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Stalking: a problem behaviour

Ce grand malheur, de ne pouvoir être seul[1]

La Bruyère, quoted by Poe (1840)

Introduction

Stalkers and stalking are words which have acquired new connotations by being increasingly applied to individuals who persistently pursue or otherwise intrude on others. Stalking has emerged as a social problem which not only commands considerable public attention but is now, in many jurisdictions, a specific form of criminal offence. Stalking is increasingly attracting clinical and research interest among behavioural scientists and mental health professionals.

The word *stalk* refers to the act of following one's prey, as well as meaning to walk stealthily. To label someone a stalker has been, at least from the sixteenth century, to imply they are a prowler or a poacher (OED, 1989). When the media appropriated the word to describe those who pestered and harassed others they provided a new focus for this ancient indictment.

Stalking is now part of our culture's language. It has become a category with which we describe and understand our experiences. If someone is repeatedly followed by a stranger, or is distressed at receiving numerous unwanted letters from an estranged partner, then, in today's world, they are likely to describe themselves as being stalked. Looking back over their life, they may now recall having been stalked in the past. At the time they might have described the experience as one of being persistently pestered but now, retrospectively, it is recognised as having been stalked.

This is not just the substitution of one word for another. Stalking and being stalked are constructs with particular implications and resonance. Stalking is now a warning of future violence. Stalking is a cause of psychological damage. Stalking is a form of victimisation. Stalkers are dangerous. Stalkers are criminals. Stalkers are disturbed and unpredictable. Stalking implies the inflicting of distress and damage (whether or not the perpetrator consciously intends such damage). Being stalked evokes the self-perception of being violated and hurt. In attributing to ourselves the experience of being stalked (and occasionally of being, or having been, a stalker) we potentially change our evaluation of ourselves. We change our moral judgement of what is occurring. Our expectations alter of what will happen and what we have a right to expect from society. The question of whether this reframing is 'a good thing' is not at issue here; what is at issue is recognising the potential changes inherent in the emergence of stalking as a social category. The experience of certain types of interactions and certain forms of relatedness have been changed forever (for further discussion see Chapter 2).

The capacity of new social constructs like stalking to reframe the past so as to endow it with new meanings and new resonance is not confined to personal experience. The rediscovery and publishing of the long-ignored first novel of Louisa May Alcott (1832–88) provides a curious illustration of this phenomenon. *A Long Fatal Love Chase* was written in 1866, two years prior to *Little Women* (Alcott, 1997). The plot involves the

[1] 'This greatest of misfortunes, not being able to be alone.'

protracted pursuit of the heroine, Rosamond, by her estranged husband. When Rosamond flees her marriage as a result of discovering both his polygamy and his murderous past he refuses to accept that the relationship is at an end. His reaction is initially portrayed as a desire for reconciliation and a wish to continue their relationship. As she continues to try to escape him he becomes increasingly resentful and angry: 'with his own unabated passion was now mingled a resentful desire to make her expiate her contempt by fresh humiliation or suffering' (p. 329). The novel climaxes with the murder of Rosamond and the suicide of her killer, who dies uttering 'mine first – mine last – mine even in the grave!' (p. 346).

This overheated example of the gothic languished in a university library until resuscitated and published in 1993. It re-emerged as a tale of stalking. On the cover of the paperback version appears the following: 'He stalked her every step – for she had become his obsession.' Inside the book are numerous endorsements and quotes from reviews, including this from *USA Today*: 'A tale of obsessive love, stalking and murder that seems ripped off today's tabloids'. Though it might be more correct to say today's tabloids have endowed this nineteenth-century novel not only with new relevance but with new meaning and a new relationship to our culture's current preoccupations.

Defining stalking

Meloy and Gothard (1995) defined stalking, or, as they prefer to call it, obsessional following, as 'an abnormal or long-term pattern of threat or harassment directed toward a specific individual' (p. 259). The pattern of threat or harassment was further clarified as being 'more than one overt act of unwanted pursuit of the victim that was perceived by the victim as being harassing', though *more than one* may seem a generous rendering of a long-term pattern. Meloy (1998b) further states that in distinction to legal definitions, which are set forth to define and prosecute criminal behaviour, this definition was designed to further scientific investigation and clinical understanding. The advantage of this definition is that it directs attention to actions which are repeated and are perceived as unwanted by the object of these attentions. A further potential strength of this definition is that, disavowals notwithstanding, it closely parallels many of the statutory definitions of the offence of stalking.

Pathé and Mullen (1997) define stalking as 'a constellation of behaviours in which one individual inflicts on another repeated unwanted intrusions and communications' (p. 12). The intrusions are further characterised as 'following, loitering nearby, maintaining surveillance and making approaches' and the communications via 'letter, the telephone, electronic mail, graffiti or notes attached, for example, to the victim's car' (p. 12). To which can now be added texting, which is often the youthful stalker's prime method of communication. The authors added that, though not part of the core and defining behaviours, there were also the associated activities of ordering goods on the victim's behalf, interfering with their property, making false accusations and vexatious complaints, issuing threats, and in some cases assaulting the victim. Pathé and Mullen (1997) attempt a definition which can be operationalised and which depends on observable activities, except with the qualification that the activities be unwanted by the victim. It defines a course of conduct but, as it stands, offers no temporal or numerical limits to that conduct. In a subsequent publication, these authors suggested that to constitute stalking the behaviour should consist of at least 10 separate intrusions and/or communications, with the conduct spanning a period of at least four weeks (Mullen *et al.*, 1999). This was an intentionally conservative set of limitations which ensured that the study group consisted unequivocally of stalkers. Westrup (1998) suggested that stalking behaviour be defined as 'one or more of a constellation of behaviours that (a) are directed repeatedly towards a specific individual (the target), (b) are experienced by the target as unwelcome and intrusive, and (c) are reported to trigger fear or concern in the target' (p. 276).

Subsequent research (see Chapter 3) has suggested that the overarching term *stalking* encompasses at least two separable problem behaviours. The first typically lasts only a day or so and consists of repeated approaches and following, usually by a stranger or casual

contact. These brief periods of harassment usually either arise from inept attempts to start a relationship, or are expressions of anger at some supposed slight or injury. The second pattern is characterised by extended, but usually less intense, unwanted intrusions typically lasting for many months. This is usually perpetrated by ex-intimates or acquaintances. In these more extended episodes of stalking, unwanted communications are more prominent, as are the associated behaviours including threats and violence. It has been found empirically that it is possible to separate the stalking characterised by brief, but often intense, intrusions from the more extended pattern of stalking behaviours (Purcell *et al.*, 2004a). Those stalking episodes which continue beyond two weeks will typically continue for many months, whereas those that ceased prior to two weeks will largely have only lasted a day or so. This bimodal distribution of very brief versus extended patterns suggests that they may be separate phenomena (for further discussion see Chapter 3). A third pattern of stalking-like behaviour, termed *obsessive relational intrusion*, may be provided by the overenthusiastic, over-hopeful and insensitive courtship practices of some young people who repeatedly intrude on someone, usually from their general social circle, with whom they desire a relationship (Spitzberg & Rhea, 1999; Cupach & Spitzberg, 2000a, 2000b; Spitzberg & Cupach, 2003). The targets of this misplaced ardour have not responded positively to the advances, but to be fair have often not clearly rejected them either. Unlike the previously described stalking, irritation rather than fear is the usual reaction of the victim, and a more robust rejection may terminate hope and with it the behaviour.

Given that most definitions emphasise that stalking is a course of conduct involving repeated actions, the behaviour must occur on more than one occasion – but how many more times than one? Meloy and Gothard (1995) opt for two or more instances, and in this they are in accord with most statutory definitions of the crime of stalking (for a full discussion of the legal discourse on stalking see Chapter 23). Thus by their definition the ex-partner who makes a second unwanted phone call to a sensitive erstwhile mate potentially enters the ranks of stalkers. Equally, so does the hopeful suitor who puts himself for a second time in the way of the woman he desires, if as a result she feels harassed. The problem with such a low threshold is that it leaves little if any gap between stalking and those behaviours which may well be irritating but are certainly extremely common. By placing the lower end of the spectrum of stalking so close to many mundane activities, one captures a very wide range of commonplace behaviours. On the other hand, why shouldn't a woman followed home by a strange man on two sequential nights be eligible to claim that she is a victim of stalking?

The impetus to cast the net as widely as possible in defining stalking reflects at least three influences. The first is the tendency noted by Westrup (1998) to conflate stalking as a description of surreptitious following with stalking as the overarching term for a variety of unwanted attempts to maintain contact. Being followed on one occasion is, for most of us, an unsettling experience – and when it is repeated most reasonable people would become concerned about their safety. This is all the more so if the follower is a man, unknown, or, worse still, is known to hold a grudge. Secondly, stalking is constructed, particularly by law enforcement agencies, as a warning sign of imminent violence. If stalking is viewed primarily as the harbinger of assault then the quicker it is recognised and responded to the better. The third is that more than once seems less arbitrary than more than five, more than 10, more than 17 times. Nobody would want to advise a terrified victim who has had a man stand outside the house all night looking up at the window on nine consecutive nights that, according to Mullen *et al.* (1999), they had another night to go before they could claim they were being stalked. Central to the concern not to place an inevitably arbitrary barrier to the recognition and potential response to stalking is the proper concern to respond to fear and distress in a potential victim.

The resolution of the dilemma of the threshold for the number of intrusions which constitute stalking should, we believe, be a function of the purpose for which the behaviours are being labelled as stalking. The law may plausibly claim a need to respond promptly in pursuit of public safety to the first signs of risk. Given the all too often tardy and partial responses of police and the courts to even gross and extended stalking activities, anxieties about overreaction may seem misplaced.

It should be noted, however, that the low threshold for committing a stalking offence tempts police to use this as a so-called 'loading' charge to add on to other offences. At our clinic we have seen a number of men charged with stalking in association with child molestation offences where the so-called stalking was integral to the sexual offence. One man was charged with stalking on the basis of following a child around a playground and subsequently approaching the child in the street where he exposed himself. The two approaches were enough to trigger the stalking charge, which in our jurisdiction carries a potential sentence many times greater than that for the indecent act of exhibitionism. Though the child molester's plight may evoke little sympathy, the use of anti-stalking laws in this context risks diluting their effectiveness in situations where no other legal protections exist. If penalties for indecent exposure to children are inadequate the solution is to change the penalty. To inappropriately employ anti-stalking laws which are still in the process of having their role and scope determined by the criminal justice system puts in jeopardy reforms whose purpose was to extend protection to a previously ignored group of victims.

If we place only brief time constraints on the behaviour which constitutes stalking, then walking past someone and looking at them on three or four occasions in the space of an hour or so at, for example, an open-air market could conceivably be construed as stalking. And in fact was, in one case we evaluated. Equally, to return to our example of the nocturnal observer outside the front gate, is it reasonable to deny the protection of the law until two weeks have elapsed?

It would be comforting to believe that common sense would arbitrate between irritating but broadly sanctioned behaviours and those which are sufficiently intrusive and so potentially fear-inducing as to justify their being labelled, and potentially prosecuted, as stalking. But such common sense depends on shared common values. It is at least arguable that the emergence of stalking as an issue reflects a process of change, if not fragmentation, in our culture's previously shared notions of privacy, personal safety and the proper limits on the forms of contact and approach sanctioned by courtship and even marriage. Central to the construction of stalking are the perceptions of the person who is the object of the unwanted attentions that these behaviours are harassing and frightening. It is not the intentions of the putative stalker that are the defining element, but the reactions of the recipient of the unwanted attention who, in the act of experiencing themselves as victimised, creates a stalking event.

In the final analysis, stalking lies in the eye of the beholder. Stalking is those repeated acts, experienced as unpleasantly intrusive, which create apprehension and which can be understood by a reasonable fellow citizen (the ordinary man or woman) to be grounds for becoming fearful. A case example will illustrate the extent to which perpetrator and victim may construct the behaviours differently.

CASE EXAMPLE

When first seen, Patrick was in prison on remand for charges relating to the stalking of his ex-wife. His imprisonment had followed the repeated phoning and approaching of his ex-wife despite both his bail conditions and a previous court order which specifically forbade such contact. He was a practising Catholic, married five years with one child. He regarded marriage as a permanent union. From his perspective he had fulfilled all his obligations to his wife and child: he had worked long hours to provide a substantial income, he had never, whilst they were together, been threatening, let alone violent. He believed he had always been loving and considerate, and he had never even looked at another woman. He had complied, albeit reluctantly, when his wife asked him to move out of the marital home for what he claimed she said would be a brief period because she 'needed space' and had 'some personal issues'. When, however, a few weeks later she had indicated she wished the separation to become permanent, he described himself as devastated. He saw his behaviour over the subsequent year as reasonable and constituting legitimate attempts to attain a reconciliation with his estranged wife.

He claimed his repeated phone calls and multiple attempts to approach his wife simply indicated how important she was to him and how enthusiastic he was for a reconciliation. Following her and watching the house at night were in his view the natural result of her seeing another man with sufficient frequency to stimulate in him fears about her fidelity. He acknowledged that on occasions he had become enraged by his wife's repeated rejections of his advances and that he had several times threatened her and on one occasion torn up the garden fence when refused entry to the house. Though he was prepared to accept he should not have lost control he was firmly of the view

that any reasonable man in his position would have been likely to have responded in a similar way. Patrick was an enormous man, standing over two metres and weighing more than 120 kg, but, in his view, he couldn't be held responsible for his size and it was of no relevance that he might have been seen as intimidating. Patrick was an intelligent man who was perfectly capable of calculating his own advantage. Despite this he had given the magistrate, who told him he must not continue trying to contact his estranged wife, an extended and forceful lecture on the magistrate's moral failings in trying to put asunder those whom God had joined. At a later stage he gave the Parole Board a similar piece of his mind. Such outbursts, he was aware, virtually guaranteed his detention, but he felt he could not in all decency refrain.

The estranged wife's perspective was clear from her various statements to police and from two thorough victim impact reports prepared as part of the court's consideration of sentencing options. She had been initially attracted to Patrick because he seemed so strong and stable, and at that time in her life, following the breakdown of a previous relationship, these had been important qualities. She stated she had wanted them to live together but she had acquiesced in his wishes for marriage. From her perspective the relationship had soon foundered as she was exposed to the extent of Patrick's demanding dependence. She stated she felt as if she had a family of two small children, not one. She described repeated attempts to negotiate a separation, which Patrick had ignored, threatening suicide should she leave. Her statements did not attempt to hide that she had established a new relationship with an old boyfriend prior to finally persuading Patrick to move out. Nor did she deny that she had managed finally to evict Patrick by misleading him into believing this was a temporary separation. Equally clear was the devastating impact of Patrick's repeated intrusions on his ex-wife. She was terrified. She described barricading herself in her house, never going out without an escort, being too frightened to answer the phone, being constantly vigilant, expecting yet another intrusion. She reported fearing not only for her own life but for that of her child. She had broken off her relationship with the other man for fear of further provoking Patrick. She now lived the life of a recluse. For the first time in her life she was using sleeping tablets, and she had been prescribed antidepressants.

Over the subsequent two years, Patrick spent several periods in prison and made two serious suicide attempts. His estranged wife finally fled to another state, changing her name, breaking off all contact with friends and family and attempting to 'disappear'. Two lives were devastated, and that ignores the possible impact on their child. Patrick's sense of entitlement to his wife and child are unchanged. He still believes he acted in the only ways open to him.

This was a clear case of stalking in the context of a relationship breakdown. Patrick's behaviour was not only illegal but would probably be regarded by most of his fellow citizens as unconscionable. Not so long ago, however, in most Western societies it would have been the ex-wife's behaviour that would have been likely to attract most criticism, if not frank outrage. There are still many societies in which the premises that Patrick appealed to in justification of his behaviour would find considerable resonance among established practice and even legal entitlements. Stalking is new, partly because of changes in our society's understanding of the nature of the relationships between people.

Stalking as popular, legal and scientific discourses

In the late 1980s the term *stalking* came to be used by the media to describe the behaviour of the unwanted followers of the famous. Initially it was the paparazzi to whom the label was applied, only later being attached to disordered fans (Nicol, 2006). It was then extended to include those who harassed ex-partners, co-workers, casual acquaintances and a whole range of fellow citizens. The intense media attention which stalking and stalkers attracted, and continues to attract, has generated a public consciousness and concern, which has found political expression in a series of anti-stalking laws. As discussed in Chapter 23, the first such law was enacted in California, with the other states in the Union clamouring to follow suit, the sole exception being Maine. Currently, most Western nations have either passed anti-stalking laws or are in the process of doing so. The legal definitions of stalking are often framed in response to local preoccupations, be it with protecting the famous, preventing the harassment of ex-partners or strengthening the laws against persistent nuisance. The emergence of what has amounted to a new category of criminal behaviour in its turn has generated interest amongst mental health professionals and behavioural scientists, particularly

those working within the criminal justice area and forensic mental health services.

Stalking has generated, almost simultaneously, (1) a legal discourse, particularly around how to define the offence of stalking, (2) a popular discourse, carried forward with no signs of flagging interest, not only in the media but through novels, films and television drama, and finally (3) a scientific discourse. The scientific discourse initially focused on the nature and motivations of stalkers, and on the impact on the victims. Today the focus is also on evaluating the risks presented by stalkers, together with an emerging interest in how best to manage stalkers and relieve the distress of their victims. This emergence of a new way of describing and talking about the world provides an opportunity to examine how these popular, legal and scientific discourses have developed and interacted, and in turn how they have created new categories of fear, crime and scientific study. The rapid acceptance of the word's new connotations and purpose was in large part because the categories of stalking and stalker filled a need which, if not perceived previously, became obvious once coined and accepted. It defined an area of human behaviour that caused distress to others. The behaviour itself is not new, but once labelled it could in rapid succession be discussed, defined, prohibited and studied. In short, the coining of the word *stalking* and its establishment as a significant social problem allowed us to recognise and act upon a previously unregarded area of human activity.

Stalking, like any form of complex human activity, can be the end point of a range of intentions and influences. Similarly, like many other forms of behaviour which cause distress to others, it lies towards the extreme end of a spectrum of activities ranging from the usually accepted and mundane to the terrifying and fortunately rare. One of the consequences of the identification and naming of stalking as a form of deviance has been to focus attention on which types of related behaviour are, in current society, acceptable, questionable or to be outlawed. The carving off of certain forms of activity, usually aimed at establishing or maintaining interpersonal contact, as not only unacceptable, but criminal and deviant, has occurred with scant discussion of boundary problems outside of law journals. Little attempt has been made to reconcile the emerging ideas of what constitutes stalking with what in marginal cases amounts to a disjunction between the intentions and attitudes of those involved in establishing a relationship or negotiating an end to a relationship. The legal literature has focused extensively on legitimate versus criminal following and intrusion, as well as subjective versus objective definitions of offending. This has, however, been strictly within discussions of legal process and the framing of effective legislation. In part, the uncritical acceptance of stalking as a social evil has been because initially the actions so described were so obviously dangerous to the victim. Prominent among the first well-publicised cases of stalking were examples in which the victim was eventually murdered by the stalker. That many stalkers are at best a distressing nuisance and at worst dangerous is beyond dispute, but this still leaves unresolved the boundary issues. In, for example, an ex-partner, where is the line which divides the acceptable pursuit of reconciliation and the stalking of that erstwhile love? In the would-be suitor, how many phone calls denote enthusiasm, and how many stalking? In the dismissed worker, how many angry letters and enquiries constitute the legitimate pursuit of clarification and assertion of rights, and how many stalking? This book will attempt not only to describe unequivocally damaging stalking behaviours but also to examine the boundaries and continuities between stalking and related forms of human behaviour.

Stalking is a problem because it evokes distress and even fear in the object of the unwanted attention. There are real grounds in some cases for victims to fear for their physical safety, and even for their lives. Equally, there are good reasons to suppose the disruptions produced by persistent stalking will have deleterious effects on the victim's mental health. It should not be forgotten that the lives of the stalkers are also severely disrupted by their actions. At the root of much stalking lie such states as loneliness, the pain of loss, nostalgia and the longing for intimacy. This is not to excuse, or to argue for some equivalence of suffering, merely to state the obvious: in many cases of stalking both victim and perpetrator have everything to gain from resolution and an end to the behaviour. The successful management

of stalking, it will be argued in this book, requires that the stalker be exposed to an appropriate balance of therapeutic help and legal sanction. For some, such as the individual with erotomanic delusions, treatment is paramount. In the calculating and vengeful ex-partner, confrontation with the personal costs of continuing to stalk, in terms of legal consequences, can have a gratifyingly salutary influence. For most stalkers a mixture of external treatment and control is optimal. Victims, even if the burden of the stalking has been relieved, are often left sufficiently traumatised to be in need of considerable help. In those still being stalked, practical help and appropriate support may go some way to relieving the burden and speeding its removal.

The question of how certain activities come to be identified as stalking has only occasionally been directly considered. As already emphasised, it is the *victim* who ultimately defines stalking, but what are the cues for recognising oneself as being stalked?

Emerson *et al.* (1998) attempt to address this question by considering stalking as a social process. They base their analysis on a variety of accounts of individuals who had been followed and harassed. They argue that 'stalking is keyed to a variety of hitches and disjunctures surrounding relational coming together and splitting apart' (p. 295). What they describe as the 'core dynamic' is a one-sided attempt to create or sustain a close relationship. Central is the notion of one party being indifferent or opposed to the establishing or re-establishing of a relationship, with the other party eager for such an outcome.

Many intimate relationships begin with the meeting of strangers. The encounter with another person who is either previously unknown or largely unregarded is a common but nonetheless charged event. This is particularly true when the context is one which promises the beginning of an important relationship. As we move from encountering someone to relating to that person we travel across a complex social and interpersonal minefield. Traversing the pitfalls which lie between encountering and relating is rarely straightforward. The opportunities are many, not just for failure but for producing unsolicited responses of anger or fear. Perceiving the other as intrusive and harassing, and oneself as stalked, can be a measure of the experienced disjunction between the intentions and perceptions of the protagonist of the relationship and that of the unwilling object of those aspirations. When intimate relationships founder and fail one partner usually perceives (or even pursues) the termination before the other. Again this is fruitful ground for those disjunctions which make possible the self-definitions of being a stalking victim. In the quest for a new intimacy the initiator risks being defined as a stalker. In the dissolution of intimacy it is the initiator of the break-up who risks provoking a response in which they experience themselves as a stalking victim. In both situations the reactions of the target may play a part in provoking or sustaining the stalker's intrusive behaviours.

Each and every struggle towards, or away from, intimacy does not inevitably occur under the threat of the evocation of the label *stalking*. Any unlucky individual could find themselves accused of being a stalker by an oversensitive, overanxious or even self-serving target of their affections. In practice, however, most reasonable individuals give a fair degree of latitude to those whose advances they intend to resist or reject. Sometimes that generosity stems from guilt, sometimes from sympathy, occasionally from simple politeness, but it is usually offered. In most cases the pursuer needs to be possessed of a good dose of insensitivity and an overwhelming sense of entitlement to place themselves at risk of their behaviour being construed as stalking.

The archaeology of stalking

The emergence of stalking as a term for a particularly egregious form of harassment has clarified and specified the possible perspectives from which repeated unwanted intrusions can properly be viewed. It has also constrained the extent to which similar behaviours can be presented in a positive light.

One construction of courtly love was the unrequited love of the persistent suitor who merely admired from afar the unattainable perfections of the loved one (see Singer, 1987). The great Italian poets Petrarch (1304–74) and Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) both celebrated in

their works lifelong devotions to women with whom they had had little or no actual contact. Dante writes of his love of Beatrice in *La Vita Nuova* (*c.* 1292). Though some have held Beatrice to be a symbol, she is usually identified with Beatrice Portinari. For Dante she is 'an abstract, almost allegorical, embodiment of beauty, goodness and the other perfections' (Singer, 1987, p. 156). T. S. Eliot (1930) regarded Dante as having a pathological obsession with Beatrice, with whom he has no real contact but whom he nevertheless uses as the focus and inspiration of his idealised love. Petrarch had a similar infatuation and idealised love for Laura (thought to be Laura de Noves, married 1325, died 1348, the mother of 11 children). It is not the reality of Beatrice or Laura but entirely their imagined properties which moves these poets. De Rougemont (1950) writes: 'but here again the woman, whether absent or present, is never but the *occasion* for a torment he cherishes above all else' (p. 178). Petrarch wrote of Laura, 'I know to follow while I flee my fire: I freeze when present: absent my desire is hot' (quoted in de Rougemont, 1950). We don't know in what manner Dante pursued his Beatrice (though the Pre-Raphaelites portray him as furtively spying). It is not known whether Laura felt harassed by Petrarch's 365 daily poems, assuming he sent them to their inspiration (number 366 was dedicated to the Virgin Mary). What is clear is that for their contemporaries, and for many generations to come, Dante and Petrarch were a subject not of scandal but of admiration. Western society at that period accepted as an ideal an autistic love constructed by a man out of projections and fantasies which took no account of the realities or feelings of the actual woman.

To be fair to these renaissance lovers, it could be argued that they embodied one essential element of the process of romantic love. Scheler (1954, originally published 1912) says the joy of love comes primarily from the act of loving, not from the delights provided by the one loved. Love for Scheler is also a movement that tends to enhance value in the one loved. Thus Dante and Petrarch may well have accessed part of the joy of loving through their distant infatuations. Beatrice and Laura, in their relatively small society, may not have remained entirely ignorant of the great literary appreciation directed at them, and perhaps it is not pushing extrapolation too far to imagine them gaining some greater sense of their own value and place in the world. Whatever the reality for those long-dead white men, they certainly point to a possible element in the intimacy-seeking stalker, that of indulging the joy of being in love.

Søren Kierkegaard (1813–55), the Danish philosopher, theologian and founder member of the existential elite, wrote a curious collection of pieces published as *Either/Or* (1987, originally published 1843). The first volume, *Either*, is ostensibly written by 'A', a young self-styled aesthete, and includes the narrative *The Seducer's Diary*. This is said to be the fictionalised account of Kierkegaard's pursuit of a young woman, Regine Olsen, renamed Cordelia Wahl in the book. The pursuit consists of surreptitious following, spying upon her, gathering information about her and engineering repeated encounters in public places. Kierkegaard in the fictionalised account describes his (or A's) first contact with the supposed beloved as follows:

> A figure appears, enveloped to the eyes in a cape. It is not possible to see where he is coming from … He passes by you just as you are entering the front door. At precisely the crucial moment a sidelong glance falls on its object. You blush; your bosom is too full to unburden itself in a single breath. There is indignation in your glance, a proud contempt. There is a plea, a tear in your eye, both are equally beautiful. I accept them both with equal right … I certainly shall meet her again sometime; I certainly shall recognise her, and she may recognise me – my sidelong glance is not forgotten so easily … I promise she will recall the situation. No impatience, no greediness – everything will be relished in slow draughts; she is selected, she will be overtaken. (pp. 314–15)

In the author's mind a relationship is created in the moment of eye contact. It is for him an exchange: an exchange of vows, a moment of recognition and reciprocity. The 'she may recognise me' at some time in the future is rapidly superseded by 'she will recall the situation'. The relationship is established, albeit autistically. His claim 'she is selected, she will be overtaken' takes no account of her; it is a statement of entitlement.

The relationship established is for A one of worship and service: 'my beautiful stranger … I am at your service in every way' (p. 320). There is a recognition that at least in the first few weeks there is no real reciprocity, only

the hope and expectation of a favourable response: 'in a certain sense my profits are meagre but then I do have the prospect of the grand prize' (p. 326). The course of the following, manufactured contacts, and information gathering is documented in the form of a diary. He follows her 'with the intention of passing by her and dropping behind her many times until I discovered where she lived' (p. 333). He spies: 'I will know who you are – why else do you think the police keep census records?' (p. 327). He watches her house – 'Today I learned something about the house into which she disappeared' (p. 337) – and plans, for 'if it is necessary for me to gain entrance to the house ... I am prepared' (p. 338).

The behaviours appear to us to be those of stalking, although this is not how either Kierkegaard or his contemporaries would have constructed this story, even assuming the vocabulary existed for such a labelling. Even more interesting is the description of the internal world A creates for himself. First there is the fantasy of the loved one's inevitable succumbing. Then he bestows on her characteristics, desires and intentions in a vacuum, for at this stage he knows only her appearance and the appearance of her house. She 'lives in a world of fantasy' (p. 341). He is convinced that 'she is an isolated person' (p. 339), that she is 'proud' (p. 342), she has 'imagination, spirit, passion' and even 'maybe at particular moments she wishes that she were not a girl but a man' (p. 343). It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the beloved is being constructed, or reconstructed, in the image of the lover. A rich world is created out of glimpsed moments and stolen observations. *The Seducer's Diary* seems a window into the world of one particular type of person we would now call a stalker.

But is Kierkegaard's account really that of stalking, and to what extent is it, as is often assumed, a true account of his initial pursuit of Regine Olsen? Regine Olsen did eventually have an actual relationship with Kierkegaard, though it didn't last. She survived him, living until 1904 and becoming a celebrity on the basis of *The Seducer's Diary*. Her later memories of Kierkegaard are not those of the stalker but of the man she eventually met and to whom for a time she was engaged. Kierkegaard remained preoccupied (even obsessed) with Regine for the rest of his life and even in his last will and testament claimed 'my estate is her [Regine's] due exactly as if I had been married to her' (Kierkegaard, 1996, p. 657). The extent to which *The Seducer's Diary* accurately portrays the actions and mental life of Kierkegaard in his early pursuit of Regine Olsen must remain questionable. It could be more fictional than factual, it could conflate (or even transpose) other episodes of such stalking-like behaviour. Kierkegaard (1996) claimed that '*The Seducer's Diary* was written for her sake, to help repulse her' (p. 417). What it does unquestionably is to provide an insight into the thinking and behaviour of someone who we would now label a stalker. At the time, however, A could have legitimately, in the eyes of his culture and his contemporaries, styled himself a lover.

We do not know the impact on the victim, who must, to some extent, have been aware of the undeclared observer. If this is an account of the stalking of Ms Olsen it is difficult to retrospectively view her as unduly disturbed, let alone traumatised, given that she later accepted his attentions and offer of marriage, and given that she accepted, in later life, the role of the eminent philosopher's great love. We would speculate that the experience of being followed and spied upon would have been very different for Regine Olsen in the Copenhagen of the mid nineteenth century than it would be for a teenager (she was 16 or 17 years old) in London or New York at the beginning of the twenty-first century. The man, though unknown, would not have been a stranger in the same sense, for his identity, if not already suspected, could easily be established in the relatively small community. His appearance would have defined him in terms of probable social class and role to a far greater extent than in today's world. His behaviour would have had acceptable explanations in terms of the shy suitor, the gauche admirer or even the romantic stranger. The threatening and sinister were not imminent to anything like the same degree in the attentions of a stranger.

John Updike (1997) describes Kierkegaard's behaviour as revealed in *The Seducer's Diary* as convoluted gallantry, though he does also describe it as stalking. Updike gives stalking a curious resonance, however, when he writes, 'The hero's long and loving stalking of a girl too young to approach provides, in fiction

as in reality, the peak of erotic excitement' (p. xiii). Kierkegaard's alter ego A does not appear in *The Seducer's Diary* to be desisting from direct contact because Cordelia is a schoolgirl, so the reader is left in some doubt as to whose reality it is that finds stalking young girls the peak of erotic excitement. That such people exist will become clear as this book progresses; that Kierkegaard was an example is, one can hope, a misinterpretation.

Conclusions

Stalking is a problem behaviour which is characterised by repeated attempts to impose unwanted communications and/or contacts on another in a manner which could be expected to cause distress and/or fear in any reasonable person. The core features of stalking are often accompanied by other harassing behaviours, including ordering or cancelling goods and services on the victim's behalf, making vexatious complaints and perhaps most importantly threats and violence.

Stalking usually emerges out of two broad contexts. The first is the attempt to establish, re-establish or impose a relationship on another who has either made clear their disinterest or has not even been consulted on the matter. The second is to retaliate for some perceived injustice.

Stalking behaviours have been clearly described in the legal, psychiatric and fictional texts for generations. What is new is not the behaviour but the naming of this course of conduct and the initiation of popular, legal and scientific discourses about the nature of the behaviour, its effects, and how it can be remedied. This book sets out to illuminate those discourses, with an emphasis on the rapidly expanding empirical and theoretical literature on stalking.