. The bylines for both the 1973 and 1975 articles are different, but the stories are identical.
 6. *Detective Cases* and *True Police Cases* were magazines often referred to as the genre of "true detective" pulp magazines, following in the tradition of the eponymous *True Detective* magazine. These magazines emerged in the 1930s and 40s with as many as 200 true crime magazine titles in print by the 1960s. Pulp magazines declined in popularity through the 1960s as other forms of true crime storytelling became more popular, including television and true crime paperbacks. These magazines did not have strong literary ambitions, but they did publish early works of well-known fiction and true crime writers including Dashiell Hammett and Ann Rule (Murley 2008; James 2011).

was tried and convicted in the fall of 1976. Clawson's attorneys successfully appealed the case to the West Virginia Supreme Court. His lawyers argued the case on the basis of that his confession was taken before he was fully informed of his Miranda rights and the prosecution presented autopsy photos of the victims during the trial, and these grisly photos had prejudiced the jury. His conviction was overturned and he was granted a new trial in 1981 (*State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson* case number 270.S.E.2d 659, 1980).⁷ Clawson was convicted a second time in 1981 and sentenced to life in prison. Eugene Paul Clawson died in the Mount Olive Correctional Complex in 2014.

Forensic Narrative Analysis

Like many who have followed this case over the years, I've long doubted Clawson's guilt, although it has less to do with his explanation about why he confessed and more to do with the physical evidence of the case and how that evidence fails to line up with the narrative that police stitched together once they had a suspect in place. These doubts have been supported by many who have looked at the case as well, including Trooper Richard Hall, one of the original West Virginia State Police officers who first interviewed Eugene Paul Clawson after he gave a confession to prison officials in New Jersey.

From the start, Trooper Hall had grave doubts about Clawson's guilt by the way he gave his confession. Hall observed that Clawson offered vague explanations of his actions, and when he was extradited to Morgantown he twice mis-identified the location where he allegedly stopped to pick up the hitchhiking women, first identifying the top of High Street, then watching another officer in the cruiser for his reaction, he finally identified the corner location where the girls were picked up (Mared and Karen: The WVU Coed Murder Podcast, Episode 5).

Hall also found the time-line of the crime problematic. Recall that Clawson allegedly drove from Philadelphia to Point Marion in under six hours in 1970, hitched a ride to Pittsburgh where he stole a car then drove to Morgantown. While it was technically possible for someone to make the trip from Philadelphia to Point Marion in the early 1970s in under six hours, it is unlikely because this was well before the construction of an interstate highway in this area. Recall in his confession Clawson states:

7. *State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson* case 270.S.E.2d 659 (1980) downloaded 10 January 2019 from JUSTIA at <https://law.justia.com/cases/west-virginia/supreme-court/1980/14070-3.html>.

Well, I drove down there [Point Marion, PA] from Philly to visit my mother; and I had a '61 black and white Buick. I left that at my mother's house, and I hitchhiked to Pittsburgh. I had a friend who lives there. He's an ex-convict, and his lives on Centre Avenue, but I couldn't find his house because I never been there before. I wasn't familiar with Pittsburgh. I think it was a 1970 Chevy; and it was cream-colored, I think. It was either in a shopping center or a hotel drive or parking lot. I drove, you know, back through Point Marion and while—you know, I kept the car for a few days before I went to Morgantown with it. (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981)

WV State Policed checked Clawson's time cards at the Weyerhaeuser and found that "Clawson was in Philadelphia and clocked out at 2:11 PM the day of the murder, and he was back in Philadelphia, again according to his time card, the day after." (Retired State Trooper Richard Hall, telephone interview March 2, 2010). On the period of the time he spent in Point Marion, Captain Captain Senatore asked, "*You said you stayed a couple weeks. Is it possible you only stayed a couple days?*" and Clawson responded, "It's possible. I don't remember" (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981, emphasis added). In addition to problems with the timeline, police were never able to verify a stolen car from Pittsburgh, let alone a car that would have had bloodstains all over the backseat (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981). The fact that the police were never able to locate the stolen car from Pittsburgh and that Clawson was unable to verify exactly where he picked up the women on University Avenue—the story of how Clawson might have committed this crime begins on very shaky ground (Hoppy Kerchival podcast interview of Richard Hall, 25 April 2017 Episode 7: <https://www.coedmurders.com/>).

Further, an examination of Clawson's story of the murder reveals significant discrepancies between what he claimed to have done and what was ultimately found at the scene. After his tale of the rape of both women, Clawson said:

After I told them to get dressed. But I may have took the panties and bras. I don't know because the panties and bra turned me on. They made me hard, whether it's the panties and bras. Then I got them outside the car and shot one of them in the head.

Captain Senatore then said, "Let me ask you one question. You didn't shoot them right alongside the car?" When Clawson answered "no," he asked, "You're saying no, you walked them back into the woods? And you shot one of them, you say?"

Clawson responded:

I shot her in the head. When she fell, she pulled the other one down or knocked her off balance, and when I shot her all I did was graze her because it didn't kill her. She was laying on the ground moaning and whimpering and begging, and it just excited me sexually, and I ran back in the car and got the machete. It was underneath the seat, and I went back and I chopped her head off. The one—she was wounded. And I chopped the other one. I cut her head off, too. (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981)

Clawson described a incredibly bloody scene, later stating:

I had blood all down my pant legs, and I had boots on at the time, not hunting boots. These were black boots that came up to out here with a zipper on the side. I had blood on them. I had blood on my hands. I had blood on my shirt. Of course, blood flew.

Captain Senatore asked, "They bled quite a bit, did they?" and Clawson said: "Yes, then I had blood on my thighs and stuff and on my penis from having the heads in the car, from being naked with the head in the car." (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981).

When the women's bodies were discovered on April 16, 1970, they were laying in a makeshift grave covered with stones, logs, branches and leaves. The excavation of the bodies was supervised by Trooper Ronald Mazingo, who was assigned oversight of the WVU Co-ed investigation. During the trial, Mazingo was asked "Did you discern any visible signs of blood on any of the debris, rocks or items near or around the grave site?" he responded, "No, I did not" (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981). They were fully dressed, and both women had been decapitated. The bodies were removed to West Virginia University Hospital where an autopsy was performed. As the bodies were undressed for examination, their clothing was not only intact, they each were wearing a full set of clothes. Mared Malerik was also wearing panty hose with a pack of cigarettes tucked into the waistband of the hose, with one cigarette remaining. There was no blood or bloodstains on the women's clothing. During testimony at the second trial, Trooper Preston Gooden described the women's clothing, saying, "The thing that impressed me as I removed them over was the condition of their clothing, the gloves still intact on their arms, on their hands. The coat on the one was missing. The other one had her coat on with the buckle buckled; but, as I recall, it was unbuttoned. Very neat, the clothing was very neat, that's the main thing I remember" (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981).

These findings contradict Clawson's confession where the women would have hurriedly dressed after the trauma of a violent sexual assault at gunpoint. It seems unlikely that Mareed would have stopped to put on panty hose, let alone tuck her cigarettes back into the waistband of her trousers. The lack of bloodstain on the women, their clothing, and the area around the gravesite is also significant. Clawson said his body and clothing was covered with blood from carnal acts with the decedents' heads. Contrary to Clawson's confession it seems more likely that the decapitations occurred post-mortem, and the lack of blood at the scene was a result of coagulation, or that the murderer had ritualistic habits where he cleaned and re-dressed the bodies after decapitation (Dinesh 2016). Finally, both women were found wearing their undergarments, which means these items could not have been taken as trophies, as Clawson outlines in his statement. In these three instances, the evidence at the scene and autopsy do not support Clawson's narrative.

In terms of the disposition of the bodies, Clawson said he lay the women on their backs. In the interview Captain Senatore asked for clarification on the position of the bodies, saying, "Now you mentioned earlier that you laid them on their backs. Do you mean you laid them literally on their backs?" and Clawson said: "I just dragged them. I dragged them by their feet, but when I got back there, I put their head up this was from me—not their heads, but their stumps, the top part of their body. ... Away from me."

"Which would put them—now, your car is behind you? That would mean their feet are facing the road?" Senatore asked.

"That's the way I put them," Clawson said.

"Did you put them close together?"

"I don't think I laid them right side by side. Maybe a little distance, but not far apart. I just wanted to get out of there." Then Senatore asked what he used to cover the bodies, and Clawson said, "Logs, dead branches or something. I think it was logs. It looked like somebody had been cutting something back in there, trees or something." (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981).

When the bodies were discovered on April 16, they were well covered except for one foot that was sticking out of the leaves and brush. The search team then became a recovery team, carefully moving the debris covering the bodies of the women, which consisted of several large logs, one so big that four men removed it, and stones, branches and leaves. Lieutenant L.

Herald, under the direction of Trooper Preston Gooden was supervising the site excavation. When the bodies were uncovered Herald described the scene:

We found the bodies, both bodies, were face down. The body we thought to the Malerik was on the bottom and Ferrel girl on top. They were... Ferrel appeared to have been...Malerik, she was face down sort of in a spread eagle fashion; and the other body was across her, sort of at an angle like that and basically the same position, just sort of on top of each other. (State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson. Court Transcript, 1981).

The prosecution asked, "Across her legs?" And Herald answered, "Well, sort of thrown across or laying across her entire body at an angle." The prosecution asked Lieutenant Herald to describe the rocks that were covering the body, which he described as "various sizes, from relatively small rocks to what you would call large rocks [indicating rocks 18 inches across]." When asked if the rocks could have been carried by one person, Herald responded,

Yes, sir. There seem to be...I think our impression were that some of the rocks had probably been retrieved from the creek bed and that was speculation on our part." Later, another investigator on the scene, Trooper Preston Gooden testified that the "there were some pretty good-sized rocks. I was able to remove the rocks, but they were very heavy.

These details are instructive in that they reveal key details that only the perpetrator would know. Indeed, they are among the most significant details of the known evidence, in that knowledge of how the bodies were covered and with what, what they were wearing and how they were positioned are things that perpetrator would know. The fact that Clawson's details were vague (about the materials used to cover the body) or frankly incorrect (regarding how the bodies were positioned) further diminishes the impact of the confession.

A critical examination of the crime scene evidence seems suggests that these murders were likely the work of a serial and well-organized perpetrator, not simply a man who decided to drive to West Virginia on the spur of the moment to pick up a victim, or in this case, two, as the police and prosecution argued.

Forensic psychologists Robert Keppel and Richard Walter, who advocate examining crime scenes to characterize the type of killer involved in the crime, classifies murders like the co-ed case as "anger-excitation profile" (Keppel and Walter 1999: 431). Anger-excitation murderers and

their crime scenes are identified through the dynamics of their behaviors, homicidal patterns, and suspect profiles. By identifying crime scene evidence that points to the behaviors of these killers, the homicide investigator will be more equipped to process murder scenes, prioritize leads, and apprehend killers. Walter defines an anger-excitation murderer as a person who will:

Plan a sexual assault and homicide [that is] designed to inflict pain and terror on the victim for gratification by the perpetrator. ...Again, sadistic murder is comprised of a series of recognizable deviancies that coalesced into a ritualistic satisfaction. Inasmuch as the development of the process requires an investment of acquired skills, energy, and time, the intent becomes one of indulgent luxury rather than the end goal of a dead body. (Keppel and Walter 1999: 431)

In the case of the WVU co-ed perpetrator, there were several distinctive features of the crime scene—the fact that the women were buried in a make-shift grave along an isolated road in the county suggests that the perpetrator was familiar with the location and terrain where the bodies were buried. Clawson grew up about 15 miles north of Morgantown, and there is no evidence that he was familiar with the remote area where the women's bodies were discovered. In addition to Clawson's distance from Morgantown the day of the murder, police were never able to identify a stolen vehicle from Pittsburgh or southwestern Pennsylvania.

And perhaps most significant, Clawson was a convicted pedophile rapist who typically attacked victims aged 13 and younger, but had no history of physical assault, murder, or animal mutilation, all early indicators of a murderer who will eventually kill and mutilate human victims (Lockwood 1999). During Clawson's second trial, his defense pointed out that he had a chromosomal anomaly, Klinefelter's Syndrome (KS). KS is the most common chromosomal abnormality in men (affecting 1 in 600 live births) and is the result of two or more X chromosomes in males. The defense argued that KS can cause may adversely affect testicular growth (typically smaller testicles) and can lead to low testosterone, which was the case for Eugene Clawson (*State of West Virginia v. Eugene Paul Clawson*. Court Transcript, 1981). His attorney argued that KS rendered Clawson impotent and unable to perform the sexual acts he described in his confession⁸ Many investigators found Clawson's story of singlehandedly abducting and overpowering two women at once less than credible, however, and other KS

8. Recent research indicates that while some men with KS experience severe sexual dysfunction, it is no more common than in men in the general population (Corona *et al.* 2010; El Bardisi 2017).

symptoms, including weak upper body muscles, would make that even more unlikely. The mutilation of the corpses and the fact that two women were abducted and murdered suggests that this was the work of an experienced killer (or an experienced killer with an accomplice).

Indeed, the only thing that brings Eugene Paul Clawson into this case was his confession which there is no doubt is a damning piece of evidence. Unlike details of the abduction and disposition of the bodies, the *Detective Cases* article did not speculate whether the women were raped and tortured, and neither Clawson's defense team, nor any of the amateur sleuths speculate on a possible source of his narrative. According to the scholarship in criminology, elaborate, fabricated confessions are common (Maden, Curt and Ditchfield 2019; Kassin 2015; Conti 1999; Kassin and Gudjonsson 2005). Thus, it makes sense that investigators jumped to bring him to trial. But there is more at risk than clearing an innocent person of a heinous double murder. If Eugene Paul Clawson did not commit these murders, someone else did. A forensic examination of the case narrative suggests that the evidence does not support the idea that Clawson was the killer, or at least there is a strong reasonable doubt. This is why today there remains a small but devoted group of amateur sleuths who are still working this case, trying to determine who actually killed these women.

So the question remains: what happened to Marek Malarik and Karen Ferrel?

The amateur sleuths Geoffrey Cameron Fuller, Sarah James McLaughlin, and J. Kendall Perkinson have created a 7-part podcast where they explore the original suspects and argue convincingly about two in particular (<https://www.coedmurders.com/>). Both were men who were intimately familiar with the area where the women were found and were associated with multiple murders and that involved sexual assault and mutilation. While these suspects are more plausible than Eugene Paul Clawson, both men are deceased, so it is unlikely that we'll ever know the full story.

For folklorists, the possibility of engaging with narrative criminology though forensic narrative analysis poses an important opportunity, not only for cross-disciplinary work, but for a new area of applied work that can make a significant contribution to real criminal cases. There are a staggering number of wrongful convictions in the U.S. every year, according to the National Registry of Exonerations⁹. If you look at many of these cases, or even causally watch true-crime cases on television, it's fairly easy to see

9. <http://www.law.umich.edu/special/exoneration/Pages/about.aspx>

that there are many cases where the crime narratives—the basis for the conviction—are specious. In these instances, our expertise in narrative analysis could help prevent structured criminal cases from coming to trial, making it more likely to solve cases like the murders of Karen Ferrell and Mared Malarek.

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