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The Matter of Genre:

Ian Rankin and the Tartan Noir Novel

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Author of the monograph

The Matter of Genre: Ian Rankin and the Tartan Noir Novel
Kwestia gatunku: Ian Rankin i powieść tartan noir

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After all those years it is hard to imagine my life without John Rebus, as if he stepped off the page and quietly took up residence in my world. But that is a whole other matter.

Introduction

> *Arguably no Scottish novelist since Sir Walter Scott has had the commercial and critical success that Ian Rankin now enjoys. He may even be said to have invented modern Scotland, or at least modern Edinburgh, for his readers, just as Scott did in his time. If Rankin's Scotland is bleaker, grimier, and less obviously romantic than Scott's, well, that may be how it is. […] Rebus lives. So does Rankin's Edinburgh.*
>
> Allan Massie

> *You can call me a crime writer or a Scottish writer or whatever. As long as people read the books.*
>
> Ian Rankin, qtd. in Wroe

If popular wisdom declares that "crime does not pay", then one look at the bookshelves in any bookstore around the world shows an example of just the opposite. Crime novels sell well and are widely read in virtually any part of the globe. Crime is the central point of an extensive production of not only books, but also films and TV series. Moreover, the worldwide success of Scandinavian crime fiction (or Nordic Noir as it has been called) shows that crime fiction is not constrained by national borders but can be successfully translated into other languages and appropriated for other cultures.

The worldwide appeal of crime fiction narratives is one distinctive characteristic of the genre; another is its huge diversification. The ability to replicate, explore, and interrogate its own conventions is one of the defining features of all types of crime fiction. There is perhaps no other genre that encompasses so many different forms: from whodunnits to hard-boiled detective fiction, from crime thrillers to police procedurals, crime fiction takes on many different forms. However, crime fiction is not only a portmanteau genre, but it also attracts a wide variety of writers. It is a remarkable sign of crime fiction's expansiveness that many mainstream writers, who are not primarily known as crime fiction writers, have taken on the genre; for example, Paul Auster in *The New York Trilogy*, John Fowles in *The Collector*, Peter Ackroyd in *Hawksmoor* and Kazuo Ishiguro in *When We*

Were Orphans, to name just a few. Julian Barnes wrote crime novels under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh in the 1980s (they were reissued in 2014 and 2015). More recently, the Irish writer John Banville has published crime novels as Benjamin Black. In Scotland J.K. Rowling started writing detective novels under the pseudonym Robert Galibrath. However, perhaps the most interesting example is Pierre Lemaitre, a French writer who in 2013 won both the Prix Goncourt for his novel *Au-revoir la haut* and the Crime Writers' Association International Dagger for *Alex*.

The crime novel has proved one of the most popular and fast-evolving creations of the Scottish imagination in the past 30 years. Although Scotland played no significant part in the so-called "Golden Age of Detective Fiction", which was dominated by English authors, Scottish writers played a significant part in establishing the genre in the nineteenth century (Hogg, Stevenson, and Conan Doyle). Today, Scottish crime writers are among the most popular crime writers around the world and Scottish crime fiction has even acquired its own label – "Tartan Noir".

Ian Rankin: Life, career, reception

Ian Rankin is one of the most successful and highly regarded crime writers to come from Scotland[1]. His life is well-documented in an extensive number of interviews that he has given and in a semi-autobiographical book *Rebus's Scotland: A Personal Journey* (2005), which reveals details of his childhood and student days, but also provides the readers with the story behind the creation of his most famous character – DI John Rebus. In 2010 Craig Cabell, a journalist, biographer and historian, published a book entitled *Ian Rankin and Inspector Rebus*. Cabell's work draws on his extensive interviews with the author and presents insights into the mind of the writer and his creation. As Cabell claims himself in the preface to his work, "[It] is not a biography of Ian Rankin and it is not an in-depth piece of literary criticism" (xv). With plot summaries, an exclusive interview with the author and a complete collector's guide it is aimed at a general reader rather than scholars.

[1] Each of Rankin's books sells 1.5 million copies in the UK (*The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature*, ed. Ian Brown and Alan Riach, Chapter 16, Endnote 25, 243).

Ian Rankin was born on 28 April 1960 in a pre-fabricated house in the mining village of Cardenden in the Kingdom of Fife[2] The town enjoyed its greatest prosperity in the nineteenth century when it became a centre of the coal-mining industry. However, like many other industrial areas in the UK, it was affected by economic changes in the twentieth century and in the 1960s the coal mines were closed. This led to a rise in unemployment: "The job opportunities in Fife during the 1960s and '70s were not diverse. You would either go into the Armed Forces or the Police Force. That was pretty much it. People would get to the age of 16 or 18 and just leave and you'd never see them again" (Rankin, qtd. in Cabell 2-3).

Rankin's family background is anything but literary. His mother was a school dinner lady whereas his father spent most of his life working in a grocer's shop, switching to an office job at Rosyth Dockyard in later years. They met as widow and widower. As Rankin put it, "Death was the reason they got together and had me…There had always been a shadow of death in my family" (qtd. in Cabell 2). Rankin grew up with two half-sisters. The novelist described his childhood as "settled and safe" (*Rebus's Scotland* 10). His mother died when he was only eighteen and his father died quite young – at the age of seventy-two, when Rankin was 30 years old.

Despite growing up in a strong working-class environment, Rankin was keen on books from an early age and eventually the town's library became "his second home" (*Rebus's Scotland* 22-23). He was fascinated by the power of words:

> At the end of each school day, I would retreat home and pick up the *Dundee Courier*, attempting the "quick" crossword with the aid of a small dictionary. In the evening there would be games of Scrabble with my parents […]. Words were the most important things in the world to me. They defined the space I lived in. The weekly purchase of *Sounds* or *New Musical Express* saw me digesting the small ads as well as every article and review. I would cut out my favourite pieces of writing and pin them to my bedroom wall. […] I didn't have much, but I had words. (*Rebus's Scotland* 128)

[2] Fife was once one of the major Pictish Kingdoms, known as *Fib*, and is still commonly known as the "Kingdom of Fife" within Scotland. Cardenden is situated in central Fife, between Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline. At the time when Rankin was born his hometown was actually called Bowhill: "As a kid, I'd known the place as Bowhill. It formed part of what old-timers called the ABCD-Auchterderran, Bowhill, Cardenden and Dundonald. The four district parishes became one – Cardenden – in the early 1970s" (*Rebus's Scotland* 2).

Although Rankin's passion for reading was connected with the desire to escape the harsh reality of living in a small village, there was also another, simpler reason for his early fascination with literature. Around the age of 12 or 13, he suddenly realised that although he could not see X-certificate films, he could go to the library and borrow books like *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, *The Godfather* and *A Clockwork Orange* (McCrum)[3]. Naturally, the passion for reading was something he tried to hide from his peers: "I grew up feeling 'different' from my family and friends, and trying desperately to blend in" (qtd. in Cabel 4).

Rankin attended local schools, first Auchterderran Junior High for a couple of years and then Beat High School in Cowdenbeath where an English teacher recognised his writing ability and encouraged him to go into higher education, the first of his family to do so. He went to Edinburgh University where he studied English Literature and Language, graduating in 1982. Between 1983 and 1986 he returned to the university to work on a PhD thesis on Muriel Spark, but he never finished it as he became increasingly involved in his own writing[4].

His university years were filled with student pastimes and explorations of Edinburgh. Rankin stresses that he initially felt like an outsider in the capital city and was trying to "make sense" of his new hometown. This attempt to "make sense of Edinburgh" is something that he would later continue in his work (*Rebus's Scotland* 13-14).

After university and before his success as a novelist, Rankin had a number of jobs which included working as a grape-picker, a swineherd, taxman, a journalist and a punk musician. It was not until the success of *Black and Blue* (published in 1997) that he was able to give up his day job and focus solely on writing.

Rankin married in 1986 after which he lived for a time in London, "at the height of Thatcherism" (*Hide and Seek*, Introduction xii) working as the editor of a hi-fi magazine. This is how he remembers this time: "In some wine bars, rising property values seemed to be the only currency of

[3] Since I quote from a number of interviews with Rankin conducted by different interviewers and published in different places, for convenience, I decided to cite them by the name of the author of the interview.

[4] The collection of essays *The Scottish Novel since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (1993), ed. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, includes Rankin's contribution on Spark, see: "The Deliberate Cunning of Muriel Spark".

conversation. […] I seemed to be surrounded by people more successful than me, people with fat salaries or five-figure publishing deals" (*Hide and Seek*, Introduction xii). Many of Rankin's feelings from that time are reflected in the third Rebus novel *Tooth and Nail*, which is the only novel of the series set in London rather than Edinburgh.

After four years in London, Rankin gave up city life and, together with his wife, moved to France. They bought a farmhouse in the countryside and stayed there for six years (with a break for a six-month spell in America after Rankin received the Chandler-Fulbright Award). His two sons Jack and Kit were born there. Rankin used to travel to Edinburgh to do research for his books but eventually was persuaded by his publishers to move back to Edinburgh where he still lives today with his wife and sons. Sadly, his younger son is seriously disabled with Angelman Syndrome, a rare genetic disorder, which means that he will require life-long care. When Rankin found out that his son was going to be disabled for life he was angry and frustrated and these feelings influenced his work at the time:

> All of the anger, the frustration, the questions, they went into my work, and in *Black and Blue*, which I was writing at the time, I took Rebus as low as he has ever got. […] But writing about the world through Rebus's eyes was cathartic. It was a way of getting all my stuff out – not having to deal with it personally, letting him deal with problems instead. And I gave it to him in a big way. In the next book, *The Hanging Garden*, I put his daughter in a wheelchair. My son is not going to walk, let's see how your daughter likes it. It was incredibly spiteful, but I think at that stage I was controlling the universe through writing in a way I couldn't control the world in real life. (Plain, "Rankin Revisited: An Interview with Ian Rankin" 132)

Rankin also admits that his son is part of the reason he is successful, "The books got good because I was angry and frustrated" (Moore). Rankin has spoken publicly and openly about his son's disability and, together with his wife, he is involved with various charities helping people with disabilities.

The accidental crime writer

Today Rankin is best known as the author of the so-called "Rebus novels". The Rebus novels are crime novels which feature Detective Inspector John Rebus, a troubled, middle-aged detective who is fond of whisky and works in

the darker heart of Edinburgh. However, Rankin's career as a writer started when, as a young boy, he started drawing cartoons. He was about seven or eight, and he would fold sheets of plain paper until they formed a little booklet. Then he would fill the pages with the drawings of stick-men with speech bubbles. The stories were about football, war, and outer space. However, he gave up on the career of comic-book writer when it was pointed out to him that he could not draw (*Beggars Banquet*, Introduction 1).

Next, he started writing song lyrics for a non-existent band. By writing lyrics, he found himself writing poetry – "doggerel, admittedly, but poetry all the same" (*Beggars Banquet*, Introduction 1). At the age of seventeen he won second prize in a nationwide poetry competition organised by the Scots Language Society for his poem "Euthanasia" (McCrum). Short stories were the next natural step: "The thing about my poems was, they told stories. They were about people going to places and the consequences of their actions. I think that's why I started writing short stories" (*Beggars Banquet*, Introduction 2). Rankin did have some success with his short stories, coming runner-up to Iain Crichton Smith in a competition organized by *The Scotsman* newspaper and winning a contest run by Radio Forth for a story based on a true incident from family's history (he wrote a story about a hard-drinking uncle who had stripped off one day and wandered the Sunday afternoon streets of Lochgelly) (*Rebus's Scotland* 8).

Rankin's first novel, *The Flood*, was published in 1986[5] by Polygon, a small independent publishing house which was owned by Edinburgh University Students' Association. At the time of writing Rankin was a 25--year-old PhD student researching the novels of Muriel Spark at Edinburgh University. The 1980s were a period which saw a remarkable surge in Scottish literary creativity, with writers such as Alasdair Gray and James Kelman being published to considerable acclaim.

In terms of genre *The Flood* is not a crime novel, but rather a *Bildungsroman* with strong Gothic overtones. The novel is set in a fictitious mining village of Carsden which bears strong resemblance to Rankin's hometown of Cardenden. It tells a story of a young man growing up in Fife and coming to terms with a dark secret from his mother's past.

[5] Actually, it was not the first novel that Rankin had ever written. In fact, his first novel was *Summer Rites*, a black comedy set in a hotel in the Scottish Highlands. It was never published although according to Rankin his wife still thinks it is his best book (Pierce).

> Although *The Flood* was written in the mid-1980s, at a time when a fresh urban Scottish fiction was arriving – thanks to writers such as James Kelman – I decided that my own story would be local and rural, based in and around a fictitious coal-mining community. The problem was, I named my village Carsden, which is why a lot of people back in my hometown of Cardenden thought I was writing about them. It hardly helped that the main character was called Sandy – the name of one of my school-friends – or that when I took the finished novel home to show to my father, he perused the opening sentence and told me a woman called Marry Miller [in the novel that is the name of the mother of the main protagonist] lived just over the back fence from him. (*The Flood*, Introduction xii)

Only a few hundred copies were sold and the novel went out of print for twenty years. Once Rankin gained popularity with his Rebus series the editions of *The Flood* were selling for as much as £1000 on the collector's market (Cabell 35). This led to a decision by Rankin to republish the book and thus make it available to everyone[6]. Eventually, it was republished in 2005 by Orion with a marketing slogan: "This is Rankin. Before Rebus". Reviewers were quick to notice the fact that *The Flood*, albeit a young man's novel, demonstrates the writing ability that would be later fully developed by Rankin in his Rebus series:

> The themes that would come to dominate the Rebus books are already here in embryonic form: the blurred boundaries between good and evil; the pull of superstition and myth; the difficulties in escaping and resolving one's past; the emotional complexities of the male of the species; and, not least, a good mystery. (*Time Out*, qtd. on the back cover of the 2005 edition of the novel)

Rankin claims that on the very day that he went to sign his first-ever book contract (Tuesday 19 March 1985) he got an idea for a new novel, which would be called *Knots and Crosses*:

> The idea came to me as I sat by the fire in my student digs. My bed-sit would have been the original living-room of the ground-floor flat. It was spacious and high-ceilinged and freezing. There was a single bed, and a desk and chair by the large bay window. As I sat staring into the fire's gasflames, the pun "knots and crosses" came to me, and with it the notion that someone might be sending someone else little teasing puzzles in the shapes of knotted pieces of string

[6] See the introduction to 2005 edition of *The Flood*.

> and matchstick crosses. It didn't take me long to decide that the recipient would be a cop, the sender someone from his past, some nemesis bent on his destruction. (*Rebus's Scotland* 9)

And so, the hero was born and next year saw the publication of *Knots and Crosses,* the first of the Rebus novels, for which he is now internationally renowned. However, at the time of publication *Knots and Crosses* did not meet with much interest from readers or critics. Moreover, much to the writer's amazement, the novel went straight into the crime section in bookshops:

> My first Inspector John Rebus novel was not meant to be a whodunnit. It was not meant to be the first book in a series […] At the time I wrote it, I was a postgraduate student in Edinburgh, studying literary theory and the Scottish novel. I thought I was updating Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, delivering a "Scots Gothic" for the 1980s, while also perhaps telling readers something about the hidden aspects of the city of Edinburgh, aspects the tourists and day-trippers would never see. (Rankin, "Detective Novels: The Pact between the Authors and Readers" 13)

Rankin recalls that he was horrified to discover that he accidentally wrote a crime novel as his intention was to be "a serious member of the intelligentsia":

> I told Allan Massie, Writer-in-Residence at Edinburgh University, "This is terrible! I've become a crime writer by accident", and he said, "Yeah but who would be a dry academic novelist if they could be John Buchan?" (Shields 25)[7].

Rankin went on to write two other novels, *The Watchman* (1990), a spy novel, and *Westwind* (1990)[8], a conspiracy thriller, before returning to Rebus in *Hide and Seek* (1990). The subsequent novels to come out were *Wolfman* (1992) – later renamed *Tooth and Nail – The Black Book* (1993), *Mortal Causes* (1994) and *Let It Bleed* (1995). Each of them sold just a few thousand copies and the publisher was considering turning Rankin down, but a breakthrough

[7] Allan Massie had his share in Rankin's career as he put one of his stories in *Edinburgh Review,* which he was editing, and later introduced him to his first London publisher, Euan Cameron at the Bodley Head (Massie 44).

[8] Both novels went out of print for many years and were almost impossible to obtain. Eventually, *The Watchman* was republished by Orion in 2010 and *The Westwind* in 2019 (with minor edits and a new Introduction by Rankin).

came with the eighth novel *Black and Blue* (1997) which received the Crime Writers Association Gold Dagger award for the best crime novel of the year (Wanner). This award led Orion to reissue Rankin's earlier novels and by 1998 Rankin had set a new record by occupying six of the top ten places in the Scottish Book Marketing Group's annual survey, with *Black and Blue* top of the list (Plain, *Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 19). Rankin himself admitted that he felt that the novel was something bigger than the previous ones:

> When I started plotting it and started writing it, I could feel that it was a different kind of book. It was initially given an injection from my close and passionate reading of James Ellroy. […] If you read the opening pages of *Black and Blue*, there's a real James Ellroy feel to them – very staccato sentences with a lot of slang that you might not know but that gives a lot of mood and character. I knew the book was going to be a lot darker and use a real-life case, which I had never done before […]. To me it felt like a big important book. (Moore)

In *The Times* Marcel Berlins commented that with *Black and Blue* "Ian Rankin joins the elite of British crime writing", a quote that would be later repeated numerous times.[9] Despite the fact that *Black and Blue* met with a very positive reaction from both critics and readers, there were of course some negative reviews as well. For example, Liam McIlvanney argued in *The Times Literary Supplement* that although Rankin uses the figure of Bible John, a real-life serial killer who terrorised Glasgow in the late 1960s, he fails to address the social and cultural impact of his crimes. Moreover, McIlvanney sees the novel as far less engaged with the issues concerning contemporary Scotland than the previous novels and worse in terms of the narrative style, which, he argues, proceeds in "chatty, almost slapdash prose" and "the few attempts at a verbal flourish achieve, at best, a laboured cleverness". McIlvanney's mixed reception of *Black and Blue* constitutes a minority viewpoint, but it is certainly interesting as the elements that he is criticising are actually seen as the novel's biggest strengths by a lot of critics[10].

Altogether, between 1987 and 2007, Rankin wrote eighteen Rebus novels as well as a novella entitled "Death is Not the End"[11]. The series ended

[9] See for example O'Connor.

[10] See for example Gill Plain's in-depth discussion of the novel: *Ian Rankin's Black and Blue: A Reader's Guide*.

[11] Rankin originally wrote the novella for an American publisher who was later reluctant to publish it. Rankin was worried that it might never get published and therefore decided to

in 2007 with *Exit Music*. Before the publication, there was much speculation among readers whether Rankin, like Arthur Conan Doyle, would kill his detective hero. Rankin chose not to do that and instead opted for retirement arguing that because Rebus lives in "real time" and ages between the books he has to retire at 60, the retirement age for the police officers (Wanner). The novel opens with, "The girl screamed once, only the once, but it was enough" (*Exit Music* 3). With this sentence Rankin both references *Knots and Crosses* (which opened with "The girl screamed once, only the once") and at the same time announces the end of the series – "it was enough". In 2012, surprisingly, after 5 years, the writer brought his hero back in *Standing in Another Man's Grave.* In the novel Rebus is retired but continues to work as a civil consultant for the Cold Cases unit, which consists of ex-police officers. In the following novel, *Saints of the Shadow Bible*, Rebus briefly re-enters the police albeit in the lower rank of Detective Sergeant and under his former protégé, DI Siobhan Clarke. In the books that follow Rebus is firmly in retirement but continues to help investigations although not in an official capacity. More recent novels feature three main detective characters – Siobhan Clarke, Malcolm Fox and Rebus and in that respect are quite different from the original 'Rebus series' (1987-2007).

Rankin has spoken humorously about the endurance of his character: "I have tried to bump him off or get rid of him several times". (…) "but he seems to want to stick around. He refuses to leave my head" ("Why Rebus Won't Die"). To date the Rebus novels have been translated into thirty-six languages and are bestsellers worldwide.

Apart from the novels, there are also a number of short stories featuring DI Rebus, most of which, but not all, were brought together in three collections: *A Good Hanging and Other Stories* (1992), *Herbert in Motion and Other Stories* (1997), *Beggars Banquet* (2002) and *The Complete Short Stories* (2005)[12]. In 2014 Orion published *The Beat Goes On: The Complete Rebus Short Stories*.

A number of the Rebus novels have been adapted for radio and television. Thirteen of the novels were dramatised for television between 2000 and 2007 in four series of *Rebus*. The first series (first aired on ITV on

use parts of the story in his next full-length novel *Dead Souls* (1999). "Death is Not the End" did get published in the end, which is why two versions of the same story exist (*Dead Souls*, introduction x).

[12] Despite its title, there are some notable omissions in this anthology.

the 26th of April 2000) starred John Hannah as DI Rebus. Hannah's performance met with a lot of criticism (mostly because viewers felt that he was too young for the part) and in the second series the part was taken over by Ken Stott who also played Rebus in series 3 and 4. Series four of the programme also included an original episode, "The First Stone", which was not based on any of the Rankin novels. The show was cancelled in 2008 after Stott announced that he did not want to play the part anymore. The TV adaptation has met with mixed reviews. Generally, it suffered from the fact that 400-500 pages of a novel were compressed into a 45-minute episode. Moreover, Rebus's TV persona never quite seemed to live up to the books but seemed reduced by the small screen.

Recently, the novels have been adapted again. A rebooted six-episode series premiered on BBC One and BBC Scotland starting 17 May 2024. The show, starring Richard Rankin as Rebus, was produced by Viaplay. However, after completing post-production, Viaplay decided to exit the UK market and sold the rights to the BBC. *Rebus* (2024 TV Series) reimagines the character of John Rebus as a younger Detective Seargeant while the setting remains present-day Edinburgh. The series has received generally positive reviews, with critics praising its gritty realism and strong performances. Some reviewers highlight the show's darker, more violent tone compared to previous adaptations, while others appreciate its focus on Rebus's personal struggles and complex relationships.

Rebus has also appeared on stage in *Rebus: Long Shadows* (2018) and *Rebus: A Game Called Malice* (2023). The former was written with Rona Munro, the latter with Simon Reade. Rankin has also written (with Mark Thomson) a non-Rebus play called *Dark Road* (2013).

Other works by Rankin include three thrillers written under the name Jack Harvey – *Witch Hunt* (1993), *Bleeding Hearts* (1994) and *Blood Hunt* (1995). He is also the author of a caper novel called *Doors Open* (2008), which was originally written as a serial for the *New York Times*, a novella "A Cool Head" (2009), a graphic novel *Dark Entries* (published in 2009; with artwork by Werther Dell'Edera) and a number of short stories that appeared in various places. The year 2009 also saw the beginning of the new series featuring DI Malcolm Fox who appeared in *The Complaints* which was followed by *The Impossible Dead* in 2011. Rather than continue with the series, Rankin decided to bring his characters together in *Standing in Another Man's Grave* and both detectives feature prominently in the novels that follow.

Over the years, Rankin has been presented with numerous awards both in Britain and abroad. He has been elected a Hawthornden Fellow and is a past winner of the Chandler Fulbright Award. He is the recipient of four Crime Writers' Association Dagger Awards[13]: The Short Story Daggers for "A Deep Hole" (1994) and "Herbert in Motion" (1996), the Gold Dagger for *Black and Blue* (1997) and the prestigious Diamond Dagger for lifetime achievements (awarded in 2005). In 2004, Rankin won America's celebrated Edgar Award[14] for *Resurrection Men*. He also won Denmark's Palle Rosenkrantz Prize, the French Grand Prix du Roman Noir and the Deutscher Krimipreis. The writer has received honorary degrees from a number of universities including St Andrews and Edinburgh University. In 2019, he donated his archive of over fifty boxes of manuscripts, letters and paperwork to the National Library of Scotland.

Rankin was appointed Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in 2002 for services to literature and received a knighthood as part of Queen Elizabeth II 2022 Birthday Honours.

The author has a strong presence in the media. Apart from appearing on numerous shows on TV and radio, he is a regular guest on the BBC's *Newsnight Review* and in 2002 presented his own three-part TV series on the nature of evil entitled *Ian Rankin's Evil Thoughts*, which was broadcast by Channel 4. In 2005, BBC Four broadcast *Rankin on the Staircase* and in 2007, Rankin appeared again in *Ian Rankin's Hidden Edinburgh* and *Ian Rankin Investigates Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Reception and place in tradition

Rankin's fiction has generally been received very well both by critics and by readers. Mark Lawson compares Rankin's achievement with that of another Edinburgh-based writer – J.K. Rowling. In 2000 Bill Ott stated that:

[13] The Crime Writers' Association (CWA) was founded in the UK in 1953. The main aims of the association are to promote the crime genre and to support professional writers. The CWA is best known for its prestigious Dagger Awards (https://thecwa.co.uk).

[14] The Edgar Allan Poe Awards (popularly called "the Edgars") are presented every year by the Mystery Writers of America, an organization that is based in New York City. They honour the best in mystery fiction, non-fiction, television, film, and theatre published or produced in the previous year (https://mysterywriters.org/).

> The Rebus series has leapfrogged to the top of the procedural heap; it's now the standard against which the hard-boiled cop novel must be measured. Nobody writes darker than Rankin; nobody confronts the ravages of the human heart with a sharper or more unflinching eye; and nobody probes quite as deeply into the inner lives of today's browbeaten coppers.

A year later Peter Guttridge went as far as to call Rankin "one of a handful of truly outstanding British mystery writers".

Rankin has been praised for his complex plots as well as his portrayal of the main protagonist. Rebus is a more complex figure than the one-dimensional characters often encountered in detective fiction: "a main character chipped with a chisel rather than painted in pastels" (Donoghue). As Lawson points out:

> One of the notable achievements of these books has been to create a central figure who is in many ways markedly unpleasant – a pisshead, a bigot, a man who, as someone says in this book [*Exit Music*], "doesn't like anyone" – and make him, if not exactly likeable, then deserving of sympathy, and even empathy. Rankin achieves this because, without ever spelling out his "demons" in the clinical and redemptive way that is common in American fiction, it's clear that Rebus is a cop because unfinished business with death: his parents', his brother's, and a fear of his own, which he may be hastening by the chemicals he imbibes to distract himself from the fear.

Whereas some critics complain that it is just the main characters that are fully developed, and some of the other characters "fail to come alive"[15]. Guttridge points out that: "One of Rankin's particular strengths is the way he can shade a character with just a sentence. Describing retired pathologist Donald Delvin [who turns out to be a serial killer], he says that he 'took his glasses off and started polishing them again, as if the world could never reveal himself too vividly for him'".

However, first and foremost, Rankin has been praised for the way he portrays Edinburgh. Joseph Farell observes that "[Rankin's] imagination peoples Edinburgh the way Balzac's fantasy did Paris" and Heather O'Donoghue in her review of *The Falls* stresses that:

[15] See, for example, Perrin and Kerrigan.

> Rankin's specialty is his evocation of the Edinburgh which lies behind the elegant tourist façade: the city of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting*, a place of violence, drugs and organized crime, and, ever present below the surface that deep sectarian divide.

Morever, as critics point out with the progress of the series, Edinburgh becomes more than just a backdrop; it becomes a central character of the novels (Bruce-Gardyne).

Another main characteristic of the novels that is highlighted by the critics is their topical interest. Especially the later novels of the series engage with issues pertinent to the state of present-day Scotland. As Farrell observes:

> His complex plots initially look like the loose threads and disjointed knots on the reverse side of a tapestry, but the beginnings and ends are eventually matched up with the finesse of the most elegant Flemish needlework. The scenes which emerge on the front sides are the product of a troubling imagination and a probing intellect which use the crime genre to examine aspects of life, especially contemporary Scottish life, that politicians prefer to ignore.

Rankin has also been praised for the way he compares a new gentrified Scotland with its darker, depressed past: "This linking of past and present is a familiar theme in Rankin's work, something that gives it a depth and resonance sometimes lacking in rival crime fiction" (Johnstone). This interest in the changing face of Scotland is something that Rankin admits being passionate about:

> I'm interested in Scotland now and then, how it's changed. […] I want to get the reader to think about that by thinking about something from the past. How has society changed, how has policing changed, have we changed philosophically, psychologically, culturally, spiritually? (Rankin, qtd. in Johnstone)

Consideration of Rankin's work has begun to appear in university literature departments, highlighting a depth and complexity, which, it is felt, crime fiction rarely exhibits. The first serious academic study of Rankin was Gill Plain's *Ian Rankin's Black and Blue: A Reader's Guide* (2002). However, as the title suggests, it is devoted merely to the study of the one novel. Duncan Petrie devoted considerable attention to the Rebus novels in *Contemporary*

Scottish Fictions: Film, Television and the Novel (2004). Rankin's fiction has also been discussed by Peter Messent who included a chapter on *The Naming of the Dead* in his *Crime Fiction Handbook* (2013). Rankin is also present in most serious academic studies on crime fiction, most notably, in John Scaggs's *Crime Fiction* (2005) and the second edition of Stephen Knight's C*rime Fiction Since 1800. Detection. Death. Diversity* (2010). He is also included in the most important studies on contemporary Scottish literature: *The Edinburgh History of Scottish Literature* Vol. 3: *Modern Transformations: New Identities (from 1918)* (Brown et al., 2007), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007), *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* (2009), and *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature* (2012).

Critics note that Rankin's fiction has been influenced by such American hard-boiled crime writers as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, but also place Rankin's work in a Scottish context and highlight the fact that his fiction rests on a Scottish literary tradition ranging from James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson to Muriel Spark and William McIlvanney. Stephen Knight for example argues that Rankin has been so successful because:

> he was the first person to successfully transplant into Britain the mood and the feel of the great American private eye tradition. Although Rebus is a policeman, he is a troubled loner with this mixture of morality and fallibility that seems to provide some deeper inside. Added to this Rankin has provided a very strong sense of place. His books have a shade of the mysticism and ghostly elements which are in the Edinburgh tradition going back to Stevenson. (Knight, qtd. in Wroe)

Duncan Petrie suggests that it is Rankin's fascination with the theme of duality and its elaboration in the Scottish literary tradition of Hogg and Stevenson that gives his fiction "much of its distinctive force" (150). And in his contribution to *The Edinburgh Companion to Twentieth-Century Scottish Literature* Michael Gardiner points out that Rankin mixes the visceral social realism of William McIlvanney with the rhetorical sophistication of Spark and "has enjoyed a huge dispersal, adding to Edinburgh's moody northern reputation" (189).

Negative comments on Rankin's work are much less common than the above but are nevertheless there. David Goldie notes that the series appears a little too formulaic:

> Rebus's much-vaunted complexity seems to some readers of serious literary fiction to be a little gestural, to lack the real sense of psychological instability and vulnerability of Mina and Lindsay or the existential depth of McIlvanney. There is a sense, often in the early fiction, that the targets of Rebus's indignation are the soft ones of a somewhat conventional and unreflexive leftism: the professional classes, lawyers, businessman, the man in suits who constitute a rather underdeveloped authority against which Rebus huffs and puffs. (200)

Goldie also criticizes Rankin for using "bad puns", but at the same time admits that Rankin's fiction is "persuasively local in its reference and tone" (201) and "paints for both its Scottish and international readers a convincing picture of contemporary Edinburgh at a number of levels and which responds to and develops the literary tradition out of which it comes" (201).

Rankin has also been criticised by Richard Bradford who in *The Novel Now* argues that although

> Some have treated Rebus's fictional environment as comparable with that created by Irvine Welsh but this is part of the false mythology [sic] of the Scottish literary renaissance […]. In truth, Rebus is only a little more unorthodox than the likes of Dalziel and Frost. He makes something of his existential cries and coat-trails his working Scottishness, with its collision of roughness and vulnerability, but beyond that formulae that inhibit the mainstream of British crime fiction remain undisturbed. (103)

Despite the few negative comments, Rankin continues to be one of the most read Scottish contemporary writers and one whose fiction is taken more and more seriously by the academia not only in Britain, but also in Europe and the USA.

Rankin's work is also appreciated by his fellow writers who give him credit for ennobling the genre and providing it with much of its credibility in Great Britain. David Peace admits that he used to be sceptical about most British crime writers:

> Inspector Morse wasn't really the kind of thing I liked. But then I read Rankin's *Black and Blue*. There was a remarkable quality to the writing and an almost discernible feeling of him raising the bar. I do wonder if my being on the Granta list would have been possible without Ian making people look more seriously at crime writers. (qtd. in Wroe)

This is echoed by Allan Massie who states that

> The crime novel has moved far beyond mere entertainment, and [Rankin] is one of the novelists who have taken it there. He presents to us the anatomy of a society penetrated by crime, one where feral children roam the streets and even the advantaged young may be more than half in love with death, where the police fight daily battles [in a] war that will never be won.

The grip of Rankin's fiction on the popular imagination is perhaps best exemplified by the way in which it has become inextricably linked with the city of Edinburgh and is part of many cultural events organised in the city. For example, his fiction also featured prominently in a number of mysterious book sculptures that were left in various cultural locations around the city between 2011 and 2013. The sculptures were presented as gifts to the cultural institutions and people of the city. All the sculptures were on topics concerning Scottish literature and poetry and were made of paperbacks. Each sculpture contained a unique message bearing the line: "in support of libraries, books, words, ideas…". The identity of the sculptor has never been revealed[16].

Rankin is at present in his early sixties. He is a writer who has produced a substantial body of work, mostly in the novel, but also in other kinds of media. It is hard to say what the overall picture of his work will be in twenty or thirty years. He continues to be a very productive writer and produces books at regular intervals. Moreover, the pattern that is observable in his fiction to date is very clear: he is using the framework of the crime novel to examine various social issues as well as record the changing face of Scotland.

The choice of books

In this book I focus primarily on the original sequence of the Inspector Rebus novels published between 1987 and 2007, a period in which Ian Rankin established the character's voice, the series' thematic concerns, and its distinctive Edinburgh setting. By focusing on these formative works – from *Knots and Crosses* to *Exit Music* – I hope to show how Rankin plays with crime fiction conventions in order to create a truly Scottish crime novel (or Tartan Noir novel).

[16] For more information, see *GIFTED: The Tales of 10 Mysterious Book Sculptures Gifted to the City of Words and Ideas* (2013).

The shape of the book

Jean Bodel, an Old French poet, famously classified the subjects of medieval romance into the "Three Matters": the "Matter of Rome", the "Matter of Britain", and the "Matter of France"[17]. Closer reading of Rankin's fiction shows that there are four matters relevant to the study of his work: the Matter of Genre, the Matter of Crime, the Matter of Gothic, and the Matter of Scotland and the chapters in this study reflect that.

Chapter One deals with issues connected with genre studies and provides the theoretical background for further discussion. **Chapter Two** shows that Rankin's crime novels contain the genre-markers of two different sub-genres of crime fiction: the hard-boiled detective story and police procedural. It also discusses Rankin's place in the wider tendencies that can be observed in European crime fiction and tries to define Tartan Noir. **Chapter Three** discusses Gothic motifs and themes present in the Rebus novels as well as the intertextual elements. **Chapter Four** demonstrates that the texts under consideration are penetrated by the motifs, themes and conventions of the psycho-social novel and that some of the novels in the series can also be seen as "state of the nation" novels as they raise questions pertinent to the state of Scotland.

[17] See Jean Bodel, *La chanson des Saisnes.*

CHAPTER ONE

The Matter of Genre

For, after all, scholars are, in the end, only the detectives of thoughts.

Marjorie Nicolson, "The Professor and the Detective"

Genre, at its most basic level, refers to a category or type of text. For example, when walking into a bookshop, one might encounter labelled sections such as "Science Fiction," "Romance," "Mystery," or "Biography" – each grouping together texts that share common themes or stylistic conventions that help readers navigate their preferences and expectations. These genre distinctions are often reinforced by paratext such as cover design, title, or blurb which signal to potential readers the genre of a book before they even begin to read it. For example, a romance novel might feature pastel colours, flowing typography, and an illustrated couple in a tender pose, while a crime thriller is more likely to use bold, block lettering, dark tones, and stark imagery like a shadowy figure or blood-spattered scene. A text typically signals its genre early on, allowing a competent reader to understand with which type of narrative they are dealing. A classic example is the opening phrase "Once upon a time", which immediately indicates a fairy tale. Recognizing whether a text belongs to romance or detective fiction sets up certain expectations, as each genre comes with its own familiar conventions. In a detective story, readers generally anticipate finding a central detective figure and a plot focused on unravelling a mystery. Genres, then, form a "horizon of expectations" against which any text is read[18].

Genres are constantly evolving, taking on new elements and shedding older ones as time goes on. As a result, a genre should not be seen as something fixed or unchanging. Instead, it must be understood as a fluid and ever-changing concept. This means that it is impossible to identify

[18] *Horizon of expectations* is a term introduced by H.R. Jauss. See: "Theory of Genres and Medieval Literature".

permanent features that will always define a particular genre (yet I have witnessed many discussions about the permanent features of detective fiction at academic conferences). Such an unhistorical view, which goes back to Aristotle and his *Poetics*, used to be dominant in genre studies.[19] However, more recent studies suggest that genres are inherently historical in nature, shaped by the cultural contexts in which they emerge and develop. This understanding of genre can be found in Alastair Fowler's *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (1982) and John Frow's *Genre* (2005), both seminal works in modern genre theory. Alastair Fowler approaches genre as a flexible and historically embedded system, rejecting the idea of strict, fixed classifications. He emphasizes that genres are not static categories but families of texts that share certain traits and evolve over time. Drawing on a biological metaphor, Fowler likens genres to species that adapt and change, sometimes giving rise to new "subgenres" or merging into hybrid forms. He introduces the idea of "genre by recognition", where a reader identifies a genre not through rigid rules, but through a set of shared expectations and conventions.

Likewise, Frow views genre not as a rigid classification system but as a social and discursive practice. He argues that genres are not fixed containers for texts, but dynamic frameworks that shape how texts are produced, understood, and interpreted. Moreover, Frow emphasizes that genres are historically and culturally contingent, meaning they evolve over time and vary across different contexts. Importantly, he sees genre as a constitutive force: it does not simply label texts but actively helps to create their meaning by situating them within broader communicative and cultural practices.

In this study I am going to draw theoretical support from works of Frow and Fowler but also the arguments that can be found in Ireneusz Opacki's "Krzyżowanie się postaci gatunkowych jako wyznacznik ewolucji poezji (The Hybridization of Genre Forms as a Determinant in the Evolution of Poetry)" (1967)[20], David Malcolm's "Border Crossings: Genre Mixture in Contemporary British Fiction", and Andrzej Zgorzelski's "Is Science Fiction a Genre of Fantastic Literature?" (1979).

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[19] See Frow, ch.3

[20] All Opacki quotations are taken from a chapter called "Royal Genres," which is a translation of the original article (albeit with some omissions) by David Malcolm and appears in *Modern Genre Theory*, edited by David Duff.

All the aforementioned studies stress that a genre should always be seen as part of a bigger spectrum of systemic evolution. Moreover, during the evolution it may undergo a complete metamorphosis. As Malcolm points out, "[i]n the sense of literary diachrony, and synchrony, a genre may undergo radical (or non-radical) change and assume new features in the course of time" ("Border Crossings" 90). Such new features appear because the tendencies in literature change. As Opacki argues: "Every literary trend – or phase of it – has underlying it certain defined socio-historical factors, which shape a specific attitude towards the world and a certain sphere of interests and problems" ("Royal Genres" 119).

Naturally, a shift in how reality is perceived calls for the adoption of new conventions and motifs, which in turn can lead to the creation of a new genre or a variation of an existing one. Moreover, existing genres always influence those already present at a particular time, so a genre always acquires features of other genres in the course of time. We are then dealing with so-called "genre mixture".

The constant process of genre mixture is by no means surprising. After all, the writer wants to exert influence on the reader, and the text is supposed to evoke an aesthetic experience. The constant use of the same genre conventions would mean that a literary work would lose its novelty effect and present nothing new or surprising to the reader. Therefore, one can observe the following process: when a new genre or genre variant appears, it is characterised by the dominance of some new conventions. In the course of time the form is established as a finite representation. Later, it becomes popularised. Next, the form becomes fossilized which tends to thwart the evolution of the genre. Thus, it is essential that the form transforms itself again. Fowler argues this forcefully:

> For to have any artistic significance, to mean anything distinctive in a literary way, a work must modulate or vary or depart from its generic conventions, and consequently alter them for the future. (*Kinds of Literature* 23)[21]

[21] It is worth pointing out here that texts that do not modulate continue to be written and there are readers who enjoy them particularly because they find in the text a familiar set of conventions, a recognisable form. Also, Opacki argues that there are such ossified genre forms as the sonnet or the fable which have simply not evolved: "Here we can see a way towards a taxonomy of genres in terms of their 'evolutionary receptivity' [...] It points, indeed, to the variety of paths which evolution can take" ("Royal Genres" 125). Opacki's statement is debatable; however, it is beyond the scope of this discussion.

In his essay "The Law of Genre" Jacques Derrida observes that although when we talk about genres we naturally talk about norms and rules, it is actually impossible *not* to mix genres (224-225). He stresses that texts do not 'belong' to any genre: "Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text, there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging" (230).

Furthermore, it must be stressed at this point that the text-reader relationship underlies the existence of genres as such. In other words, the reader must be conscious of the signs of genre established in the text:

> The existence of a particular genre structure (variant) in a given epoch is usually accompanied by a literary consciousness of writers, critics, and readers who recognise this structure as different from the synchronic structures of other genres. (Zgorzelski 297)

This is echoed by Malcolm who observes, "[t]he existence of a contemporary consciousness of a particular genre is required before we can speak of that genre's existence as such" ("Border Crossings" 90).

Of course, a literary consciousness depends on the authority of the implied reader who by definition should be highly educated, and familiar with the literary legacy. This is stressed both by Zgorzelski and Malcolm:

> It is a part of the competence of the implied reader to recognize these [genre variants], and they are vitally important for an appropriate reading of the text. A concrete reader may ignore them or be unaware of them, but then produces an incompetent reading. (Malcolm, "Border Crossings" 90)

Thus, the relationship between the text and the reader has a communicative character. By reading the signs in the text the reader decodes the message sent by its author[22]. Breaching the rules established early in the text must inevitably attract the reader's attention. An example of such a case could be a text which first establishes its rules as mimetic, and then suddenly introduces a fantastic element as is the case in, for example, *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells (cf. Zgorzelski 298-299). As Malcolm puts it, "[t]he transition

[22] Cf. Jakobson "Linguistics and Poetics".

from one genre to another inevitably shocks the reader into an awareness of the text" (*That Impossible Thing: The British Novel 1978-1992* 115).

Similarly, mixing different genres is a particularly important communicative act. As Fowler points out, genres modulate, and "such modulation communicates and probably has a communicative value far greater than we can ever be directly aware of" (*Kinds of Literature* 20). Malcolm develops this argument further by suggesting that "tampering with genre, sending confusing or contradictory signals to the reader must be of major communicative importance, and one of the most radical things a text can do" ("Border Crossings" 91).

Hence, a question presents itself: when genres modulate, what factors influence this process? Why do they "borrow" conventions and motifs from one genre and not another? This question is addressed by Opacki who points out that the appearance of new socio-political conditions brings about the rise of a new literary trend ("Royal Genres" 119). Within each literary trend some genres are more dominant than others. For instance, in eighteenth-century Polish literature the crown of literary genres was the ode, the satire and the fable. In early Romanticism, on the other hand, it was at first the poetic novel, but in its second phase it was drama. It seems that those genres best conveyed a changed attitude to the surrounding reality and the rise of new problems and interests within contemporary literary trends (Opacki, "Royal Genres"120). As Opacki further argues, it is typical of every literary current to prefer particular genres over others:

> Each literary current introduces for its own use a certain hierarchy of literary genres – there are genres which are dominant in it, and "secondary" genres which are less representative of it. ("Royal Genres" 120)

He further suggests that a dominant genre (which he calls a "royal genre") will affect other genres that exist at a particular time.

> A literary genre, entering in the course of evolution, the field of a particular literary trend, will enter into a very close "blood relationship" with the form of the royal genre that is particular to that current. ("Royal Genres"121)

However, it has to be stressed that a literary genre which enters, as Opacki puts it, into a close "blood relationship" with the royal genre does not become it. This is stressed by Zgorzelski who states that: "[t]he introduction

of new themes or motifs employed in asset of texts is in itself not tantamount to the birth of a new genre" (297), and it is put thus by Opacki:

> The royal genre draws towards itself all the remaining literary genres of a given period. But this does not lead to the fusion of all literature into one genre. The distinguishing features of the various genres survive. They come from other areas of the work, from other levels of the structure which do not undergo transformation into new ones, in this way maintaining evolutionary sequence and making it possible to divide works among different genres in a given period. ("Royal Genres" 122)[23]

If genres acquire the main constitutive features of the royal genre, but at the same time retain some of their former ones, it follows that in concrete instances one must speak of a multi-generic construction.

> One can […] speak of its [the literary work's] genealogical multiplicity of form, in the sense that one can detect the presence, in the work, of several earlier consolidated genre forms which, at a given stage of development, lost their clear generic identification, an identification which was strictly limited by the borders of the literary trend in which the form establishes itself. (Opacki, "Royal Genres" 124)

It should be stressed that this multiplicity does not, however, weaken the unity of a genre. Such a multi-generic form is: "[h]eterogeneous in form, but generically homogeneous, because generic homogeneity is measured by the current stage of literary development and the development of the genre itself" (Opacki, "Royal Genres" 124).

The tradition of genre mixture is very much present within the British novel since the 1980s and can be seen as one of the defining features of contemporary British fiction[24]. For example, one can find genre-mixture in

[23] Opacki provides the following example of this process: If we formulate the model (form) of a given genre in a series of letters, which symbolize the components of its structure: a b c d e f; and if the royal genre of the subsequent literary trend has, by common consent, the form: k l m n o p, among which m n o are the main constitutive features of the genre; then the earlier literary genre, entering into the literary trend, will take on these important new features, at the same time keeping part of the former ones: b c d m n o f. A new form of the genre arises which lasts while the given literary current does. The features m n o draw to themselves all the genres on this stage of evolution; the remaining features make for differences among the genres (122).

[24] This argument has been put forward by David Malcolm in a number of his publications. See, for example, *That Impossible Thing: The British Novel 1978-1992*.

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) – a highly structured novel composed of nested narratives across different time periods and genres – from 19th-century travelogue to post-apocalyptic sci-fi. Other examples could include Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger* (2009) which blends the ghost story with social realist fiction, or Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021) which mixes dystopian sci-fi with magic realism. I do not aim to present a comprehensive list here; however, one can certainly argue that genre-mixture is very much present in some of the major works of contemporary British literature and one of its defining features[25].

A question arises whether the process of genre mixing can be observed only within mainstream literature or whether it applies to popular fiction as well. I would like to argue that genre syncretism can also be found in popular, non-mainstream fiction such as crime fiction. Specifically, I wish to show the process of genre-mixing in the works of Ian Rankin, whose fiction not only combines elements of various crime fiction sub-genres, but is also penetrated by the motifs, themes and conventions of the Gothic novel and the psychological-social novel, thus providing support for arguments concerning the historical process relating to genre which is sketched out by Opacki and other scholars.

What is crime fiction?

One of the major issues that one faces when discussing crime fiction is terminology. Some scholars use the term "detective fiction" to describe the whole genre (especially earlier critics e.g. Sayers, Haycraft, Todorov); others call it "mystery fiction". However, as a reader soon discovers, there are a number of crime texts which do not feature any detective figure or even mystery (e.g. many novels by Patricia Highsmith or Ruth Rendell), but there is always a crime in one form or another. Therefore, the majority of critical studies of the genre over the past twenty years employ the term "crime fiction", with detective fiction as its sub-genre. Detective fiction is usually defined as a type of fiction that focuses on the figure of the detective and the investigation that is carried out by him:

[25] For more examples, see Malcolm, "Border Crossings" and *That Impossible Thing: The British Novel 1978-1992*, ch.4; Węgrodzka *Popular Genres and Their Uses in Fiction*.

> A type of fiction centred around the investigation of a crime that focuses attention on the method of detection by structuring the story around a mystery that appears insoluble through normal investigative methods. For this reason it is also known as mystery fiction. Detective fiction, by focusing on the method of detection, simultaneously focuses attention on the figure of the methodical detective: that is, the detective who follows a particular method. (Scaggs 144)

However, a different approach can be found in Carl D. Malmgren's *Anatomy of Murder: Mystery, Detective and Crime Fiction* (2001). Malmgren divides "murder fiction", as he calls it, into three types: "the mystery" (e.g. Agatha Christie's detective novels), "the detective story" (hard-boiled detective stories in the style of Chandler), and "crime fiction" (e.g. Patricia Highsmith's *Strangers on the Train*). The problem with this approach is that Malmgren's categories largely overlap. It is true that the plot of Christie's novels revolves around mystery, but, at the same time, the main protagonist is always a detective. Chandler's narratives often contain a mystery element and a crime element is present in all three.

It is also interesting to note here Cawelti's contribution to the study of popular literature. In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1986), Cawelti distinguishes three main categories or, as he calls them, "archetypes" of popular literature: Adventure, Mystery and Romance. According to Cawelti, in essence, all texts of popular literature can be put into one of these categories. As his study demonstrates, the classic whodunnit detective story clearly belongs to the mystery archetype, whereas the hard-boiled detective story is based on the pattern of adventure.

One can also come across the term "thriller" which is used in many different ways: sometimes it is used to describe the whole genre (e.g. Palmer), sometimes the term is used just to refer to the detective-free mystery adventure (Scaggs employs here the term "crime thriller"), or to the private-eye detective story (Todorov, Priestman). In *Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* (1998) Priestman distinguishes "the detective thriller" as a genre that features a private-eye detective, but also distinguishes two further sub-genres: "the noir thriller" and "the anti-conspiracy thriller" both of which may or may not feature professional detectives. "Thriller" is therefore a vague term that can refer to any narrative structured in order to maximize tension, suspense, and exciting action (Scaggs 148) and, as such, is useless for this discussion.

Although crime fiction is generally regarded as a distinguishable literary form, what is considered to be part of the genre is more disputable. Can Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* be classified as a crime novel for instance? After all, the story revolves around a murder, punishment and redemption – key themes of the genre. And what about Matthew Lewis's *The Monk*, Dickens's *Bleak House,* or even Shakespeare's *Macbeth*? Some critics have even traced the genre as far back as the Jewish Apocrypha's stories of Daniel defeating the Elders in the trial of Susanna or exposing the priests' theft of grain from the temple of Bel (See Wrong 42 and Sayers *The Omnibus of Crime*, Introduction 9-13). Others point to Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, which draws together all of the central characteristics of the detective story, including mystery surrounding a murder, a closed circle of suspects, and the gradual uncovering of the hidden past (see Scaggs 9-11).

However, a narrative does not belong to crime fiction simply because it tells a story that features crime. The key lies in a shift of focus, for in the crime fiction narrative it is the crime and the criminal that form the central thematic interest of the story. The story may also, but does not have to, feature a detective figure[26] or an investigation. Arguably, in *Bleak House* the investigation by Inspector Bucket[27] into the murder of a prominent attorney, Mr Tulkinghorn, is only one of the many sub-plots of the socio-political novel.[28] Lewis's *The Monk,* although a story about a villain who rapes and murders, is actually a Gothic novel and *Crime and Punishment* is essentially a psychological-social novel.

The sub-genres are problematic as well. First of all, critics distinguish a large number of different sub-genres. Genre-variants that are encompassed under the umbrella of crime fiction include such different forms as the classic detective story or the "whodunnit"[29]; the country-house mystery and the locked-room mystery (which can also be seen as sub-genres or the genre-variant of the classic detective story); the caper story; the hard-boiled

[26] When I say "detective figure," I mean not only a professional detective, but any kind of character that takes this role.

[27] One of the earliest official police detectives to appear in mainstream English fiction.

[28] Some critics consider *Bleak House* to be a novel of sensation, a term coined by Margaret Oliphant. See Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, 11 and Oliphant "Sensation Novels".

[29] "A whodunnit" or whodunit (from "Who done it?") is a term coined in the 1930s and used to describe a type of story or play about a murder in which the identity of the murderer in not revealed until the end (Oxford Dictionary).

detective story[30]; the police procedural (also referred to as the police novel, although some critics distinguish between the two, e.g. Horsley; Messent)[31]; the psycho-thriller (also called crime thriller and noir thriller); the historical crime novel; the postmodern crime novel; the spy novel[32] and the various manifestations of the thriller: political thriller, global conspiracy thriller, medical thriller, legal thriller, techno thriller, etc.[33] It is quite impossible to present a full list here.

The global phenomena of Scandinavian crime novels in recent years has resulted in the distinction of a new category of text called Nordic Noir. In 2013 "Nordic Noir" entered the Oxford English Dictionary and was defined as "a type of Scandinavian crime fiction and television drama that typically features dark storylines and bleak urban settings". However, most critics do not see it as a distinctive sub-genre, but rather a successful marketing label that is put on book covers to attract readers (see, for example, Bergman). Another label that has appeared in recent years and is crucial to this study is "Tartan Noir", which is used to describe crime fiction from Scotland. I discuss it in detail in chapter 2. The most recent addition to the ever growing list of crime fiction sub-genres is "Eco-Crime Fiction" – narratives that foreground environmental issues, ecological injustice, climate change etc., as part of the crime plot[34].

One has to stress here that the boundaries between different sub-genres are blurred, as many crime novels contain elements of different sub-genres. In fact, genre-mixture seems to be one of the prevailing features of the whole genre. Symons hints at this when he points out that "[t]he detective story pure and complex, the book that has no interest whatever except the solution of a puzzle, does not exist, and if it did exist would be unreadable" (15). Whatever terms one decides to use, there are always going to be huge overlaps among categories. Nevertheless, it is important to outline

[30] It was Dashiell Hammett who first used the term "hard-boiled", meaning "tough" or "shrewd," and it came to describe the hero of a type of fiction that developed in the United States in the interwar period (Scaggs 55).

[31] See Horsley, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fictio*n and Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook*.

[32] An interesting point for consideration is whether the spy novel is a sub-genre of crime fiction or a separate genre that evolved from crime fiction.

[33] A separate issue is constituted by true crime narratives, which are beyond the scope of this study.

[34] See Ashman, *The Routledge Handbook of Crime Fiction and Ecology* (2024) and *Crime Fiction and Ecology: From the Local to the Global* (2025).

here the terms employed in this book as this carries implications for the sense of further discussion and provides (one hopes) a much-needed clarity.

In this study I refer to crime fiction as a genre and its various manifestations as sub-genres. I see crime fiction as a higher-level category than detective fiction. In this understanding, Rankin's Rebus novels can be seen both as examples of crime fiction and detective fiction since the first includes the second. Moreover, I reserve the term "mode" for the lyric, the epic and drama. Therefore, contrary to the vast majority of crime fiction scholars, I do not talk about "the hard-boiled mode" (as for example Scaggs), but rather "the hard-boiled" or the "hard-boiled detective story" (a term used also by Cawelti). I use terms "murder mystery", "whodunnit", and "classic detective story" interchangeably to refer to one sub-genre. I prefer the, perhaps a bit more old-fashioned, term "police procedural", to "police novel", and I do not see them as separate sub-genres (see Chapter 2).

Crime fiction as a scholarly concern[35]

In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (2003) Martin Priestman writes that "[u]ntil quite recently, the words 'Cambridge Companion' and 'Crime Fiction' would have seemed mutually exclusive"(1). Recent years have seen a real boom in scholarly interest in crime fiction. The genre, which was at one point described as being "guilty pleasure" (W.H. Auden), has finally gained substantial scholarly respect, and crime fiction is now discussed and written about by academics.

Of course, critical discussion of detective fiction has been there right from the start. One of the first critical discussions of the genre is G.K. Chesterton's essay "A Defence of Detective Stories" (1901). In his essay Chesterton defended the detective story as "a perfectly legitimate form of art" and stressed that its value lies in the fact that "it is the earliest and only form of popular literature in which is expressed some sense of the poetry of modern life". By "poetry of modern life" he meant that the detective story offers an evocation of the modern city and a portrayal of contemporary

[35] This is a succinct discussion to various approaches to crime fiction. I am quite aware that whole books can be written (and indeed have been written) on the history of crime fiction criticism. This sub-chapter does no more than provide context for my discussion of Ian Rankin's work.

society. While most writers write about the past, he argued, detective fiction writers are deeply interested in the present and the world around them:

> We may dream, perhaps, that it might be possible to have another and higher romance of London, that men's souls have stranger adventures than their bodies, and that it would be harder and more exciting to hunt their virtues than to hunt their crimes. But since our great authors (with the admirable exception of Stevenson) decline to write of that thrilling mood and moment when the eyes of the great city, like the eyes of a cat, begin to flame in the dark, we must give fair credit to the popular literature which, amid a babble of pedantry and preciosity, declines to regard the present as prosaic or the common as commonplace.

Chesterton also praised detective fiction for its engagement in preservation of the rules of civilization against what he called "criminal chaos". Chesterton's image of the detective as a knight-errant was later echoed by Raymond Chandler in his influential essay "The Simple Art of Murder".

The 1920s and 1930s, which have been called "The Golden Age of Detective Fiction"[36], saw the first appearance of serious critical reflection on detective fiction as many genre enthusiasts and writers engaged themselves in writing about detective fiction. Writers such as Dorothy L. Sayers, S.S. Van Dine (penname of Willard Huntington Wright, the author of the famous "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories") and Nicholas Blake (penname of the poet C. Day Lewis), among others, wrote their own defences of detective fiction. Mostly they wanted to justify their own writing and reading preferences and to suggest that detective fiction, contrary to popular opinion, was worth reading and discussing. R. Austin Freeman, for instance, praised the detective story for its "mental gymnastics" (11) and "intellectual

[36] The Golden Age is usually understood as the period between the two world wars (See for example Symons, *Bloody Murder,* chapters 7 and 8) and often identified as starting in 1920 with the publication of Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* (Scaggs 145); however, some scholars point to different dates. For example, Haycraft dates the Golden Age from 1918 to 1930 (See *Murder for Pleasure*) and Panek suggests 1914 to 1940 (See *Watteau's Shepherds: The Detective Novel in Britain 1914-1940).* It is also worth pointing out that classic detective stories in the style of the Golden Age were still being produced after the 1940s. The term Golden Age has been criticised by some for being unduly homogeneous (see for example Shaw and Vanacker 10). Current writing influenced by the Golden Age style is often referred to as "cosy" mystery writing, as distinct from the hardboiled style.

satisfaction" (11) whereas Sayers stated that what Aristotle desired "in his heart of hearts […] was a good detective story; and it was not his fault, poor man that he lived some twenty centuries too early to revel in the Peripeties of *Trent's Last Case*[37] or the Discoveries of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*[38]. […] He had a stout appetite for the gruesome" ("Aristotle on Detective Fiction" 405). These early contributions to the discussion were mostly, but not exclusively, published as prefaces to anthologies of short stories; for example, Dorothy L. Sayer's noteworthy introductions to *The Omnibus of Crime* (1929)[39] and *The Second Omnibus of Crime* [USA 1932; UK 1931]).

In "Criticism and Theory" Heta Pyrhönen observes that one of the main interests of the early critics was the analysis of plot structure and narrative techniques. They wanted to show that what sets detective fiction apart from all other genres of literature is its narrative organization. Detective fiction adhered to the kind of cohesion that was familiar from earlier nineteenth-century realism, and thus the genre kept alive a narrative model based on plot and incident, which the critics thought was an achievement in itself (45-46).

At the same time critics agreed that detective fiction could never reach the status of serious literature. For example, Sayers stated that the detective story "does not, and by hypothesis never can, attain the loftiest level of literary achievement" (37) because although it deals with

> the most desperate effects of rage, jealousy, and revenge, it rarely touches the heights and depths of human passion. It presents us only with a *fait accompli*, and looks upon death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye. It does not show us the inner workings of the murderer's mind – it must not; for the identity of the murderer is hidden until the end of the book. The victim is shown rather as a subject for the dissecting-table than as a husband or father. (37)

The detective story is, she later adds, "part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us" (44). Marjorie Nicolson in "The Professor and the Detective"

[37] A detective novel written by E. C. Bentley and first published in 1913.

[38] *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is the third of the four crime novels by British writer Arthur Conan Doyle featuring the detective Sherlock Holmes.

[39] This is the title of the American edition and one that is usually cited by scholars. The book was first published a year earlier in the United Kingdom under the title *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror*.

(1929) also discussed detective fiction as the literature of escape; however, she thought it was an escape not from life, but rather from modernist literature of her time:

> We have revolted from an excessive subjectivity to welcome objectivity; from long-drawn-out dissections of emotion to straightforward appeal to intellect; from reiterated emphasis upon men and women as victims either of circumstances or of their glands to a suggestion that men and women may consciously plot and consciously plan; from the "stream of consciousness" which threatens to engulf us in its Lethean monotony to analyses of purpose, controlled and directed by a thinking mind; from formlessness to form; from the sophomoric to the mature; most of all, from a smart and easy pessimism which interprets men and the universe in terms of unmoral purposelessness to a belief in a universe governed by cause and effect. All this we find in a detective story. (113-114)[40]

Early criticism also focused on the puzzle-like nature of the typical whodunnit and explored the notion that the genre of detective fiction is essentially a kind of intellectual game played with the reader. The game should have clearly defined rules, which are known both to the reader and the writer. The most famous set of rules was laid down by S.S. Van Dine in "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" (1928). The first rule stated that: "The reader must have equal opportunity with the detective for solving the mystery. All clues must be plainly stated and described" (189). Other rules introduced various limitations such as that there must be a corpse, a detective and only one culprit who "must turn out to be a person who has played a more or less prominent part in the story" (190-191). The rules were repeated in a concise form by Ronald Knox (See "A Detective Story Decalogue")[41]. Interestingly, all of the rules were eventually broken and most of them by the "Queen of Crime" herself – Agatha Christie[42].

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[40] The view that detective fiction flourished in the early 20th century as a reaction against modernist literature was taken up later by other scholars including Michael Holquist who observed that: "[t]he same people who spent their days reading Joyce were reading Agatha Christie at night" (147). See: "Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction".

[41] Knox's Decalogue formed the basis for the oath of the Detection Club that he set up. The members included Christie, Sayers and Chesterton.

[42] The most well-known example is *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* where the narrator turns out to be the culprit. The publication of the novel caused a great hue and cry among the

In 1941 Howard Haycraft, a publishing executive, editor and an enthusiastic reader of detective fiction, published *Murder for Pleasure: The Life and Times of the Detective Story*, the first serious book of criticism of the genre. Haycraft introduced the term "Golden Age of Detective Fiction" and singled out certain authors, among them Christie and Sayers, as masters of the "classic detective story". Haycraft also edited the first anthology of critical essays, *The Art of the Mystery Story*: *A Collection of Critical Essays* (1946) which contained many of the early surveys of the subject, including contributions by G.K. Chesterton, Ronald Knox, Dorothy L. Sayers and Raymond Chandler.

Chandler's article "The Simple Art of Murder", which first appeared in 1944 in the *Atlantic Monthly*, is especially worthy of notice[43]. Chandler attacked the writers of Golden Age tradition accusing them of lack of verisimilitude and not being true to the "real world" (231). He stated that "there are no dull subjects, only dull minds", (232) and called for bigger realism in the detective story and "lively characters, sharp dialogues, a sense of pace and an acute use of observed detail" (225). He claimed that writers of detective stories are hopelessly outdated, "living psychologically in the age of hoop skirt" (225) and their stories are "too contrived, and too little aware of what goes on in the real world" (231). While criticising British writers such as Christie and Sayers at the same time Chandler praised a fellow American writer Dashiell Hammett for trying to write "realistic mystery fiction" (233) and giving murder "back to the kind of people that commit it for a reason, not just to provide a corpse" (234).

Chandler also disagreed with Sayer's statement that the detective story will never attain the loftiest levels of literary achievement as it is merely the literature of escape saying that: "I do not know what the loftiest level of literary achievement is: neither did Aeschylus or Shakespeare; neither does Miss Sayers" (231) and he added that:

> [s]ome very dull books have been written about God, and some very fine ones about how to make a living and stay fairly honest. It is always a matter of who writes the stuff, and what he has in him to write it with. [...] *all* reading for pleasure is escape, whether it be Greek, mathematics, astronomy,

readers as many felt cheated by the author. Nevertheless, today it is considered one of the best novels written by Christie and one that had a big influence on the whole genre.

[43] I quote here from the article re-printed in Haycraft's anthology which is a revised version of the essay that appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

> Benedetto Croce, or *The Diary of the Forgotten Man*. To say otherwise is to be an intellectual snob. (231-232)

After World War II critical interest in detective fiction subsided, probably due to the decline of both the British whodunnit and the American hard-boiled detective story (Pyrhönen 46). Edmund Wilson who regarded the genre as "sub-literary", either an addiction or a harmless vice on a par with smoking and crossword puzzles[44], argued in "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?" (1944) and "Who Cares Who Killed Roger Ackroyd?" (1945) that detective stories are dull, badly written and not imaginative. He criticised the likes of Christie, Sayers and Hammett for the lack of characterisation and no human interest. As for the popularity of the detective story, Wilson sought the causes of it in an all-pervasive feeling of guilt and the fear of impending disaster which pervaded society in the years between the two world wars. Detective fiction offered readers a world where guilt is assigned to a particular individual and thus the order is restored ("Why Do People Read Detective Stories?").

W.H. Auden, on the other hand, defended the traditional whodunnit against the claims of "art" and the hard-boiled mode in "The Guilty Vicarage" (1948) stating that detective fiction should be treated as "escape literature". According to Auden, the reader of detective fiction is just like Kafka's hero K. who knows that he is guilty, but does not know why:

> The fantasy, then, which the detective story addict indulges is the fantasy of being restored to the Garden of Eden, to a state of innocence, where he may know love as love and not as the law. The driving force behind this daydream is the feeling of guilt, the cause of which is unknown to the dreamer. The fantasy of escape is the same, whether one explains the guilt in Christian, Freudian, or any other terms. (24)

Thus, for Auden detective novels replay the Christian drama of guilt, confession, and atonement and become a substitute for religious patterns of certainty (a view shared by Nicholas Blake)[45].

As Pyrhönen points out the new wave of interest in detective fiction criticism came in the 1960s with the arrival of structuralism:

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[44] See "Why Do People Read Detective Stories?"

[45] See introduction to the 2nd English edition of Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure*.

> Although the structuralists essentially covered the same ground as the early critics, their motivation for studying the genre was different. […] The Russian formalists claimed that such unsophisticated narratives as myths and folktales were worthy of study because their simplicity enabled scholars to examine the general laws by which all narratives work. (46)

The structuralists regarded popular narratives as the modern counterparts of these forms, and thus detective fiction was treated as a prototype for narrativity, a testing ground for a methodology that could then be applied to other texts (Pyrhönen 46).

An important contribution from this time is Todorov's critical essay entitled "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (1977) in which he distinguishes three different types of detective story: the whodunnit, the thriller and the suspense novel as well as mentioning the possibility of the rise of new genres. Todorov claims that what distinguishes detective fiction is temporal displacement: the genre omits narrating the moment of committing the crime; instead, this act is made to appear gradually only after its consequences, such as a body, have been revealed. Hence, temporal displacement creates two separate stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. As he points out:

> [T]hese definitions concern not only the two stories in detective fiction, but also two aspects of every literary work which the Russian Formaliasts isolated forty years ago. They distinguished […] the fable (story) from the subject (plot)[46] of the narrative: the story is what has happened in life, the plot is the way author presents it to us. (228)

Todorov goes on to argue that story and plot are combined differently in different sub-genres. In the whodunnit the story of the crime belongs to the past and is absent from the present. The story of the investigation happens in the present but is not as significant as the murder mystery. In contrast, the thriller fuses the two stories together; the narrative coincides with the action. In the thriller it is the story of the investigation that is given the main focus. Finally, the suspense novel combines the properties of the other two forms. It keeps the mystery of the whodunnit and also the two

[46] Translation of the Russian Formalist terms f*abula* and *sjužet*.

stories, that of the past and that of the present; but it refuses to reduce the second to a simple detection of the truth (229-232).

As we can see from the examples mentioned above, early studies were focused mainly on detective or mystery fiction. However, in 1972 Julian Symons published a major study *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel: A History* which made a large contribution to the broadening of the critical discussion. Symons defined the features of crime novel and helped to establish it as a distinctive genre separate from the detective novel.

Despite all the critical interest presented above, one can safely say that: until 1980s crime fiction has been an *enfant terrible* of literary studies. Although crime fiction was read and written about, it was always with a certain apologetic manner and the writers were mostly defending their reading choices. However, in 1983 Glenn W. Most and William W. Stowe stated in the introduction to *The Poetics of Murder* that:

> The criticism of detective fiction has never been healthier or more wide ranging than it is today. Taking advantage of their popularity, their relative simplicity, and their clear position as a model for many other kinds of narrative, contemporary literary critics and theorists have used detective novels as test cases and examples for all sorts of literary speculation, from investigation of narrative techniques to discussions of the social function of literature, its psychological effects, and the philosophical systems it assumes or promotes. These novels have come to be seen as contemporary folktales, cultural documents *par excellence*, and prime illustrations of mental and social processes (xii).

One of the critical interests pursued by the scholars at this time (1980s) was the intersection between ideology and crime fiction. As Pyrhönen points out critics "worked from the assumption that its [genre's] function was to reproduce values and subject positions maintaining socio-cultural stability" (47). For example, John G. Cawelti in his influential work *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (1986) argued that detective fiction enables readers to engage in "moral fantasies" (16). Each work of art, he says, contains both "mimetic" and "formulaic" elements: "The mimetic element in literature confronts us with the world as we know it, while the formulaic element reflects the construction of an ideal world without the disorder, the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the limitations of the world of our experience" (13). In short,

according to Cawelti reality is ambiguous and formless and therefore the mimetic elements in the text depict the chaos of everyday life. In contrast, the formulaic elements in the text are not true to life, but offer the consolation of structure, pattern and form. Because detective fiction is highly formulaic, he argues, it offers the readers a sense of control and thus allows them to experience a wide range of emotions without the insecurity that would accompany such emotions in reality. Thus, reading detective fiction may help to process difficult psychological or sociological issues (13-16).

On the other hand, Stephen Knight in *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1980) criticised the ideology underlying the genre. Knight's study forms an important introduction to the study of the sociology of detective fiction. In the introduction Knight argues that the commercial success of a text should not be a reason for its dismissal by literary critics:

> Literary criticism has shied away from commercial success as a ground for treating a book seriously. Literary critical skills have not been used to study the interests and needs of mass society: they have been turned inwards in a fully ideological way to gratify and ratify the taste – and needs too – of the highly educated minority who validate their position by displaying a grasp of complicated cultural artefacts. In universities in particular it is striking that humanities department study what interests them while other areas – medicine, engineering, economics, political science, anthropology, sociology – study the workings and the needs of the society at large. A good literary critic should be able to say why a mass-seller works, and how it works. (2)

Knight further argues that if literary criticism is to avoid being merely "self-gratifying connoisseurship", (6) it has to consider the dynamic social force of the texts. According to Knight major examples of crime fiction not only create an idea about controlling crime, but "both realise and validate a whole view of the world, one shared by the people who become the central audience to buy, read and find comfort in a particular variety of crime fiction" (2). Hence, by focusing both on the form and content a literary critic can establish "the ideological nature and function of crime fiction" (3).

By analysing the key crime fiction texts (including *The Newgate Calendar*, Poe's Dupin stories, Sherlock Holmes stories, novels by Christie, Chandler, McBain and others), and drawing on the works of Marx, Auerbach and Barthes (among others), Knight shows that each work presents the world in a particular, ideological way. The worldview is embedded in the

textual language, the presentation of incidents, characters and motives as well as the overall structure of the text. For example, one of the main ideological features of the stories found in *The Newgate Calendar* "is the basic notion, and hope, that the all-pervasive, inescapable Christian reality provides a protection against crime" (12) whereas, for instance, the police novels by Ed McBain create an illusion of security enabling the readers "to feel that a human protective quality is still present among the oppressive modern reality of the mechanical world of commodities" (192).

The discussion of the ideology of crime fiction was continued by Dennis Porter in *The Pursuit of Crime*: *Art and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (1981) and D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police* (1988). All three critics claimed that because crime fiction disseminates ideas about crime and policing it belongs to the discursive practices sustaining Western capitalist societies. By portraying the law and its enforcement as natural and self-evident, the genre helps to promote the idea that both crime and the law are outside any specific social contexts and concrete historical developments. Moreover, crime fiction reproduces moral values that the society is already familiar with and does not contest habitual, everyday standards of perception and thinking (Pyrhönen 48).

As Pyrhönen observes the view of crime fiction (Pyrhönen uses the term "detective fiction") as a straightforward reflection of dominant ideology has later been contested because it is "based on the untenable assumption that detective fiction is aligned with conservative ideology, while serious literature is relatively autonomous in relation to ideology" (48).

Since the 1980s various methodologies have been applied to the study of crime fiction. For example, Sally Munt's *Murder by the Book? Feminism and the Crime Novel* (1994) is an example of an interesting application of feminist and psychoanalytic theory to crime fiction written by women. Susan Rowland in *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell: British Women Writers in Detective and Crime Fiction* (2001) examined the works of major women writers in the context of critical debates on gender, colonialism, psychoanalysis, and feminism. Another work worth mentioning here is Gill Plain's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (2001). This excellent study provides an examination of the construction of gender, sexuality, and the body in crime fiction. Its critical focus on corporeality considers both the corpse-as-signifier and the body of the detective as the site of various socio-cultural conflicts.

The publication of various collections of critical essays, such as *The Contemporary American Crime Novel: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Class* (2000), *The Post-Colonial Detective* (2001), or *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story* (2005) helped to enrich the discussion by the investigations into the issues of race, ethnicity, class and post-colonialism in detective and crime fiction.

In recent years, several major studies of crime fiction have been published. The historical and genealogical dimensions of the genre remain of interest to scholars who produce new studies tracing the history of the formation of the genre and outline its various sub-genres. Tony Hilfer's *The Crime Novel: A Deviant Genre* (1990) was the first comprehensive account of the forms, conventions, themes, and key authors of crime fiction. Martin Priestman in *Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* (1998) offers a short and concise history of the genre while Stephen Knight in *Crime Fiction 1800-2000. Death, Diversity, Detection* (2004; 2010) provides a clear outline of the history, practices and conventions of the genre including very recent developments. Similarly, John Scaggs in *Crime Fiction* (2005) presents a concise history of crime fiction and explores its key sub-genres. Another study well-worthy of notice is Maurizio Ascari's innovative *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (2007) which uses a comparative approach to take a fresh look at the evolution of crime fiction and puts emphasis on market forces, translation, and adaptation. All of the studies mentioned above have formed a critical background for this study.

At the time of writing, crime fiction studies are characterised by critical diversity and scholars show an interest in all forms of narrative. Crime fiction criticism is flourishing and a major study *A Companion to Crime Fiction* (2010) published by Blackwell and edited by two of the most distinguished crime fiction scholars, Lee Horsley and Charles Rzepka, is the best example of that. One of the critical approaches which foregrounds this study is the reading of crime fiction in the context of national literature. This approach challenges the older Anglo-American opposition to the genre and looks at crime fiction as a global phenomenon exploring the specificity, difference, and contextual significance of crime narratives in different places across time. This study adopts this approach and looks at Rankin's Rebus novels not only as crime novels, but also Scottish novels.

CHAPTER TWO

The Matter of Crime

Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness.

Raymond Chandler, "Simple Art of Murder"

The hard-boiled detective story[47]

Within contemporary crime fiction, Ian Rankin's Rebus series occupies a distinctive position. While the novels clearly conform to the conventions of detective fiction – each centered on a murder and its resolution – they depart from the classical models of Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie, drawing instead on the thematic concerns and stylistic features of the hard-boiled tradition.

The emergence of the hard-boiled detective story in America of the 1920s and the 1930s can be related to the socio-economic circumstances of the time: Prohibition, growing evidence of illicit connections between crime, business and politics in American cities as well as the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed (Horsley, "American Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction, 1920s – 1940s"). As Messent puts it: "The hard-boiled crime novel […] was a product of its America: a form more appropriate than the classical model to a society that seemed out of joint; when anxieties about crime, capitalism, and the conditions of urban life were increasingly and urgently pressing" (*The Crime Fiction Handbook* 35). And Lee Horsley points out that:

[47] Parts of this chapter have been published before, see: "Tartan Noir: Crime, Scotland and Genre". Elias and Sienkiewicz-Charlish 65-80.

> In the "hard-boiled" and "noir" fiction of this period, the anxious sense of fatality is usually attached to a pessimistic conviction that economic and socio-political circumstances will deprive people of control over their lives by destroying their hopes and by creating in them the weakness of character that turn them into transgressors or mark them out as victims. ("American Hard--Boiled Crime Fiction, 1920s–1940s")

The most iconic figure to emerge in the crime stories of that period is the hard-boiled investigator – a cynical, tough and alienated hero. Although John Daly's Race Williams is generally acknowledged to be the first hard-boiled detective hero, it was Dashiell Hammett who set the foundation for the new sub-genre: a threatening and alienating urban setting, frequent violence, and fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language "of the streets" (Scaggs 55-56). In *Red Harvest* Hammett described his detective hero, Continental Op, as a "hard-boiled, pig-headed guy" (85) and thus "hard-boiled" came to describe the type of hero that appeared in other detective stories produced at this time (Scaggs 55). Other famous private investigators of the time include Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe and Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer. Daly, Hammett and Chandler all began their careers by writing short stories for the *Black Mask* and other pulp magazines[48].

Of course, there is one major difference between the works of such authors as Raymond Chandler or Dashiell Hammett and that of Ian Rankin: the former feature private investigators (PI's) whereas Rankin uses a police officer as his hero. Another difference is the use of the third-person narration rather than the first-person narration which is commonly associated with the sub-genre (although it was not used by all of the hard-boiled writers, e.g. much of Hammett's work is written with a third-person narrator). Despite these significant differences, all the Rebus novels contain many signs which point to the hard-boiled mode. This becomes clear when one analyses the pattern of action, the presentation of characters, and the setting, which all shape the narrative.

[48] "The pulps," as they were pejoratively termed because of the cheap paper on which they were printed, were inexpensive, weekly publications with lurid and garish covers intended to catch the attention of readers who were used to reading sensational stories typical of the "dime novel". In Britain there is a similar relationship between the earlier "penny dreadfuls" and "shilling shockers" and magazines such as *The Strand Magazine* in which Sherlock Holmes appeared for the first time in 1891. (Scaggs 56)

The pattern of action

To begin with, the pattern of action of the hard-boiled detective story differs considerably from that of the classic detective story or a whodunnit. As Cawelti points out, there are two significant differences:

> the subordination of the drama of solution to the detective's quest for the discovery and accomplishment of justice; and the substitution of the pattern of intimidation and temptation of the hero for the elaborate development in the classical story of what Northrop Frye calls "the wavering finger of suspicion" passing across a series of potential suspects. (142)

In other words, whereas the classic detective story focuses on the puzzle element i.e. who committed the crime and why, the hard-boiled detective story focuses on the adventures of the detective and his struggles to bring justice. Thus, the first type is based on the pattern of mystery (hence classic detective stories are often referred to as "murder mysteries"), and the second one is based on the pattern of heroic adventure (Cawelti 142). In fact, most critics agree that the hard-boiled detective story developed out of the Western Adventure story and the figure of the detective developed from that of a lonely cowboy who is called into town to take care of criminals[49]. In *Delightful Murder: A Social History of the Crime Story* Ernst Mandel points out that:

> Hard-boiled fiction translated the romanticism of the Western into a modern urban setting, and this movement from the Western frontier to a hostile urban environment was accompanied by an abrupt shift from the artificial gentility of the classical detective story to the creation of a fictional world of social corruption and "real" crime. (qtd. in Scaggs, 57)

The word "real" is crucial here. As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, in his influential essay "The Simple Art of Murder", Raymond Chandler criticised the English "Golden Age" detective story for its lack of verisimilitude. Chandler's statements laid foundation for the understanding of the genre and for a long time remained indisputable. Although recently his

[49] See for example Scaggs 56-57, 64-70; Priestman, *Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* 52; and Knight, *Crime Fiction 1800-2000* (2004) 111.

arguments have been undergoing revision[50], there is no denying the fact that in comparison to its classic counterpart the hard-boiled detective story is attempting to be more "realistic" by focusing on urban crime and featuring more credible characters who spoke "the language of the streets".

One has to note that, despite the shift of focus from the puzzle to the detective, a whodunnit-like puzzle is generally still present in the hard-boiled detective stories although the detective comes across them in the course of following up some private case for the client (Priestman, *Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* 51).

All the Rebus novels to a lesser or greater extent contain the puzzle element. It might be in the style of the classic detective story i.e. who done it?, but equally the story might revolve around a different question: why did they do it? For example, in *A Question of Blood* two teenagers are killed by an ex-Army loner who then turns the gun on himself. As Rebus puts it, there is no mystery except for the why (1). Despite the fact that the puzzle element is present in all of the novels, the focus is on the figure of the detective(s)[51] and his adventures. In that respect, Rankin follows the tradition of the American hard-boiled mode rather than that of the classic detective story.

Both classic and hard-boiled detective novels essentially follow the same narrative pattern: the novel opens with the introduction of the detective and the presentation of a crime; investigation follows, and the story concludes with the solution and apprehension of the criminal (Cawelti 142). In the classic detective story the detective is often (but not always!) first presented in his bachelor pad (e.g. Sherlock Holmes in 221b Baker Street) whereas in the hard-boiled detective story we typically find him in a shabby office on the outskirts of town (e.g. Sam Spade in *Maltese Falcon*).

Rankin introduces some variations to the narrative pattern mentioned above. First of all, he tries to avoid using clichéd openings and chooses rather to show the detective at the crime scene, already in the midst of the police investigation (e.g. *Strip Jack, Let It Bleed*, *Black and Blue*, *The Falls*)[52], or gives the reader an insight into the mind of the villain (e.g. *Knots and Crosses*, *Tooth and Nail, The Black Book, Mortal Causes*). Sometimes the novels open with

[50] See especially Ogdon, "Hard-boiled Ideology," but also Pepper, "The 'Hard-boiled' Genre" and Knight *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (2004), ch. 5.

[51] In later novels of the series the cast of main characters grows to include first DS Siobhan Clarke and then DI Malcolm Fox.

[52] This is typical of the police procedural.

a description of the crime or give us the sense that a crime is just about to be committed, like in the opening scene of *Hide and Seek*:

> 'Hide!'
> He was shrieking now, frantic, his face drained of all colour. She was at the top of the stairs and he stumbled towards her, grabbing her by the arms, propelling her downstairs with unfocused force, so that she feared they would both fall. She cried out.
> 'Ronnie! Hide from who?'
> 'Hide!' he shrieked again. 'Hide! They're coming! They're coming!' (1)

Moreover, although the novels usually reach a conclusion, in the sense that the crime puzzle has been solved, the criminal is not necessarily apprehended (e.g. *Hide and Seek*, *Black and Blue*). Moreover, sometimes, like in *The Hanging Garden*, the mystery also remains unsolved. In the novel Rebus is investigating a suspected war criminal, a wealthy, retired scholar Joseph Lintz who lives quite happily in Edinburgh's Heriot Row. The detective is supposed to find out if Lintz is in fact Josef Linzstek, a former junior SS officer implicated in a massacre of French civilians on 1 June 1944[53] who, with the connivance of Allied governments, escaped justice after the Second World War via the "Ratline"[54] and was given a new identity in Britain. However, Rebus does not succeed in uncovering the truth.

Despite the few alterations mentioned above the pattern of action found in the Rebus novels is in many ways what one expects to find in the conventional hard-boiled detective story. The investigation in the hard-boiled detective novel is usually not only about identifying the culprit, but also about making some kind of personal choice or action (Cawelti 142). For example, the detective might be given a deceptive mission, and then, consequently, the investigation becomes not simply a matter of determining who the guilty person is, but of defining his own moral position (Cawelti 146). As Cawelti argues:

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[53] The story is based on the real events that took place in a French town called Oradour-sur-Glane in June 1944.

[54] Ratlines were a system of escape routes for Nazis and other fascists fleeing Europe at the end of World War II. These escape routes mainly led to South America, particularly Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, and Bolivia. Other destinations included the United States, Great Britain, Canada and the Middle East (Phayer 173).

> While the classic detective's investigation passes over a variety of possible suspects until it lights at last on the least-likely person, his hard-boiled counterpart becomes emotionally involved in a complex process of changing implications. [...] the initial mission turns out to be a smoke screen for another [...]; the supposed victim turns out to be a villain; the lover ends up as a murderess and the faithful friend as a rotten betrayer; the police and the district attorney and often even the client keep trying to halt the investigation; and all the seemingly respectable and successful people turn out to be members of the gang. (146)

One can find this pattern of investigation in Rankin's novels. In *Knots and Crosses* Rebus is moved to a case involving abductions of young girls only to find out that all the murders are linked to him, as the murderer turns out to be his former colleague and friend whose final victim is going to be Rebus's daughter. In *Resurrection Men* Rebus is asked to go undercover and investigate fellow police officers, but in fact, as it turns out later, he is under investigation too. Sometimes one investigation helps to solve another case from the past, as in the short story "In the Frame" where Rebus has to solve the mystery of a blackmailer's letters and by coincidence discovers the evidence that helps to close an old case.

Moreover, in the Rebus novels the plot is often immensely complex – this is especially evident in the later novels of the series (e.g. *Black and Blue, Dead Souls, Set in Darkness, Fleshmarket Close*). This is because Rebus is often involved in a few investigations at the same time. Sometimes they turn out to be linked with one another, but often they remain unconnected, like in the novella "Death is Not the End" in which Rebus conducts two unrelated investigations at the same time. Similarly, in *Black and Blue* the plot involves four different investigations. All of them overlap, but do not prove to be all connected. Such a "network of interrelated plots" is a typical characteristic of the hard-boiled detective novel (Priestman, *Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* 51) but also makes Rankin's fiction more mimetic as in real life this is how police officers work. Moreover, in the later novels of the series the plots become more complex as the number of characters grows. Whereas the earlier novels focused primarily on Rebus and his struggles to bring justice, later novels feature a bigger group of police officers who often work together on one case (but following different lines of investigation) or work separately on different cases (which may or may not turned out to be linked). In addition, one has to point out that in the later novels of the series we follow

not only Rebus's adventures, but also Siobhain's. For example, in *The Falls* she plays as big a role as Rebus. They conduct their separate investigations and are rarely work together. Rankin acknowledged that himself by saying that "*The Falls* is as much Siobhan's book as Rebus's" (*The Falls*, Introduction xiii). This puts Rankin's fiction not only in the tradition of hard-boiled writing but also links it with the police procedural.

Characters

The Rebus novels feature some stock characters of hard-boiled detective fiction. First of all, his Edinburgh-based police detective, DI John Rebus[55], owes a lot to the clichés of an alienated private investigator. He is a lonely and obsessive individual, drinks and smokes a lot, has trouble sustaining relationships and often faces violence. In the first novel of the series, *Knots and Crosses,* Rebus is introduced as a loner, cut off from his brother, ex-wife and daughter, and very much a failure; at least according to social conventions: "Fifteen years [on the force], and all he had to show were an amount of self-pity and a busted marriage with an innocent daughter hanging between them. It was more disgusting than sad" (5).

Rebus's life may look like a failure, but it is a form of rejection of the ordinary concepts of success. This is made clear when Rebus is compared to his brother who is a stage hypnotist:

> [M]eantime Michael was happily married with two kids and a larger house than Rebus could ever afford. He headlined at hotels, clubs, and even theatres as far away as Newcastle and Wick. Occasionally he would make six-hundred quid from a single show. Outrageous. He drove an expensive car, wore good clothes, and would never have been caught dead standing in the pissing graveyard in Fife on the dullest April day for many a year. No, Michael was too clever for that. And too stupid. (5)

However, it is not only in his personal life that the detective is alienated, also at work he is not "one of the team", but an outsider:

[55] Rebus first appeared in *Knots and Crosses* in the rank of detective sergeant. Sometime between the first and second novel he has been promoted to detective inspector, which is his only promotion in the series. After retiring at the end of *Exit Music*, Rebus briefly re-enters the police force in *Saints of the Shadow Bible*, but he has to accept demotion to detective sergeant.

> He had always been one of the top men while he had been in the Army. He had been a Para. He had trained for the SAS and came out top of his class. He had been chosen for a crack Special Assignments group. He had his medal and his commendations. It had been a good time, and yet it had been the worst of times, too, a time of stress and deprivation, of deceit and brutality. And when he had left, the police were reluctant to take him. He understood now that it was something to do with the pressure applied by the Army to get him the job he wanted. Some people resented that, and they had thrown down banana skins ever since for him to slide on. (25)

The passage quoted above shows Rebus as isolated from his police colleagues and depicts a characteristic feature of the hard-boiled detective: he does not conform to the rules but has his own sense of what is moral and just. Rebus is an anti-authoritarian and his tendency for insubordination is a constant threat to his job security. He is repeatedly suspended from duty and in *Black and Blue,* for example, he is moved to another police station (Craigmillar) as a form of punishment:

> It was Edinburgh's hardest posting; a stint of duty lasted two years max, no one could function longer than that. Craigmillar was about as tough an area as you could find in Scotland's capital city, and the station fully merited its nickname – Fort Apache, the Bronx. It lay up a cul-de-sac behind a row of shops, a low-built dour-faced building with even dourer-faced tenements behind. Being up an alley meant a mob could cut it off from civilisation with ease, and the place had been under siege numerous times. Yes, Craigmillar was a choice posting. Rebus knew why he was there. He'd upset some people, people who mattered. (6)

In *Fleshmarket Close* he does not even have his own desk – a clear message from his superiors that they would rather see him go. The novel opens with Rebus saying "I'm not supposed to be here" – a sentence which summarizes his position in the force (1).

Because the detective is an individual rather than a team player, he does not have many friends, but that is mainly because he does not seek them. In *Black and Blue* Jack Morton says that:

> He'd seen them going out together, reminiscing about cases and characters, haunts and high points. He should have known better. He might have changed – become a "yes man", a pencil-pusher, a careerist – but John was the same as

> always...only worse. Time has seasoned his cynicism. He wasn't a terrier now: he was a fighting dog with locking jaws. You just knew that no matter how bloody he got, how much pain there was behind the eyes, the grip was there to the death. (373)

This is what one expects from this type of character; however, it is also a typical representation of the police officer in contemporary British crime fiction in general. As Ian Bell observes in "'He Do the Police in Different Voices': Representation of the Police in Contemporary British Crime Fiction", the modern representation of the police officer shows him as an outcast, neither integrated with the police force nor society in general. Such a detective is beset by uncertainties, often driven by conflicting needs and desires. Ironically, exactly those features make him the best person to deal professionally with people from all parts of society and, hence, solve crime and bring its perpetrators to justice (184). Indeed, Rebus fits the picture. Plain argues that:

> Just like Philip Marlowe, Rebus must plough a lone furrow in search of a truth nobody wants him to uncover. [...] He is isolated from his police colleagues by a refusal of the pragmatic compromise. He is similarly isolated in private, as most of his personal relationships have been destroyed by his obsessive commitment to work. In neither his home nor his work life can he be described as a 'family' man. (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 37)

Moreover, the hard-boiled detective is a "tough guy" who often faces violence. As Cawelti puts it, "he can dish it out and he can take it" (149). Hence, "the beating of the hero" is a staple element of the plot of the hard-boiled detective story. Rebus regularly faces violence. For example, in *Knots and Crosses* he gets shot (217), in *The Black Book* he is attacked in front of his house and nearly run over by a car (278), in *Black and Blue* he is imprisoned and receives a severe beating and torture (437-444), and in *The Resurrection Men* three other police officers try to kill him (chapter 32). The function of this convention in the hard-boiled detective fiction is very important – the beating of the detective symbolizes the toughness of the hero. In addition, as Plain argues, this toughness is "encoded more in his capacity to endure than in his ability to fight back – it illustrates the strength of his convictions, proving that he is not a man who can be persuaded from the path of righteousness" (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 34; see also Cawelti 143).

Additionally, throughout the series, Rebus's toughness is implied by his army background and depicted in the descriptions of his past life in the army, especially the special SAS training that he has gone through.

Yet it is not only physical toughness which is a staple character feature of the hard-boiled detective's character; he is also characterised by tough talk and wisecracks. For example, in *The Black Book* Rebus repeatedly confronts a fellow Detective Inspector, Alistair Flower:

> 'So', Flower said, 'you lose a DS to a blow on the napper, and a DC to a gas explosion. What's for an encore?' Rebus saw that they had an audience. Half the station had been waiting for a confrontation between the two inspectors. Now more detectives than usual seemed interested in the filing cabinets near Rebus's desk.
> 'It's easier if you do a handstand,' commented Rebus.
> 'What is?'
> 'Talking out of your arse'. (219)

When Flower says, "Rebus I thought your kind went out with the dinosaurs" the detective's answer is typical, "Aye, but only because they turned *you* down when you asked them" (220).

In *Black and Blue* the ability to put down people that he has no respect for is depicted when Rebus encounters the oil tycoon "Major" Weir:

> 'Can I ask you something, Major? Why did you name your oilfield after an oatcake?'
>
> Weir's face reddened with sudden rage. 'It's short for Bannockburn!'
>
> Rebus nodded. 'Did we win that one?'
>
> 'Don't you know your history, laddie?' Rebus shrugged. 'I swear, sometimes I despair.
>
> You're a Scot.'
>
> 'So?'
>
> 'So your past is important! You need to know it so you can learn.'
>
> 'Learn what, sir?'
>
> Weir sighed. 'To borrow a phrase from a poet – a Scots poet, he was talking about words – that we Scots are 'creatures tamed by cruelty'[56]. Do you see?'

[56] Ron Butlin, "Creatures Tamed by Cruelty" from *Creatures Tamed by Cruelty: Poems in English and Scots and Translations* (1979).

> 'I think I'm having trouble focusing'.
>
> Weir frowned. 'Do you drink?'
>
> 'Teetotal is my middle name.' The Major grunted his satisfaction. 'Trouble is', Rebus went on, 'My first name's Not-at-all'. (209-210)

This dialogue illustrates Rebus's independence, his lack of respect for authority, and his fearlessness. As Plain points out, Rebus "refuses to be cowed by the patriarch's power, and deploys the tough-guy's archetypal weapon, the wise-crack to bring arrogant Weir down to size" (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 38). Lack of respect for authority is one of the staple characteristics of Rebus and there are numerous examples in the novels where the language he uses depicts this. This character feature is something acknowledged by his superiors. As the Chief Constable comments:

> 'It's a good act,' […] 'but then you've spent years perfecting it, haven't you?'
>
> 'What act is that, sir?'
>
> 'The wisecracks; that hint of insubordination. Your way of coping with a situation until you've had a chance to digest it.' (*Resurrection Men* 89)

Rebus also often retorts to verbal abuse and physical violence when interrogating witnesses or suspects:

> Rebus grabbed him by the neck and brought his head down against the dashboard, right between where both feet were still resting.
>
> 'Jesus Christ!' The boy checked for blood on his forehead. There was none. Rebus was pleased with himself: maximum shock, minimum visible damage. 'You can't–'
>
> 'I can do anything I like, son, and that includes tipping you over the edge of the highest point in the city. Now tell me about Ronnie.' (*Hide and Seek* 132)

One can definitely see the shadow of Philip Marlowe in these scenes. Violence is a regular feature of the landscape in hard-boiled detective fiction and an indispensable tool used by the hard-boiled detective in fighting crime. This feature differentiates him from his classic counterpart who uses merely the power of his brain, and not muscles, to solve mysteries.

Furthermore, the hard-boiled detective is emotionally involved in the cases that he investigates. Cawelti argues this forcefully: "Since he becomes emotionally and morally committed to some of the persons involved [...] the hard-boiled detective remains unfulfilled until he has taken a personal moral stance towards the criminal" (143). Accordingly, Rebus always becomes emotionally involved in a case; it becomes personal to him. In *Black and Blue,* we learn that Rebus is haunted by the screams of the victims and that "One night he'd heard Angie Riddell and it had pierced his heart, because he'd known her, liked her. In that instant it became personal for him. He couldn't not be interested in Johnny Bible" (51-52), and later he tells Jack Morton how the fact that he had known one of the victims changed his attitude to the case:

> I knew her, Jack. I mean, I'd met her a couple of times. First time, it was business, I was pulling her in. But then I came down here looking for her. [...] We sat and talked. Next thing I knew she was dead. It's different when you know someone. You remember their eyes. I don't mean the colour or anything, I mean all the things their eyes told you about them". He sat in silence for a moment. "Whoever killed her, he couldn't have been looking at her eyes". (294)

As Cawelti observes: "The hard-boiled detective sets out to investigate a crime but invariably finds that he must go beyond the solution to some kind of personal choice or action" (142). Perhaps the most extreme example comes in *The Hanging Garden* in which Rebus investigates a hit and run incident in which his own daughter is the victim. In the search for the culprit Rebus "signs the pact with the devil" by accepting the help from his adversary, a dangerous gangster called Cafferty. Once he finds out who is responsible for putting his daughter into a coma he has to take a moral stance: can he kill the culprit, or should he let them live?

Because the detective gets emotionally involved in his investigations, he follows his instincts rather than rational analysis. Rebus often talks about having "a gut feeling" and follows his own "hunches". For example, in *Hide and Seek* we read: "What was his interest? Maybe it was the dreariness of the day, or the atmosphere in this house, or the positioning of the body. All he knew was that he felt something" (14). In *Black and Blue* when Rebus is asked by Lumsden whether he found anything in Shetland, Rebus's response is typical: "Just a bad feeling. A little hobby of mine, I collect them" (232). And

in *The Falls* he is the only officer convinced that there is a link between two seemingly unrelated cases, but it is not something he explains to his colleagues as his conclusions are based on instinct rather than facts (221). Due to this method of policing Rebus is often accused by his superiors and colleagues of "chasing shadows" or "chasing ghosts".

Because Rebus follows his instinct in the investigation, he often uses methods that do not comply with police procedures. For example, in *The Falls* he returns late at night, drunk, to the apartment of the missing girl – Philippa Balfour. When the girl's father finds him there, he cannot find words to explain his presence there: "He looked around. 'Just wanted to…well, I suppose I…' But he couldn't find the words" (16). When interrogated later about this incident by DCS Gill Templer he simply says: "It's just something I do" […] When things are quiet, I like to go back" (26).

To sum up, Rebus indeed shares many features with a hard-boiled detective. Plain puts it bluntly:

> Rebus conforms to many of the patterns we have come to associate with the hard-boiled urban detective. He is a hard-drinking obsessive loner, who has difficulty sustaining relationships. He is distrustful of institutional structures and is inclined to conflict with authority. (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 26)

However, one has to point out that despite the fact that Rebus owes a conspicuous debt to an urban private eye, he is a genuinely original creation and has a complexity not often encountered in characters in genre fiction. I shall discuss this farther in the last chapter.

The second most important figure in the hard-boiled detective fiction is the villain. In classic detective fiction the criminal is usually a relatively obscure, marginal figure whereas in the hard-boiled detective story the criminal plays a central role and might even be a friend of the detective or a woman he is emotionally or sexually involved with. The hard-boiled criminal is often characterised as particularly vicious, perverse, or depraved, and in a striking number of instances as a woman of unusual sexual attractiveness: a femme fatale (Cawelti 147-148).

The presentation of villains in the Rebus novels differs from story to story. Some novels feature serial killers and psychopaths, some more ordinary criminals who are driven to crime through some set of circumstances. There is also a fair number of professional gangsters and

corrupt politicians. In several cases, a "master criminal" – Morris Gerald Cafferty (also known as "Big Ger") – takes center stage. Cafferty is presented as a particularly dangerous criminal who runs the city of Edinburgh. He has ties in all sorts of places and seems to be behind almost every crime that Rebus investigates. The two characters are arch enemies, but at the same time there is a certain weird bond that connects them: one cannot exist without the other. Their relationship grows and expands over the series to reach its dramatic climax in *Exit Music*. Cafferty is Rebus's nemesis, his own Moriarty[57].

It is worth pointing out at this point that although Rebus is usually the character-focaliser (to use Rimmon-Kenan's term)[58] in the novels, occasionally it is also the villain:

> She drives home the knife.
>
> The moment, she knows from past experience, is a very intimate one. Her hand is gripped around the knife's cool handle and the thrust takes the blade into the throat up to the hilt until her hand meets the throat itself. Flesh upon flesh. Jacket first, or woolen jersey, cotton shirt or T-shirt, then flesh. Now rent. The knife is writhing, like an animal sniffing. Warm blood covering hilt and hand. (The other hand covers the mouth, stifling screams.) The moment is complete. A meeting. Touching. The body is hot, gaping, warm with blood. Seething inside, as insides become outsides. Boiling. The moment is coming to an end all too soon.
>
> And still she feels hungry. (*Tooth and Nail* 1)

In the above quoted passage, the reader does not know the identity of the killer yet, but the use of the internal focalisation gives the reader an insight into the mind of the murderer.

Moreover, sometimes it is through a character's internal focalisation that the reader begins to suspect that he or she is involved in the crime:

> James Carew felt that he deserved his treat. […] These were good days for him. London was shifting north, it seemed, the incomers brimming with cash from properties sold in the south-east, wanting bigger and better and prepared to pay. […] Carew was in the right place, the only place, and the time was right,

[57] See Chapter 3 for a more detailed analysis of the character of Cafferty.
[58] See: *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics,* 2nd ed., 73-88.

> too. This was a year to be clutched, embraced, a year unlike any other. […] Though he had walked home, he would need the car for tonight. It was garaged in a mews to the rear of his street. The keys were hanging on their appointed hook in the kitchen. Was the Jaguar an indulgence? He smiled, locking the flat as he left. Perhaps it was. But then his list of indulgences was long and about to grow longer. (*Hide and Seek* 123)

This feature of Rankin's fiction sets it firmly apart from both classic detective fiction and the hard-boiled detective story in which we typically do not have access to the thoughts of the villain.

In her analysis of *Black and Blue* Gill Plain identifies three typical female characters that can be found in hard-boiled detective fiction: the deadly, sexually voracious femme fatale, the asexual (and hence unthreatening) plucky girl assistant and the damsel in distress (48). Plain goes on to argue that all three categories of woman can be found in Rankin's *Black and Blue*. She claims that the role of femme fatale is taken by Eve Cudden; the asexual assistant is Siobhan Clarke; and Gill Templer can be described as a damsel in distress.

Plain's argument is convincing only to a certain extent. Although her observations contain significant insights, they are derived from an analysis of a single novel, *Black and Blue*, and must be reconsidered in the context of the series as a whole. First, Plain rightly observes that Eve Cudden can be described as a femme fatale. Rebus meets Eve in a clichéd setting for an encounter with a femme fatale: a bar. Eve tries to seduce him in order to set him up, but she fails. Later, when Rebus is interrogating her, he refers to this situation:

> 'I don't see you and Malky as an item, not long-term. He's too thick for you, and he'll never be rich enough to make up for that. I can see what he sees in *you*: you're an accomplished seducer'.
> 'Not that accomplished.' Her eyes found his. (385)

Rebus not only calls her an accomplished seducer but also compares her to a cat: "same morals, same instinct" (386). Eve eventually agrees to betray her partner and bring down his gangster family, after which she has sex with the detective (404–405). This time she does it not because she wants to set him up, but simply because she wants to enjoy herself. Just like a man, she seeks pleasure and is too independent and emotionless to get entangled

with anyone. When the detective wakes up the next day, she is gone. Clearly, she is a femme fatale who, as Plain argues, "breaks free from the customary association of woman with passivity and emotion, displaying instead a "masculine" appetite for pleasure, power, and independence" (49).

One has to notice at this point a conspicuous absence of other femme fatales in the other novels of the series. Although Rankin uses a lot of motifs and conventions associated with the hard-boiled formula, he chooses not to use this particular character type more often. There are small exceptions, of course. For example, Tracy from *Hide and Seek* who first takes the role of the damsel in distress, only to turn out to be a femme fatale in the end. However, she is a secondary character and does not play a big role in the whole novel.

Plain argues that the second category (that of asexual assistant) belongs to DC Siobhan Clarke (DS in later novels). Although she does not play a large role in the novel, Plain claims that her brief appearances are significant because Rebus depends on her to obtain information for him: "She works in the inside to find the answers for the outside detective" (50).

Finally, Plain puts Gill Templer in the category of the damsel in distress. Gill asks Rebus for help with handling a drug case, and he helps her out by nailing down the criminal and delivering the evidence of his guilt to Gill. As Plain points out, although technically she has a higher rank, she needs Rebus to help her survive in the predominantly male world of the police. Therefore, the relationship between the two becomes that of a teacher and a pupil (50).

Again, I agree with Plain only up to a point. Over the course of the series, the character of Siobhan Clarke is developed far beyond the role of the "unthreatening plucky girl assistant". Initially just one of the colleagues, she becomes Rebus's partner and a close friend, one of the few people to stand by his side at times of crisis. Their relationship undergoes many changes with Rebus taking up various roles such as teacher, father, friend and protector.

In addition, Gill Templer cannot really be described as a "damsel in distress". At one time Rebus's lover, later on in the series she receives promotion and becomes not only his direct superior, but also the first female DCS in Scotland. From that moment, it is rather she that helps the detective. Moreover, the situation described by Plain is only a short episode in quite a lengthy novel. If one were to describe Gill as damsel in distress, one could just as well say that about Siobhan who fills that role in *A Question of Blood* where she is stalked and terrorised by a petty criminal, Martin Firestone. Eventually she tells Rebus about it, and he comes to her rescue by threatening

and warning off the criminal (19). Yet again we talk here about a small episode, and not the role played by a character in a whole series or even just a whole novel. Hence, such an argument is clearly far-fetched.

So, although one can find in Rankin's fiction the archetypal female characters of hard-boiled detective fiction, it has to be stressed that such characters are not a staple element of each and every novel. As I have mentioned above it is only in one novel that we find an archetype of the femme fatale whereas the "unattractive female assistant" is absent altogether. As for the figure of the damsel in distress, Candice from *The Hanging Garden* fits the picture, but one struggles to find more examples. By not using more of the archetypal female characters Rankin avoids the danger of his fiction becoming too clichéd. Although he uses the hard-boiled mode as his framework, he reworks the conventions to create an original piece of text.

Overall, Rankin's fiction contains some of the stock characters of the hard-boiled detective fiction. First, the figure of the detective has a lot in common with the figure of an alienated private eye. Secondly, his criminals are similar to the ones found in hard-boiled detective fiction. Finally, an occasional femme fatale or a damsel in distress brings to mind pulp magazines. However, generally speaking, in Rankin's fiction there is a greater variety of characters than in the formulaic hard-boiled detective stories. Moreover, the fact that the writer chooses to use the same characters again in different novels means that many of them develop over the course of the series (e.g. Samantha, Michael, Jim Stevens, Siobhan Clarke, Gill Templer, Jack Morton, Cafferty etc.). Rebus himself undergoes transformation: the middle-aged police officer that we meet in *Knots and Crosses* is considerably different to the one who retires in *Exit Music*. The post-retirement novels record his slow aging and present him as a considerably more mellow character; he even adopts a stray dog. Siobhan also undergoes a transformation: from Rebus's sidekick she becomes an independent character in her own right.

Setting

As Cawelti rightly observes, "One of the most important aspects of the hard-boiled formula is the special role of the modern city as background" (140). The setting in the hard-boiled detective story is typically an urban world which epitomizes an "empty modernity, corruption, and death" (Cawelti 141). It is a world perverted by evil and crime. Hence, it bears little

resemblance to the typically small and peaceful settings of the classic detective stories (e.g. a manor house in the countryside, a little village, a vicarage etc.). In classic detective stories the small, enclosed community is shaken by the appearance of a crime, but the detective's intervention restores the social order and the status quo. On the contrary, in the hard-boiled detective story crime is a constant feature of the landscape. As Plain puts it, "The location shifts from the predominantly rural to the predominantly urban, and the albeit imperfect community of classical crime fiction is replaced by a fragmented landscape of alienation, corruption and decay" (33). Cawelti points out that the city of the hard-boiled detective fiction is "a wasteland, a man-made desert or cavern of lost humanity" (155).

The setting plays a key role in the Rebus novels[59]. All the novels of the series are predominantly set in Edinburgh, except for the *Wolfman* (later renamed *Tooth and Nail*) which is set in London[60]. Rankin paints a rather depressing picture of the Scottish capital. Edinburgh reveals itself as a city penetrated by crime, violence and corruption. It is a city troubled by major social issues such as poverty, prostitution, and drugs. Moreover, it is a place where no one can be fully trusted, because the citizens are hiding their true feelings and intentions. On the surface it is a genteel town, full of historic monuments, beautiful architecture and the host of the Edinburgh Festival. This is the side of the city that the tourists see:

> Such a beautiful place, and prosperous. So little crime. They thought to be dangerous a city had to look dangerous. London, Manchester, Liverpool – these places were dangerous in their eyes. Not Edinburgh, not this sleepy walking-tour with its monuments and museums. ("Death is Not the End" 349)

However, this is only a superficial view of the city because underneath the attractive layer lurks menace: "The city hid its secrets well, and its vices

[59] I have previously discussed the representation and function of Edinburgh in the Rebus novels in " 'A Crime Scene Waiting to Happen': Edinburgh in the Novels of Ian Rankin". *Crimelights: Scottish Crime Fiction Then and Now*, edited by Kirsten Sandrock and Frauke Reitemeier, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2015 and "Tartan Noir: Crime, Scotland and Genre in Ian Rankin's Rebus Novels". *Crime Scenes: Modern Crime Fiction in an International Context,* edited by Urszula Elias and Agnieszka Sienkiewicz-Charlish, Peter Lang, 2014.

[60] In the "Exile on Princes Street" foreword to *Rebus: The Early Years*, Rankin says he was living in London at the time of writing and did not enjoy it, so "I brought Rebus to London so he could suffer, too". The original title was *Wolfman* but the American editor came up with the title *Tooth and Nail*, which Rankin preferred as it kept the early title sequence (vii–viii).

too" ("Death is Not the End" 349). Rebus peers underneath the genteel façade uncovering the hidden world of criminality, violence and corrupt morals:

> Edinburgh's an easy beat, his colleagues from the west coast would say. Try Partick [infamous area of Glasgow] for a night and tell me that it's not. But Rebus knew different. He knew that Edinburgh was all appearances, which made the crime less easy to spot, but no less evident. Edinburgh was a schizophrenic city, the place of Jekyll and Hyde sure enough, the city of Deacon Brodie[61], of fur coats and no knickers (as they said in the west). (*Knots and Crosses* 193)

Arguably, the "schizophrenic" Edinburgh of Ian Rankin echoes the Los Angeles of Raymond Chandler, which is also characterised by imitation, artifice and fakery. As Liahna Babener observes in "Raymond Chandler's City of Lies", Los Angeles is the home of Hollywood – "the kingdom of illusion". Chandler repeatedly uses the images drawn from the cinema to stress the artificiality of the metropolis. Marlowe's Los Angeles is a city of façades, deception and lies (Babener 109-111). Similarly, Rankin calls Edinburgh "a city of fur coats and no knickers", drawing the reader's attention to the fake and showy representation of the city. As Scaggs points out the fakery and artifice that characterise the city of hard-boiled fiction drive a wedge between what is seen and what is known. Consequently, the detective sets out on a quest to make sense of a fragmented and largely unintelligible world (72). It is worth pointing out at this point the juxtaposition of what is seen and what is hidden is also characteristic of Gothic fiction. (I discuss the Gothic tropes in Rankin's representation of Edinburgh in chapter 3).

The gloomy view of the city in the Rebus novels partly comes from the fact that Rebus is a professional cynic (another feature of character that he shares with the typical urban private eye), but also from the fact that as a police officer he tends to deal with its dark underbelly rather than the pretty façade. Rebus acknowledges as much by saying: "He was living in the most beautiful, most civilized city in northern Europe, yet every day had to deal with its flipside, with the minor matter of its animus" (*Hide and Seek* 135).

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[61] William Brodie (better known as Deacon Brodie) was a Scottish cabinet-maker, deacon of a trade guild and respectable Edinburgh city councillor, who maintained a secret life as a burglar, partly for the thrill, and partly to fund his gambling. The character of Brodie inspired Stevenson to write *Jekyll and Hyde* (This is discussed among others by Gibson, see *Deacon Brodie: Father to Jekyll and Hyde)*.

Consequently, the protagonist cannot, or perhaps even refuses, to see the beauty of the city. When in *Mortal Causes* Father Leary points out that: "That's the beauty of Edinburgh, you're never far from a peaceful spot". Rebus quickly adds, "And never far from a hellish one either" (20). In *The Falls*, when his friend and lover Jean Burchill stops to gaze at the panorama of the city and makes a remark about its beauty, Rebus cannot see what she sees:

> 'Such a beautiful city', she said. Rebus tried to agree. He hardly saw it anymore. To him, Edinburgh had become a state of mind, a juggling of criminal thoughts and baser instincts. He liked its size, its compactness. He liked its bars. But its outward show had ceased to impress him a long time ago. […] To him it wasn't a view at all. It was a crime scene waiting to happen. (*The Falls* 153; see also *Rebus's Scotland* 87)

And in *Set in Darkness* while walking through the city at midnight "Rebus saw crime where none existed; or perhaps it was that he was attuned to the possibility of crime" (331).

However, one has to note that the juxtaposition of what is seen and what is hidden is not only typical of the American hard-boiled detective story, but it is also characteristic of more recent British and American crime novels. Martin Priestman, for example, notes that this theme is given a lot of focus in the crime fiction of the 1980s and suggests that "perhaps in response to the 1980s domination by the strongly right-wing Thatcher and Reagan governments, much of the decade's crime fiction explores the fracture between glossy, wealth-driven appearances and hidden histories of oppression and abuse" (*Post-war British Crime Fiction* 183). This tendency remains very strong, and a lot of crime fiction written today explores the hidden realities. It appears then that this is a more universal feature of crime fiction as a whole. As Kirsten Sandrock points out in "The Changing Geographies of Ian Rankin's Edinburgh: Crime and the City":

> This dictum of searching for the truth behind the façade has much to do with the genre of crime fiction itself as a detective novel is based on the idea that certain parts of the reality are hidden and must be unveiled by the protagonist to uncover the truth. Inspector Rebus follows this dictate of the genre and constantly seeks to unearth the secrets of the city and its people. (84)

One can see clearly from the examples quoted above that the setting in the Rebus novels bears a strong resemblance to the "mean streets" of the American hard-boiled detective fiction; however, it would be an oversimplification to say that Rankin's Edinburgh is just another example of the hard-boiled city. On the contrary, Rankin's portrayal of Edinburgh is a distinguishing feature of the novels. In fact, one could claim that the city is as much a protagonist as the detective. I discuss this further in the following chapters.

To conclude, Rankin's Rebus novels contain many features of hard-boiled detective novels. One can see this clearly from an analysis of the narrative, characters and setting. In *Detective Fiction and Literature: The Figure on the Carpet* (1990) Priestman notes the impact of the hard-boiled on various kind of recent British writing (see ch.10). Certainly, the American hard-boiled school of writing has influenced many other contemporary Scottish crime writers including William McIlvanney, Paul Johnston and Stuart McBride.

Part of the success of the hard-boiled sub-genre comes from the fact that it has proven extremely versatile for various forms of appropriation: feminist, gay and lesbian, or cinematic. Hard-boiled conventions have also been used in graphic novels and computer games. There are even examples of "generic appropriation" as in the case of *Blade Runner* in which hard-boiled is drawn together with another distinct genre - science fiction (Scaggs 82). As Scaggs notices (following observations made earlier by Symons [1993] and Priestman [1990]), it is the ease with which the hard-boiled mode is appropriated that has led to the developments of two distinct sub-genres in crime fiction: the crime thriller and the police procedural (84). Therefore, we shall now take a look at the police procedural and its influence on the fiction of Rankin.

The police procedural

According to Priestman the police procedural has been the most important development in British crime fiction since the "Golden Age" ("Post--war British Crime Fiction" 173). It is hard to disagree with this statement and yet up to now the police procedural has not been discussed much by scholars. As Priestman observes:

> Perhaps because it is still rapidly evolving and has no clearly defined 'golden' past of iconic stereotypes to look back on, police fiction has a far lower profile in critical circles than amateur or private eye detection. But the story of British detective fiction since the Second World War is largely the story of how middle-ranking career police officers-usually detective inspectors-came to be taken seriously. ("Post-war British Crime Fiction" 173-174)

One of the earliest full-length studies of the genre is George N. Dove's *The Police Procedural* (1982). Dove defines the procedural thus: "First, to be called a procedural, a novel must be a mystery story; and second, it must be one in which the mystery is solved by policemen using normal police routines" (47). This definition draws attention to two fundamental aspects of the genre: the clue-puzzle element and the focus on the procedures of police work. The police procedural usually features a team of police officers, often pursuing a number of different cases at the same time (which may or may not turn out to be linked to each other). A lot of attention is given to the methods of police work including such things as command and communication structures, suspect interviewing techniques, or ways of gathering evidence.

Since the late 1990s more and more emphasis has been put on the forensic technology and psychological profiling especially in television series like the American *C.S.I.: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, premiered in 2000), or the British *The Silent Witness* (BBC, premiered in 1996) and *Waking the Dead* (BBC, premiered in 2000), but also in the fiction of such writers as Patricia Cornwall, Lin Anderson or Stuart MacBride. The focus on forensics is supposed to reflect the way police investigations are conducted in real life. Thus, in contrast to the ratiocination of the classic detective story and the pursuit and infiltration of the hard-boiled detective story, the police procedural focuses on the use of police routines as the method of resolution (Dove 49).

Therefore, one can say that central to the development of the sub-genre of police procedural is the shift towards realism. As Knight observes the transition from hard-boiled detective fiction towards police procedural resulted from a "pressure for greater verisimilitude" (*Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* 169). This pressure, as Messent argues, "has been prompted by a recognition that the marginal position and limited perspective of the PI hero or heroine makes for the ineffectual, and even irrelevant, figure as far as

the representation of criminal activity and its containment goes" (*Criminal Proceedings* 2)[62]. James Ellroy, whose work had a great influence on Rankin, admits that:

> From 1997 on, I've written about cops. I consciously abandoned the Private Eye tradition that formally jazzed me. Evan Hunter wrote: 'The last time a Private Eye investigated a homicide was never'. The Private Eye is an iconic totem spawned by pure fiction. The American Cop is the real goods from the gate. (qtd. in Messent, *The Crime Fiction Handbook* 41)

Rankin, however, slightly distances himself from the idea that police procedural is more "realistic":

> No police procedural is ever realistic. A realistic police procedural would be the most boring book in the world, because police investigation is tedious and police officers are all tiny cogs in the machine; they never even get to see the whole investigation through from start to finish. (qtd. in Pierce)

Rankin's comment is important because it draws our attention to the fact that all crime novels are essentially plot-driven, which means that focus on verisimilitude will always be subordinate to the drama of events.

The move towards realism within the police procedural is evident not only in the pattern of action, but also in the choice of themes, characters and setting: crime in the procedural happens to ordinary people in ordinary places. As Priestman points out:

> By the 1970's […] new reputations were being consolidated by writers who seemed to have discovered new ways of grafting contemporary realistic observation onto the old form. Gone, first of all, were the aristocratic trappings of some predecessors: the series detectives of Collin Watson, Peter Dickinson, P.D. James, Ruth Rendell and Reginald Hill are simply hard-working professional policemen. Gone too, often were the stately homes and idyllic villages: the settings of murder were now often quietly domestic or the semi-public, shared spaces of welfare Britain. (*Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* 26)

[62] Ironically, it was for the same reason, i.e. the move towards realism that the writers of hard-boiled detective fiction moved away from the classic detective story.

Setting, as Priestman observes, is central to the police procedural and in the British procedural it is usually a "relatively localised beat", e.g. Kingsmarkham in Ruth Rendell's novels or Oxford in Colin Dexter's novels. Such localism, he points out, "has been a key element in turning attention away from the closed society and brilliant, but eccentric detective towards a more "realistic" notion of crime as something that happens every day, arising from the pressures of a common life" (*Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* 27). Following Priestman's observations Scaggs points out:

> The localised beats of the British procedural, from real or fictional small-town Britain to the contemporary reality of large urban spaces, are an element of the realism of the procedural, in particular in the portrayal of crime as an everyday occurrence arising from the tensions of modern life. (93)

Most of the Rebus novels are set primarily in Edinburgh (which is relatively small for a capital city) and give a very strong sense of the place. Whereas the Edinburgh presented in the earlier novels of the series contains a number of fictional or invented places, from *Mortal Causes* onwards Rankin began to build a very detailed picture of Edinburgh and its citizens that takes the reader beyond the landmarks shown on the postcards and becomes the most accurate depiction of Edinburgh in modern crime fiction. As Barry Forshaw puts it: "If Charles Dickens […] is the ultimate chronicler of London, Ian Rankin has performed a similar function for his beloved Edinburgh" (16).

> [H]e was watching from his window as the city's late-night drunks rolled their way up and down the obstacle-strewn hazard of Lothian Road, seeking alcohol, women, happiness. It was a never-ending search for some of them, staggering in and out of clubs and pubs and takeaways, gnawing on the packaged bones of existence. Lothian Road was Edinburgh's dustbin. It was also home to the Sheraton Hotel and the Usher Hall. Rebus had visited the Usher Hall once, sitting with Rhona and the other smug souls listening to Mozart's Requiem Mass. It was typical of Edinburgh to have a crumb of culture sited amidst the fast-food shops. A requiem mass and a bag of chips. (*Knots and Crosses* 65-66)

The vivid portrayal of the city is made complete by the numerous descriptions of the weather, which enables the reader to get a real feel for the place:

> Springtime in Edinburgh. A freezing wind, and near-horizontal rain. Ah, the Edinburgh wind, that joke of a wind, that black farce of the wind. Making everyone walk lie mime artists, making eyes water and then drying the tears to a crust on red-nipped cheeks. And throughout it all, that slightly sour yeasty smell in the air, the smell of not-so-distant breweries. (*Strip Jack* 50)

> The sun was out, bathing the tired buildings in dazzling light. Edinburgh's architecture was best suited to winter, to sharp, cold light. You got the feeling of being a long way north of anywhere, some place reserved for only the hardiest and most foolhardy. (*Let It Bleed* 69)

The urban realism of the procedural is central to its commitment to social, structural and thematic realism. The thematic realism is reflected in the use of themes relevant and pertinent to "the state of Scotland" (See Chapter 4). On the narrative level, this commitment is realised by the use of third-person narration which gives the appearance of objectivity in contrast to the subjective, first-person narratives of hard-boiled detective fiction (Scaggs 93). Rankin uses third-person narration throughout the series, with *Knots and Crosses* making an interesting exception (See Chapter 3).

Another characteristic of the police procedural is the focus on teamwork. This is at least partly connected with realism as few major crimes are in fact solved by solitary individuals these days (cf. Priestman, *Crime Fiction from Poe to the Present* 32). As Dove points out:

> The nature of plot-development that also characterizes the police procedural is the use of multiple protagonists, the police team instead of the single superior detective. In most of the procedural series, attention does admittedly tend to focus on an individual, like Martin Beck in the Sjöwall-Wahlöö series or Christie Opara in Uhnak's series, but the work of detection is being carried on by a group of policemen working as a team, and the resolution of the problem is seldom the result of the work of one outstanding individual. (49)

The focus on teamwork can actually be one of the weakest points of the police procedural. A larger group of characters might mean that the reader finds it difficult to identify with any of them (unlike in classic detective fiction or hard-boiled detective fiction where the reader identifies with the detective who is the main protagonist). In my opinion, this is a problem for example with the classic Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series. Rankin manages to escape

this danger by creating a character that mediates between two different poles: the subjective worldview of the hard-boiled detective and the collective worldview of the police team. As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, Rebus owes a lot to the clichés of the American hard-boiled detective: he is an alienated investigator who follows his own instinct rather than the police procedures. As Rankin himself puts it: "Rebus operate[s] almost as a private-eye within the police force" (Messent, "The Police Novel" 177). However, although Rebus is clearly an outsider with his own sense of what is moral and just, he is still a member of the police force and his actions serve the interests of the dominant social and political order and help to restore the status quo. *Set in Darkness*, for example, takes place just as Edinburgh is preparing to house the first Scottish Parliament in almost three hundred years, but the process is threatened by the murder of a Scottish MP. Therefore, the aim of Rebus's investigation is not only to find the culprit, but also to maintain Scottish political stability and credibility (Scaggs 96).

Furthermore, the fact that Rebus is a member of the police force means that the plot revolves around the official police investigation and the text focuses, at least to some extent, on the nature of police work and the procedures followed by the police during the investigation. The focus on the intricacies of police work seems to be more evident in the later novels of the series. Whereas the first novels focused predominantly on Rebus and his struggles to bring criminals to justice, later additions feature more of his colleagues who all contribute to solving the case. For example, in *Set in Darkness* Rebus is working closely not only with Siobhain, but also with DS Grant Hood and DC Ellen Wyllie: "They stayed late, Rebus reminding them that they could head home if they liked. But they were working as a team, uncomplaining, focused, and no one was about to break the spell. He got the feeling it was nothing to do with overtime" (359). Moreover, in later novels of the series Rebus's work is also more dependent on police information and technology.

The shift from a narrative focused mostly on the individual detective to one focused on multiple characters is best illustrated by the development of the character of Siobhan Clarke (Rebus's sidekick). Siobhan appears for the first time in *The Black Book* as a newly promoted detective constable. She is a complete contradiction to Rebus as she is much younger than he is, comes from a middle-class background and holds a university degree. But even more importantly, she is English. Throughout the series, Siobhan climbs the

promotion ladder and by *Resurrection Men* is promoted to detective sergeant and by *Standing in Another Man's Grave* to detective inspector. Clarke's focus on professional development is another feature that makes her different from Rebus, who, except for the one promotion at the very beginning of the series (from DS to DI), is stuck in the same rank throughout the original series[63]. Over the course of the series, Clarke plays an increasing role; she works closely with Rebus, but also has her own cases to work on as well. As Scaggs notes:

> Central to the development of Rankin's John Rebus novels […] is the growth of a team of police officers who both function collectively to solve crime, and serve as a foil for Rebus's rule-bending and intuitive investigations. The character of Siobhan Clarke, often sourly identified by her superiors as 'another John Rebus', mediates between the twin poles of collective and individual agency. (94)

Thus, in later novels Rebus has somewhat less in common with a lonely private investigator but is more similar to the troubled police officers found in the police novel, e.g. McIlvanney's Laidlaw, Mankell's Wallander or Martin Beck from the Sjöwall-Wahlöö series. In the post-retirement novels, the relationship between the characters further evolves: Siobhan Clarke works closely with Malcolm Fox, but relies on Rebus's advice and help. Rebus, meanwhile, conducts his own investigations in civilian capacity.

The Rebus novels successfully merge two sub-genres of crime fiction: the hard-boiled detective story and the police procedural. By using the framework of the police procedural Rankin takes his work beyond the formulaic structure of the hard-boiled detective story adding a certain element of realism to his stories. At the same time, by using the detective figure which is based on the long tradition of a private-eye detective figure, he escapes the danger of creating a story which would be only focused on the process of investigation and police procedures and would fail to generate interest in the character of the detective(s).

[63] This is partially his choice as at one point in the series he actually turns down a promotion.

Europejski kryminał społeczny

After looking at two sub-genres that have quite a long tradition, we should look at two loose generic categories that have been used to describe Rankin's work: "*Europejski kryminał społeczny*" and "Tartan Noir".

The term "*Europejski kryminał społeczny*" was coined by Wojciech Józef Burszta, a Polish cultural anthropologist. In the article "Bronię kryminału!" [In Defence of the Crime Novel] Burszta suggested that the novels of such writers as Ian Rankin, Henning Mankell, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Donna Leon[64] belong to this sub-genre[65]. Although Burszta admits that it is difficult to talk about such a homogeneous category as the "European crime novel", he draws attention to the fact that there is a significant difference between the European crime novel and its American counterpart (21-23). Next, he goes on to argue that there is a distinctive sub-genre within contemporary crime fiction produced in Europe and that is "*Europejski kryminał społeczny*". Burszta claims that what differentiates this entity from the others is the focus on contemporary social issues. He suggests that the solution of the crime puzzle is of secondary importance here, as the novels are primarily concerned with raising questions about the changing world around us. Hence, they feature detective protagonists who are tired of living in a world they understand less and less, a world which has become alien and untrustworthy (23-24).

Indeed, one can find these conventions in Mankell's fiction. In the first novel of the series with Inspector Kurt Wallander, *Faceless Killers* (1991), the main hero repeatedly wonders: "What kind of world are we living in?" Wallander is worried that Sweden is changing as the invasion of foreigners coming from abroad is putting an end to the myth of the Swedish welfare state and even in remote places in Sweden one cannot feel safe ("Bronię kryminału!" 23). The ending of the first novel of the series signals the beginning of the changes in Swedish society:

[64] Donna Leon is actually an American writer whose novels are set in Italy.

[65] In a much earlier publication (co-edited with Mariusz Czubaj) *Krwawa Setka: 100 najważniejszych powieści kryminalnych* [The Bloody Hundred: 100 Most Important Crime Novels] Burszta used a slightly different term – *Europejski thriller społeczny.* However, *Krwawa Setka* does not define the genre markers of *Europejski thriller społeczny*, therefore I refer to the later article and the more accurate term.

> Before he went to sleep, he lay in bed for a while in the darkness of his apartment with his eyes open. Again he thought about the violence. The new era, which demanded a different kind of policeman. We're living in the age of the noose, he thought. Fear will be on the rise. (*Faceless Killers* 298)

This theme is continued throughout the next novels which depict the slow disintegration of the Swedish welfare state. The novels talk about such social issues as immigration (*Faceless Killers*), the collapse of the USSR and the mafia (*The Dogs of Riga*), human trafficking (*Sidetracked*), or violence towards women (*The Fifth Woman*).

Similarly, the fiction of Manuel Vázquez Montalbán and Donna Leon is full of socio-political observations. Leon criticises Italy's bureaucracy and corrupt political class, the military, as well as the Church whereas Montalban's novels provide a detailed and bitter description of the changing face of Spanish society.

As for Rankin's novels, it is true that they engage with social issues and the concerns of present-day Scotland; however, the example chosen by Burszta to illustrate his point is not the strongest one. Burszta argues that while in Mankell's novels it is immigrants who become "the Other" coming to destroy the Swedish state, in the Rebus novels it is the tourists who are changing the face of the city, ruining its unique atmosphere and thus making it similar to Glasgow – the city of criminals (23). Even though it is true that Rebus sees tourists as a nuisance, especially during the Edinburgh festival, this theme is not as recurrent in the novels as Burszta's comment might suggest. Moreover, one of the Rebus novels, *Fleshmarket Close*, actually depicts immigrants and foreigners as "the Other". In addition, Burszta does not develop his argument any further and fails to provide any other examples to support his claim that Rankin's novels are full of social criticism.

Indeed, it is true that the Rebus novels focus heavily on social issues. Rankin's aim as a writer is not so much to write a whodunnit as to say something about modern Scotland. Therefore, the novels touch upon such themes as internal police politics and corruption in high places (e.g. *Hide and Seek, Let It Bleed, The Hanging Garden*), the oil industry (*Black and Blue*), sectarianism *(Mortal Causes*), immigration and xenophobia (*Fleshmarket Close, A Song for the Dark Times)*, the theme of devolution (*Dead Souls*, *Set in Darkness, Saints of the Shadow Bible*), Scotland's involvement in global

politics (*The Naming of the Dead*), or Brexit (*A Song for the Dark Times*) to name just a few (I discuss this further in chapter 4).

One can add, of course, more examples of European crime novels with a strong focus on social issues. Stieg Larsson with his *Millennium* trilogy is an obvious one, but also the fiction of such writers as Jo Nesbø, Ruth Rendell and Denise Mina engages in social criticism.

Despite the fact that the examples quoted above show that there is a number of European writers whose fiction is characterised by a strong focus on social issues, this is not enough to support Burszta's claim that one can talk about the emergence of a new genre-variant here. First of all, the juxtaposition of British and American crime fiction is a reductive approach and built on the myth that the two forms are traditionally completely different (British crime fiction consists solely of cosy whodunnits and American crime fiction is all about the mean streets of the hard-boiled) whereas, in fact, one can find various forms of writing on both continents.

Secondly, although it is true that there is a strong tendency among European crime fiction writers to engage in socio-political criticism, this tendency is not limited to European crime fiction. One can find numerous examples of crime novels from outside Europe which also engage in social criticism. For instance, the fiction of James Ellroy (USA), Miyuki Miyabe (Japan), or Deon Meyer (South Africa). Moreover, although the novels of Mankell or Rankin are characterised by a strong focus on social issues they are still predominantly police novels and such genre-markers are the most dominant in the text.

Therefore, one could rather argue that the abundance of social themes in crime fiction provides proof for the theory of the evolution of the genre: the contemporary crime novel is penetrated by the motifs of the psychological-social novel. I shall discuss this further in the last chapter.

Tartan Noir?

Julie H. Kim in her introduction to *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story* (2005) notices that detectives today are more and more defined by their ethnicity rather than by Poe's style of ratiocination (4). It is hard to disagree with this statement. One look at book covers seems to confirm this view. Detective stories are now advertised as "Tartan Noir", "Nordic Noir", "Emerald Noir" etc.

The term Tartan Noir has undoubtedly been one of the most successful labels used by the publishing industry over the last twenty years. It has been used to describe a wide range of authors from Scotland; however, its characteristics are loosely defined. Therefore, it has been a subject of discussion among readers and scholars whether the genre is a viable one, or one created by publishers for marketing reasons[66].

The name itself is a contradiction in terms as "tartan" is a pattern consisting of criss-crossed horizontal and vertical bands in multiple colours. Moreover, it is a curious merger of two very different cultural concepts: "tartan" is something that we associate with rural Scotland, it brings to mind the desolate landscape of the Highlands with its mountains, glens and lochs whereas "noir" is normally associated with a mean urban landscape. The term was supposed to have been invented by James Ellroy who was said to have called Rankin "the King of Tartan Noir" (See for example O'Connor). However, recently Rankin admitted that he had invented it himself:

> 'Tartan Noir' is a term I'm confident I invented, but I gave it to James Ellroy. I met him at a crime fiction convention in Nottingham many years ago and I wanted to get him to sign a book for me. I was explaining to him that I was a crime writer as well and wrote about Edinburgh and the darker side of Scottish life. I said, 'You could call it Tartan Noir.' He laughed and signed the book to 'the King of Tartan Noir.' So then I pretended that he'd invented it. But in fact, I told him and then he wrote it down. Chris Brookmyre nicked it after that and started using it. (Wanner)

The question remains whether Tartan Noir can be treated as a separate sub-genre of crime fiction like, for instance, the hard-boiled detective story or the police procedural. This question goes beyond the scope of this discussion as it would require a detailed study of texts produced by other writers who are typically associated with Tartan Noir such as Lin Anderson, Tony Black, Christopher Brookmyre, Paul Johnston, Val MacDermid, Denise Mina, Stuart MacBride and others. It certainly presents an interesting issue for further study.

However, one can propose the hypothesis that Tartan Noir is just a marketing label, a versatile umbrella under which various forms have been

[66] The issue was discussed, for example, at the conference "Crime Scotland – Then and Now" which took place at the University of Göttingen in May 2012.

placed. The fact that it is used to describe a wide variety of authors and texts primarily on the basis that they are set in Scotland or are written by Scottish writers and ignoring the signs that point to various established sub-genres of crime fiction raises serious questions about its validity. For example, Stuart MacBride's novels featuring Detective Sergeant Logan McRae are typical police novels with the focus on police procedures and forensic science. The fact that the novels are set in Aberdeen and the writer uses real locations does not make them distinctively different from other examples of the sub-genre. Similar observations can be made about the fiction of Lin Anderson and her Rhona MacLeod series[67].

The various attempts at defining the genre variant can also be seen as unsuccessful. Stephen Knight, for example, defines it as "the mode of representing crime, social difficulties and national inspirations in Scotland" (*Crime Fiction Since 1800* [2010] 200). This definition could refer to a lot of different texts, including ones that are certainly not crime novels, for example Alasdair Gray's *Lanark*, James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*, or a lot of fiction by Irvine Welsh. O'Connor, on the other hand, proposes an even broader definition arguing that the Tartan Noir novel is one where the "subject-matter [is] crime-related; and the crime should be written about Scotland and/or from a Scottish author, the former being more important" (50). Such a perspective makes it possible to include Val MacDermid among Tartan Noir writers although most of her novels are set in England and her fiction is certainly not concerned with issues relating to Scotland in particular.

To conclude, although the term Tartan Noir has been used by many scholars to denote crime fiction that comes from Scotland, so far no study has fully analysed its different manifestations in order to prove or disprove its validity as a distinctive sub-genre.

Conclusion

The analysis of the narrative, setting and character shows that the Rebus novels combine elements of hard-boiled detective fiction with elements of the police procedural. Rankin's fiction can also be placed among wider tendencies found in European crime fiction such as the focus on social issues and interest in the country and its society.

[67] See for example MacBride's *Cold Granite* (2005) and Anderson's *Driftnet* (2006).

CHAPTER THREE

The Matter of the Gothic

> *Next to the criminology section were books on the occult and witchcraft, along with various packs of Tarot cards and the like. Rebus smiled at the curious marriage: police work and hocus-pocus.*
>
> *Tooth and Nail* 155

Crime fiction and the Gothic[68]

Since Edgar Allan Poe's foundational short stories, crime fiction has maintained a strong affiliation with the Gothic. Maurizio Ascari, in *A Counter--History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (2009), and Catherine Spooner, in her essay "Crime and the Gothic" in *The Blackwell Companion to Crime Fiction* (2010), both investigate this relationship in detail. Spooner observes that although the Gothic novel in its original eighteenth-century form waned after 1820, its characteristic motifs continued to inform other nineteenth-century literary modes, most notably the detective story. As she points out, the earliest practitioners of detective fiction – Poe, Wilkie Collins, and Arthur Conan Doyle – may also be read as Gothic writers. Gothic elements permeate crime narratives, just as acts of crime underpin the plots of most Gothic novels (Spooner 246).

In *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction* Ascari argues that the separation of the two genres is an artificial one as it was produced by early-twentieth century critics of the genre who put emphasis on the association between detection and science, which in turn led to a popular belief that nineteenth-century detective fiction was unambiguously realistic whereas in fact it had an ambivalent status (Introduction x – xi). This is also acknowledged by Clive Bloom who claims that: "Other genres owe much to gothic concerns

[68] Parts of this chapter have been published before, see: "Gothic Crimes: Rebus and the Ghosts of the Past". Butler and Sienkiewicz-Charlish, pp. 85-99.

and neither detective fiction nor science fiction can be separated in their origins from such an association" (2). However, as Ascari demonstrates, in the spirit of literary Modernism the Gothic became unfashionable, and as a consequence Gothic associations were removed from the detective story, which was regarded as a logical puzzle only: "[B]odily fluids were 'washed away' from the pages of clue-puzzle novels and crime was increasingly represented – by writers and critics alike – as an aseptic riddle to be solved by the detached mind of an investigating agent" (Introduction xii). Ascari claims that the critics selectively composed the detective fiction canon to support this view and therefore omitted all works that did not follow the conventions that they pre-assigned to the genre[69]:

> During the 1920s and 1930s detective fiction finally achieved the full status of a literary genre thanks to a rich critical output, including R. A. Freeman's "The Art of Detective Stories" (1924), Dorothy Sayer's introduction to *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (1928), and H. Douglas Thomson's *Masters of Mystery: A Study of the Detective Story* (1931). These critical essays can be considered as symptomatic of the increasing tendency to disparage the nineteenth-century crime tradition in order to promote the more recent "scientific" developments of the genre. Over the decade both the theoretical and the historical approach to detective fiction tended to consign it to a space of rigid rules. In their attempt to assert the dignity of the genre, writers and critics emphasised its rational elements at the expense of other components and consequently pushed the more sensational aspects into the background. (3)

This prescriptive view of detective fiction was radically revised by late twentieth-century critics, who emphasised the debt of detective fiction to the early-modern traditions of picaresque novels, criminal biographies and broadsides (Ascari, Introduction xiii)[70].

[69] This is also discussed by Spooner, "Crime and the Gothic", 246.

[70] It is worth pointing out that Ascari also challenges "the foundation myth" which identifies Poe as the father of detective fiction. He argues that this particular myth was created to support a normative view of the genre (10). The trend to normalize detective fiction reached its climax in the late 1920s when S.S. Van Dine pronounced his "Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories" and Ronald A. Knox included his famous "Detective Story Decalogue" in his introduction to *The Best Detective Stories of 1928* (11).

Rankin and the Gothic tradition

Rankin's novels are penetrated by Gothic themes and motifs as well as by numerous references to other Gothic texts. Rankin himself admits that he has been deeply influenced by the Gothic:

> In Scotland there was no tradition of the crime novel. The English crime novel was perceived as entertainment, a puzzle. In Scotland, the tradition I was coming from was much more the Gothic novel. (qtd. in McCrum)

Rankin has repeatedly cited James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824)[71] and Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), seminal works of the Scottish Gothic, as major inspirations behind his novels[72]. Of course, both novels can be seen not only as examples of Gothic fiction, but also crime fiction. Hogg's novel is also an interesting example of genre syncretism. It contains elements of the gothic novel, psychological mystery and religious satire. It can also be seen as an early example of a crime thriller as part of the story is told from the point of view of its criminal anti-hero. Nevertheless, it is the Gothic signs that are predominant in the text (especially the use of the motif of the doppelgänger as well as the elaboration on the theme of duality).

Stevenson's own fascination with a split personality was undoubtedly influenced by Hogg's fiction, most famously in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, but also, for instance, in *The Master of Bellantrae* or the short story "Markheim". As with Hogg, Stevenson's novella contains genre markers of the detective novel with the character of the lawyer, Mr. Utterson, taking the role of the detective[73].

Rankin not only admits that his fiction has been greatly influenced by Hogg and Stevenson, but also claims that his first novel, *Knots and Crosses,* was not meant to be a crime novel, but rather a re-writing of *Jekyll and Hyde*.

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71 The full title of the novel, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner: Written by Himself: With a Detail of Curious Traditionary Facts and Other Evidence by the Editor*, is shortened here for convenience.

72 See for example Ian Rankin's website ("The Path from Rankin to Rebus: Ian's Literary influences") or *Rebus's Scotland* 9.

73 The development of crime fiction in the works of Hogg and Stevenson is discussed in more detail by Christopher MacLachlan in "Murder and the Supernatural: Crime in the Fiction of Scott, Hogg and Stevenson".

However, reviewers failed to notice this at the time and the novel was classified as a straightforward detective story.

> It was meant to be an update on *Jekyll and Hyde*, a serious literary novel, a psychological Gothic novel. I'd never read any crime fiction. I was horrified! I was doing a PhD on Muriel Spark. I was going to be a Professor of English. I wanted to be a serious member of the intelligentsia. (qtd. in Shields 25)[74]

The fact that Rankin is heavily influenced by the Gothic can be seen straight away in the choice of titles for his novels (e.g. *Set in Darkness, Dead Souls, and Resurrection Men)* as well as the choice of artwork for his front covers[75]. Moreover, the atmosphere of mystery and suspense in the novels is reminiscent of Gothic fiction as, for example, in the prologue to *Dead Souls* which opens with an identified figure looking over Edinburgh from the top of Salisbury Crags:

> From this height, the sleeping city seems like a child's construction, a model which has refused to be constrained by imagination. […] He shoves his hands in his pockets. The wind is stropping his ears. He can pretend it's a child's breath, but the reality chides him.
>
> *I am the last cold wind you'll feel.*
>
> He takes a step forward, peers over the edge and into darkness. Arthur's Seat crouches behind him, humped and silent as though offended by his presence, coiled to pounce. He tells himself it is papier-mâché. He smooths his hands over strips of newsprint, not reading the stories, then realises he is stroking the air and withdraws his hands, laughing guiltily. Somewhere behind him, he hears a voice. […]
>
> A police car blares in the distance, but it's not coming for him. A black coach is waiting for him at the foot of Salisbury Crags. Its headless driver is becoming impatient. The horses tremble and whinny. Their flanks will lather on the ride home. […]

[74] One should treat this statement with suspicion. First of all, *Knots and Crosses* contains a lot of conventions associated with the genre and it is hard to believe that the author of the novel would not be familiar with other crime novels. Also, in *Rebus's Scotland* Rankin admits that in his teenage years he read books by Frederick Forsyth and Alistair MacLean (23).

[75] See for example the covers of the following editions of the novels: *Knots and Crosses* (1998), *Strip Jack* (1993), *The Black Book* (1994), *Mortal Causes* (1999), or *Resurrection Men* (2002).

> There is a figure behind him in the darkness, drawing nearer. He half-turns to confront it, then quickly looks away, suddenly fearful of meeting the face. He begins to say something.
>
> 'I know you will find it hard to believe, but I've…'
>
> He never finishes the sentence. Because now he is sailing across the City, jacket flying up over his head, smothering a final heartfelt cry. (3-4)

The scene quoted above not only echoes Gothic narratives, but also references Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, a pivotal Scottish Gothic novel, in which the main protagonist confronts his brother atop Arthur's Seat with the intention of pushing him over the edge. One can also find Gothic echoes in the horror-like descriptions of crime scenes such as those that open *Hide and Seek* and *Mortal Causes*. In the former the body is found in an urban slum:

> As he moved further into the house, passing the bare stairwell, darkness embraced him. Boards had been hammered into all the window-frames, shutting out light. […] The room he entered was surprisingly large, but with a low ceiling. Two constables had thick rubber torches out to illuminate the scene, casting moving shadows over the plasterboard walls. The effect was of a Caravaggio painting, a centre of light surrounded by degrees of murkiness. Two large candles had burnt down to the shapes of fried eggs against the bare floorboards, and between them lay the body, legs together, arm outstretched. A cross without the nails, naked from the waist up. (10-11)

Also, in *Mortal Causes* the body is found in a typical Gothic or neo-Gothic setting: an old, buried street beneath the City Chambers on the High Street (called Mary King's Close). The body is located in what used to be a butcher's:

> It […] consisted of a vaulted room, again whitewashed and with a floor of packed earth. But in its ceiling were a great many iron hooks, short and blackened but obviously used at one time for hanging up meat.
>
> Meat still hung from one of them.
>
> It was the lifeless body of a young man. His hair was dark and slick, stuck to his forehead and neck. His hands had been tied and the rope slipped over a hook, so that he hung stretched with his knuckles near the ceiling and his toes barely touching the ground. His ankles had been tied together too. There

> was blood everywhere, a fact made all too plain as the arc lamp suddenly came on, sweeping light and shadows across the walls and roof. (9)

Moreover, in Rankin's fiction we can also find a thematic and structural feature identified by Chris Baldick as intrinsic to Gothic narrative; namely, the return of the past upon the present:

> For the Gothic effect to be attained, a tale should combine a fearful sense of inheritance in time with a claustrophobic sense of enclosure in space, these two dimensions reinforcing one another to produce an impression of sickening descent into disintegration. (xix)

This theme is pursued by Rankin first and foremost in *Knots and Crosses*, the first novel of the series, in which Rebus is both metaphorically and literally haunted by his past army life. When we first meet Rebus he is in his forties, and he has been working for the police for fifteen years. From the very beginning of the novel, we learn that in his past there is some dark secret; something he deliberately tried to forget. He has chosen to isolate certain memories, thus causing what Freud classifies as a "splitting of consciousness" (See "The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence")[76]. In the course of the novel, it becomes evident that the isolated memories are connected with his past army life and some incident that occurred then: "There was plenty of life in *his* past" (9). Although Rebus had pushed back all memories connected with that time in his life, the repressed memories keep haunting him; every now and then he hears "a screaming in his memory" (12) and he is gradually losing control over those flashbacks:

> Past lives…Yes, he believed in some things… In God, certainly … But past lives … Without warning, a face screamed up at him from the carpet, trapped in its cell. He dropped his glass. (11)

The recurring memories are a constant source of anxiety, making him physically sick:

[76] This argument was put forward by Rebecca Stewart at the conference "Retold, Resold, Transformed: Crime Fiction in the Modern Era", which took place at Leeds University on 17–18 September 2013.

> Rebus wiped sweat from his forehead. He felt weak still, and leaned against a lamp-post. He knew vaguely what it was. It was rejection by his whole being of the past, as though his vital organs were rejecting a donor heart. He had pushed the horror of the training so far to the back of his mind that any echo of it at all was now to be violently fought against. (52)

It is worth noticing that Rebus is partially aware of what is happening to him: "He knew vaguely what it was". Later on, he wonders: "What was he blocking out? What was it that had been rejected by him all those years ago as he had walked the Fife shoreline, having his final fit of the breakdown and shutting out the past as securely as if he had been shutting the door on a Jehovah's Witness?" (142-143).

Eventually, his brother Michael, who is a stage hypnotist, puts him under hypnosis to help him bring back past memories. At this point the text of the novel modulates into first person narrative and the whole monologue is put into a separate chapter. Rebus's journey into his unconscious brings to mind a hypnotic analysis during which a patient tries to find the source of the unconscious conflicts that are interfering with his or her daily functioning and thus causing the feelings of anxiety, depression, and phobias. The detective uncovers not only the source of his attacks of sweating, anxiety and blackouts, but also discovers the solution to the crime puzzle. We find out that early on in his army career Rebus decided to try for the SAS (Special Air Service) and for that purpose went to the special SAS training camp:

> I had been in the Parachute Regiment since the age of eighteen. But then I decided to try for the Special Air Service. Why did I do that? Why will any soldier take a cut in pay to join the SAS? I can't answer that. All I know is that I found myself in Herefordshire, at the SAS's training camp. I called it The Cross because I'd been told that they would try to crucify me, and there, along with the other volunteers, I went through hell, marching, training, testing, pushing. They took us to the breaking point. They taught us to be lethal. (157)

Together with a colleague, Gordon Reeve, they were judged the two best trainees and were chosen for a new elite group, which was to be set up from within the SAS. Its role would be the infiltration and destabilization of terrorist groups, starting with the IRA. As part of the examination, they had been trapped and taken prisoner, and then put through a series of endurance

tests involving mental and physical torture that were supposed to make them "crack":

> I waited there, waited for hours and days, hungry, thirsty, and every time I closed my eyes a sound like that of a blaring radio caught between the stations would sound from the walls and the ceiling. I lay with my hands over my ears.
>
> Fuck you, fuck you, fuck you.
>
> I was supposed to crack now, and if I cracked I would have failed everything, all the months of training. So I sang tunes loudly to myself. I scraped my nails across the walls of the cell, walls wet with fungus, and scratched my name there as anagram: BRUSE. I played games in my head, thought up crossword-puzzle clues and little linguistic tricks. I turned survival into a game. A game, a game, a game. I had to keep reminding myself that, no matter how bad things seemed to be getting, this was all a game. (159)

Initially, Rebus and Reeve are separated; however, after a while, they are put together to examine their interaction. Rebus manages to stay strong whereas Reeve starts to lose his grip on reality and grows more and more dependent on Rebus calling him "the brother he never had" (165) and mingling his own blood with Rebus's so that they can become blood brothers (165). The development of this close and intimate relationship reaches its dramatic climax when Reeve tries to kiss Rebus who finds himself compliant:

> His eyes [Gordon's] were no longer human. They were the eyes of the wolf. I had seen it coming, but there had been nothing I could do.
>
> Not until now. But now I saw everything with the clear, hallucinogen eyes of one who has seen everything there is to see and more. I could see Gordon bring his face up to mine and slowly – so slowly that it might not have been happening at all – plant a breathy kiss on my cheek, trying to turn my head around so as to connect with the lips.
>
> And I saw myself yield. No, no, this was not to happen! […]
>
> 'Just a kiss,' he was saying, 'just one kiss, John. Hell, come on.' And there were tears in his eyes, because he too could see that everything had gone haywire in an instant. He too could see that something was ending. (166-167)

It is at this very moment that an officer walks into the cell and announces that Rebus had passed the test and will join the special unit. Reeve, however, is to remain in the cell because his "interrogation" is going

to continue. What is more, in the ironic turn of events, Rebus is now also supposed to be involved in the further interrogation of Reeve. Although at first hesitant and reluctant to leave Gordon behind in the cell, Rebus eventually walks out, thus abandoning his "blood brother", even though he realises that Gordon is not going to cope without him:

> I didn't need to look back at the cell, or at Gordon. I just kept thinking to myself: it's another part of the game, just another part of the game. The decision had been made a long time ago. They were not lying to me, and of course I wanted out of the cell. It was preordained. Nothing was arbitrary. I had been told that at the beginning of my training. I started forwards, but Gordon held onto the tatters of my shirt.
>
> 'John,' he said, his voice full of need, 'don't let me down, John. Please'.
>
> But I pulled away from his weak grip and left the cell.
>
> 'No! No! No!' His cries were huge, fiery things. 'Don't let me down, John! Let me out! Let me out!'
>
> And then he screamed, and I almost crumpled on the floor.
>
> It was the scream of the mad. (169)

The decision to leave Gordon behind overshadows the successful completion of the training. Guilt-driven Rebus suffers a nervous breakdown and eventually leaves the army and chooses to suppress all the memories connected with the training and his friend and "brother" Gordon Reeve.

> I went to a small fishing-village in Fife and walked along the pebbled beach, recovering from my nervous breakdown and putting the whole thing out of my mind stuffing the most painful episode of my life into drawers and attics in my head, locking it all away, learning to forget. So I forgot. (171)

However, this act of intentional forgetting causes the split in the character's psyche. Freud calls it "defence hysteria" ("The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence"). As Freud observes, patients enjoy good mental health up to a moment when their ego is faced with an experience, an idea or a feeling which arouses such a distressing affect that the subject decides to forget about it because he has no confidence in his power to resolve the contradiction between the incompatible idea and his ego by means of thought-activity. The splitting of consciousness is then "the result of an act of will on the part of the patient" ("The Neuro-Psychoses of Defence"). Accordingly, Rebus cannot

cope with his betrayal and abandonment of Reeve as well as the homosexual experience and chooses to forget. However, subconsciously he feels guilty, and the repressed memories keep haunting him for the next fifteen years. Therefore, physical sickness, bad dreams and recurrent memories of someone trapped screaming and the constant feeling of being a failure, especially in relationships. The memory of the kiss comes back to him in dreams:

> That night, Rebus had one of his nightmarish dreams again. A long, lingering kiss was followed by an ejaculation, both in the dream and in reality. He woke up immediately afterwards and wiped himself down. The breath of the kiss was still around him, hanging to him like an aura. (53)

But also in reality, during sexual intercourse:

> Gill raised herself up and turned her head towards his, seeking a kiss. Gill, Gordon Reeve, seeking something from him, something he couldn't give. Despite the training, despite the years of practice, the years of work and persistence.
>
> 'John?'
>
> But he was elsewhere now, back inside the training camp, back trudging across a muddy field, the Boss screaming at him to speed up, back in that cell, watching a cockroach pace the begrimed floor, back in the helicopter, a bag over his head, the spray of the sea salty in his ears...
>
> 'John?'
>
> She turned round now, awkwardly, concerned. She saw the tears about to start from his eyes. She held his head to her.
>
> 'Oh, John. It doesn't matter. Really, it doesn't.'
>
> And a little later: 'Don't you like it that way?' (68-69)

As we have seen above, Rebus is metaphorically haunted by his past, but he is also, as I have pointed out earlier, literally haunted because Gordon Reeve reappears in his life, as a ghost from the past, and kidnaps five girls, including his daughter, to gain his revenge and punish Rebus. The names of the first four victims spell out a name SAMANTHA, and Reeve sends Rebus letters with clues one of them being: "For those who read between the times", which hints at the fact that the solution of the puzzle lies in the past. In addition, each letter contains a knot or a cross (a reference to the game of

noughts and crosses that Rebus and Reeve played during confinement)[77]. The past then does return upon the present in both a metaphorical and literal way linking the crime fiction of Rankin with the Gothic:

> Both gothic and detective fiction … share common assumptions: that there is an undisclosed event, a secret from the past; that the secret represents an occurrence or desire antithetical to the principles and position of the house (or family); that to know the secret is to understand the inexplicable and seemingly irrational events that occur in the present. Both forms bring hidden experiences from shadow to light. (Skenazy, qtd. in Spooner)

The novel is also a clear attempt at a re-writing of Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, even if the critics failed to notice it at the time of publication[78]. Rebus and Reeve can be seen as two halves of the same personality (Priestman, "Post-war British Crime Fiction" 183). They share the same background, but only one of them becomes successful. When Rebus suppresses all his memories of Gordon, the SAS training and the homosexual awakening, he as it were, suppresses the other side of his personality. It is not accidental that the isolated memories come back to Rebus mostly in dreams or during sexual intercourses (although not only) as this is the time when we release ourselves from the constraints of the super-ego and give ourselves to the pleasures of the id (cf. Freud, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and "The Ego and The Id").

Thus, Reeve, like Hyde, can be seen as representing the suppressed side of Rebus's personality. As Natasha Haarstick points out, the language in *Knots and Crosses* quotes Stevenson's novella to underline this parallel: the caging of Reeve (189) alludes to that of Hyde's (*Jekyll and Hyde* 60). Moreover, Rebus is "trying to get inside Gordon Reeve's skin" (193), but just as Jekyll finally realised that Hyde is a monster, so does Rebus: "Rebus had to admit, finally, that he was further away from his insane, murderous blood brother than ever before" (193). During their final confrontation Reeve seems massive, growing larger with each step until he consumes Rebus (220) (Haarstick,

[77] At the time of writing the novel Rankin was influenced by semiotics and Umberto Eco and hence saw the novel as a game played with the reader. Thus, he named the detective hero "Rebus" (a picture puzzle) and came up with a plot that revolved around word games (See *Rebus's Scotland* 9-10).

[78] This is also discussed briefly by Natascha Haarstick in "Tales of Doubles and Devils. Criminals in Ian Rankin's Rebus Series and Christopher's Brookmyre's *Boiling a Frog".*

"Tales of Doubles and Devils", 176). Again, this references Stevenson's novella in which Dr. Jekyll is finally consumed by Mr. Hyde. As he is strangling Rebus Reeves whispers to him: "'You're glad it's actually all over, aren't you, John? You're actually relieved'" (220) suggesting that Rebus can no longer fight with his dark side. However, in the end, Reeve dies and Rebus survives. The villain is shot dead, falls down on Rebus and smothers him. Rebus, who is unable to move, decides that it is finally safe to go to sleep – the sleep metaphorically transforms him into himself again.

The theme of the past returning upon the present is primarily employed in *Knots and Crosses*; however, it is also evident in subsequent novels of the series. Erin E. McDonald argues that "the entire series is driven by the basic idea that Rebus is a man who cannot escape the past – whether it be his own or that of his ancestors" (68). Indeed, Rebus's defining feature is his feeling of guilt over some events from the past. In *Hide and Seek* the voice of Reeve still haunts him: "A voice suddenly sounded in Rebus's mind: *you're the brother I never had*" (123). And in *Tooth and Nail* while the detective ponders on the details of the case that he is investigating, he hears a distant echo of a past case: "*There are clues everywhere*. The monster from his past, rearing up out of the dark deep waters of memory" (155-156). At the end of *Knots and Crosses* Rebus puts his brother behind bars and in *The Black Book*, Michael comes out of prison "bringing with him bad memories of a period in John Rebus's life he'd rather not remember" (8). When an old friend from the army appears Rebus suddenly remembers everything, "the whole black comedy of his past" (15).

Similarly, in the later novels Rebus is haunted by the memories of old cases:

> The Spaven case … it had dragged Rebus backwards through time, forcing him to confront memory, then to wonder if this memory was playing tricks. It remained unfinished business, twenty years on. Like Bible John. He shook his head, tried to clear it of history, and found himself thinking of Allan Mitchison, of falling headlong on to spiked rails, watching them rise towards you, arms held fast to a chair so there was only one choice left: did you confront doom open-eyed or closed? (*Black and Blue* 41)

The memories of the old cases are inextricably connected with those of the victims and their lives. In *Black and Blue,* we find out that, like many other police officers, Rebus hears the screams of the victims:

> The way a lot of them saw it, when you worked a murder investigation, your client was the deceased, mute and cold, but still screaming out for justice. It had to be true, because sometimes if you listened hard enough you could hear them screaming. Sitting in his chair by the window, Rebus had heard many a despairing cry. (51)

As Gill Plain writes of the novel, "the detective's pain is an integral part of the narrative…his pain emerges from an inability to distance himself from the suffering of others. Although he tries to resist it, he is haunted by the victims he encounters, and he takes their pain onto himself, tearing himself apart through his excessive identification and feelings of responsibility" (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 39).

Moreover, each time the detective pursues the investigation he ventures into the past. In *Black and Blue* obsession with the old case sends him "back in time" and he spends "less and less time in the present" admitting that "sometimes it took all his strength to pull him back to the here and now" (52). This immersion in the past is something typical of police officers:

> Jethro Tull: "Living in the Past". Rebus had been a slave to that rhythm for far too long. It was the work that did it. As a detective, he lived in people's pasts: crime committed before he arrived on the scene; witnesses' memories ransacked. He had become a historian, and the role had bled into his personal life. Ghosts, bad dreams, echoes. (*Black and Blue* 461)

The word "ghost(s)" appears countless times throughout the whole series. In *Dead Souls*, one of the bleaker novels of the series, ghosts that haunt Rebus take a more physical form. (The title seems to be significant here). In *The Hanging Garden*, which precedes *Dead Souls*, Rebus's old colleague and friend, Jack Morton, is shot dead. Rebus feels responsible for his death and this feeling of guilt transforms itself into the apparitions of ghosts. At the beginning of *Dead Souls*, Jack has been dead for three months, and Rebus sees him everywhere:

> And suddenly there were ghosts swirling around the room, just on the periphery of Rebus's vision and chief amongst them Jack Morton. Jack, his old colleague, now three months dead. […] A friend who refused to stay buried. The Farmer followed Rebus's eyes, but saw nothing. (16)

During the funeral of another cop, Jim Margolies, he sees Jack Morton "standing there, seeming as young as when the two had first met" (20). The ghostly apparition of Jack also haunts him at home: "Without opening his eyes, Rebus knew Jack Morton was seated in the chair across from him" (41). In the following novels "Rebus's ghosts" remain metaphoric rather than ontological although in the next novel *Set in Darkness* it is mentioned that Rebus still sees them:

> The TV was on with the sound muted. His chair was by the window, cordless phone and TV remote on the floor next to it. Some nights the ghosts came, settling themselves on the sofa or cross-legged on the floor. Not enough to fill the room, but more than he'd have liked. Villains, dead colleagues. And now Cafferty was back in his life, as if resurrected. Rebus, chewing looked to the ceiling, asking God what he'd done to deserve it all. He liked a bit of laugh, God, even if it was the laughter of cruelty. (294)

Unable to cope with all the ghosts of the past and his guilty conscience Rebus escapes into alcohol, cigarettes and music, but he also makes himself as emotionally detached as possible. He distances himself from his colleagues and family.

However, it is not only Rebus who is haunted by his past; both Edinburgh and Scotland are full of ghosts. In the epilogue to *Dead Souls*, Rebus reflects on the construction of the new parliament building as he walks towards the building site in Holyrood:

> Behind it, he could make out a couple of the Greenfield tower-blocks, and behind those Salisbury Crags. The sun had set, but it wasn't quite dark. The twilight could last an age at this time of year. […] He couldn't be sure where everything would go, but he knew there would be a newspaper building, a theme park, and the Parliament building. They'd all be ready for the twenty-first century, or so predictions went. Taking Scotland into the new millennium. Rebus tried to find within himself a tiny cheer of hope, but found it stifled by his old cynicism.
>
> No longer twilight now. Darkness had fallen. Shadows seemed to rise all around him as a bell tolled in the distance. The blood that had seeped into the stone, the bones that lay twisting in their eternity, the stories and horrors of the city's past and present…he knew they'd all come rising in the digger's steel jaws, bubbling to the surface as the city began its slow ascent towards being a nation's capital once again. (481)

Although Rebus tells himself that "It's the Old Town, that's all" (481), the ghosts of the past return in the next novel *Set in Darkness* in which an old skeleton is discovered hidden behind the wall in the fireplace of Queensberry House which is to become part of the new Scottish parliament. The house once belonged to the Duke of Queensberry who was the architect of the 1707 Act of Union. Rankin brings back an old legend according to which on the night of the signing one of the servants was killed, roasted in the fireplace and eaten by the son of the duke (9-10). The skeleton turns out to be more recent and dates back to somewhere between 1978 and 1979, so it not only evokes the alleged murder and cannibalism from 1707, but also the devolution referendum of 1979 which revealed a big division in Scottish society between those who supported the Union and those who did not. Thus, the skeleton found in the fireplace serves as a metaphor for the ghosts and skeletons hidden in the past of Edinburgh and all of Scotland[79]. The ghosts in the Rebus novels are gothic representations of a troubled mind, but also draw the reader's attention to things hidden under the surface; they embody the anxieties present in the society, which is something that the Gothic genre has always done.

The theme of the past returning upon the present can also be found in the fiction of other Tartan Noir writers. Denise Mina's *Garnethill* trilogy[80] tells the story of Maureen O'Donnell who was abused in her childhood by her father. The memories of the abuse haunt her both day and night gradually pushing her into alcoholism. At the end of the first novel Maureen learns that her father has returned to Glasgow and the subsequent two novels follow her struggle to face and accept her past. Also, Paul Johnston's characters cannot let go of the past. Quintilian Dalrymple, a cop-turned-private investigator from the series that began with *The Body Politic*, is haunted by the memory both of the death of his lover who he failed to save and of the revenge that he took on her murderer.

However, although this theme is a recurrent feature in Tartan Noir narratives, I do not mean to suggest that it is characteristic only of Scottish crime fiction. On the contrary, it is pivotal to the genre of the crime novel as the detective' s investigation is always, in one way or another, focused on the

[79] This argument is also put forward by MacDonald 74.

[80] The so-called "Garnethill trilogy" consists of three novels: *Garnethill* (1998), *Exile* (2000), *Resolution* (2001).

past as it is either reconstructing past events or looking for the events that led to present actions.

However, it is not only the theme of the past returning upon the present that links Gothic and crime fiction, another link is the unstable protagonist. As Spooner points out, "when Gothic and crime fiction coincide, the protagonist is often racked by guilt, obsession, paranoia, or other psychological disturbances, or his or her identity is misplaced or disguised" (250). Accordingly, Rebus is an obsessive individual who is often driven by feelings of guilt and paranoia:

> He wanted a drink, wanted one desperately. But he wasn't going to have one, not yet. Maybe later, maybe sometime. People died and you couldn't bring them back. Some of them died violently, cruelly young, without knowing why they'd been chosen. Rebus felt surrounded by loss. All the ghosts… yelling at him… begging him… shrieking… […] He knew he'd been crying and pulled out a handkerchief. (*Black and Blue* 381)

Moreover, from the very beginning Rebus is presented as a dubious hero: somebody who is on the side of righteousness, but also on the side of darkness. In the first novel of the series, *Knots and Crosses* we find him stealing bread rolls and milk from his local shop: "Nothing in the world tasted as good for breakfast as stolen rolls with some butter and jam and a mug of milky coffee. Nothing tasted better than a venial sin" (37-38).

What is more, the narrative is constructed in such a way that the reader is supposed to think that Rebus might be the culprit. Firstly, as I have already mentioned, he is fighting repressed memories, so we get a sense that in his past there is some dark mystery. Secondly, during sexual intercourse, he almost suffocates his lover and does not succeed only because he passes out (120-121), and finally, one of the rooms in his flat remains permanently closed[81].

This dual representation of the protagonist is continued in the subsequent novels of the series. As Petrie rightly observes: "Despite an apparent obsession with justice, Rebus […] often appears to have more in

[81] When Rankin wrote *Knots and Crosses* he did not see it as the beginning of the series, but rather a stand-alone book, so it was possible for him to make the detective hero the suspect. Of course, the reader today will not see Rebus as a potential suspect as he or she will be aware that the novel is the first one in a series.

common with the villains he is pursuing" (153). Sometimes his crimes are rather petty like when he steals rolls and milk from his local shop, or when he locks out the cat of his former girlfriend (the cat ends up dead), but sometimes they are far more serious. For example, in *The Black Book* he uses a rehabilitated paedophile, Andrew McPhail, to catch Cafferty (a dangerous gangster and Rebus's nemesis). As a result, McPhail ends up in the hospital badly beaten up. Rebus, however, feels no real remorse; on the contrary, he feels that McPhail got what he deserved (335). In *Black and Blue,* he sticks up for his colleague and protégé, Brian Holmes, although he has beaten up a suspect during questioning (10-13). "There's a darkness in you" (157) is what one of the characters says to Rebus in *Set in Darkness*. Although his response is a typical attempt at escape into humour: "Probably all the beer" (157), her next remark strikes a chord: "We all come from darkness, you have to remember that, and we sleep during the night to escape the fact. I'll bet you have trouble sleeping at night, don't you?" (157). Rebus is partially aware of his dark side; for example, in *Black and Blue* he acknowledges his own conflicting thoughts about rape:

> Rape was all about power, killing, too, in its way. And wasn't power the ultimate male fantasy? And didn't he sometimes dream of it, too? He'd seen the postmortem photos of Angie Riddell, and the first thought that had come to him, the thought he'd had to push past, was: *good body*. It had bothered him, because in that instant she'd been just another object. Then the pathologist had got to work, and she had stopped being even that. (190)

Moreover, Rebus often takes the law into his own hands, which means that, inevitably, he finds himself the subject of investigations. For example, in *Black and Blue* he is implicated in the alleged framing of a criminal, Lennie Spaven, by his former mentor Lawson Geddes and in *Exit Music* he is suspected of attacking Cafferty and putting him into a coma. This theme of Rebus as simultaneous hunter and haunted recurs throughout the series. Petrie believes this serves to intensify his feelings of vulnerability (153); however, in my opinion this presentation of the character serves to underline his moral ambiguity.

The double

The motif of the double pervades the Rebus series[82]. As we have seen above, one example is the dual representation of the main character. Moreover, in *Knots and Crosses* Rebus is doubled with Gordon Reeve. Another example of the exploration of duality in the novels is the paring of Rebus and Siobhain Clarke whose relationship is built on a series of oppositions: male/female, old/young, Scottish/English, working-class/middle-class. In the "post-retirement novels" Rebus is also contrasted with Malcolm Fox whose approach to police work is the opposite of his own. This contrast extends beyond their work: Fox is a recovering alcoholic who lives sober, while Rebus maintains a close, if troubled, relationship with alcohol.

However, the dual nature of Rebus's character is first and foremost explored through his relationship with his adversary – a dangerous gangster called Morris Gerald Cafferty (also known as "Big Ger") who rules the underworld of Edinburgh. Cafferty was first introduced in the third novel of the series, *Tooth and Nail,* but it is in *The Black Book* that he emerges as a fully formed character and, as Rankin puts it, "the epitome of moral and spiritual corruption" (*The Black Book,* Introduction ix). On the one hand, the relationship between the two characters seems to be that of the detective hero and his archenemy (or nemesis):

> Nobody wanted to nail Morris Gerald Cafferty (known to all as Big Ger) as badly as John Rebus did. He wanted a full-scale crucifixion. He wanted to be holding the spear, giving one last poke just to make sure the bastard really was dead. Cafferty was scum, but clever scum. (*The Black Book* 28)

Yet when Rebus decides to question Cafferty, instead of calling him to the police station he visits him at home and even joins Cafferty in his jogging practice (Chapter 20). Despite the fact that the two characters stand on two different sides of the law there seems to be a special bond between them. For one thing they spend quite a lot of time together. Repeatedly throughout the series they visit each other at home, sometimes even sharing a drink. Despite the fact that at one point Rebus puts Cafferty in jail, he continues to visit him in prison. In *Set in Darkness* the Assistant Governor of the prison observes:

[82] The use of the motif of the double in Rankin's Rebus series is also discussed by Haarstick in "Tales of Doubles and Devils".

"[I]t's more than just the usual cop/villain thing with you two, isn't it?" which forces Rebus to admit that: "'Sometimes I feel closer to that bastard than I do….' He bit off the ending *to my own family*" (309). The uncanny similarity between the two characters is also observed by Rebus's colleagues: "Rebus himself knew the rumours: that he was too close to Cafferty, that they were too much alike in so many ways" (*Resurrection Men* 51). "Feeling was, their shared history ran too deep. Some knew them for enemies; others thought them too similar…and way too familiar with one another" (*The Naming of the Dead* 34). A Siobhan puts it, "He is more like you than you care to admit" (*The Naming of the Dead* 166). In *Exit Music* there is even a suggestion that they look similar (312).

At the end of *The Black Book* Rebus puts Cafferty away; however, he subsequently "gets locked into a complex psychological power struggle with his adversity [sic]" (Petrie 154). In *Mortal Causes* Cafferty puts pressure on Rebus to find those responsible for killing his son. This situation is reversed in *The Hanging Garden* in which the detective asks the gangster to help him find the person responsible for putting his daughter into a coma (Sammy is the victim of a hit-and-run incident). In exchange for his help Rebus agrees to be "Cafferty's man", an action symbolically akin to making a pact with the devil (177). Cafferty keeps his promise and delivers the person responsible to Rebus. Although Rebus decides at the last moment against hurting (killing?) the culprit (it turns out to be a harmless little boy who did not mean to kill anyone), the fact that he even considered taking the law into his own hands and that he asked Cafferty for help in this matter will forever hang over their relationship. As Cafferty's right hand man puts it, "You didn't go to Mr Cafferty because you wanted justice. You went out of *revenge*" (493). Cafferty represents the darker side of the human soul and is always there to torment but also tempt Rebus to cross over to the dark side.

Accepting Cafferty's help is the point of no return, something that Rebus acknowledges much later on when in *The Naming of the Dead* Siobhain has her own dealings with the gangster: "When he gets his claws into you Shiv, they don't come out. All these years you've known me, you must have seen that" (340). However, Siobhain just like Rebus yields to the temptation because: "He [Cafferty] was offering me something that I knew I couldn't get from the law" (341). As a result, one of the characters ends up dead and even though it might not be what Siobhain really wanted, she is partially responsible for the death.

In many ways, Cafferty resembles a devil-like figure, something that is suggested in *The Black Book* and is reinforced more and more as the series develops. Whereas *Knots and Crosses* and *Hide and Seek* were strongly influenced by Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Black Book* is a homage to another Scottish writer – James Hogg and his *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (Rankin acknowledges this in an introduction to the 2005 edition of the novel).

In Hogg's novel the main protagonist, Robert Wringham, is manipulated and tricked into committing murders by a stranger who calls himself Gil-Martin. Gil-Martin appears after Reverend Wringhim, (Robert's adoptive father who is most likely his real father), declares Robert to be a member of "the elect" and so predestined to eternal salvation. Gil-Martin soon directs all of Robert's pre-existing tendencies and beliefs to evil purposes, convincing him that it is his mission to "cut sinners off with the sword", (122) and that murder can be the correct course of action in achieving this.

There are many hints in the text that suggest that Gil-Martin is a devil in disguise. He is a shape-shifter and can assume various forms including that of the sinner himself. He is also a mind reader and knows people's thoughts and opinions. Different characters in the novel recognise Gil-Martin as the devil. Robert's brother George, for example, calls for Robert to "confess that the devil was that friend who told you I was here […] No one else could possibly know of my being here" (44). When Robert meets Gil-Martin for the first time he feels some invisible power that draws him towards the stranger, "something like the force of enchantment", which he cannot resist (116). After the meeting, Reverend Wringhim finds him greatly changed and declares at once that "Satan, I fear, has been busy with you" (121). Moreover, Gil-Martin himself admits that he does not pray (128), has his "own bible" in red writing (124), and that he has no parents "save one, whom I do not acknowledge" (129).

However, there is also a suggestion in the novel that Gil-Martin is not the devil, but merely a figment of Robert's imagination, a manifestation of his evil side, his Mr Hyde. If that is the case then Robert, similarly to Dr Jekyll, suffers from a split personality. As any human being, he is torn between good and evil. He is at the same time extremely religious, a devoted Calvinist, and a ruthless killer.

The plot of *The Black Book* echoes *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. When Rebus's colleague and sidekick Brian Holmes is put into a coma after being attacked in the car park of his favourite restaurant, the Elvis-themed Heartbreak Café, Rebus sets out to find the person responsible. Brian's girlfriend, Nell Stapleton, tells Rebus that Brian had a "Black Book", a small notebook in which he kept interesting snippets of information. She suggests that Brian was attacked because of something in it. When Rebus recovers the book, he discovers that in his private time Brian was conducting an investigation into the fire that had destroyed the seedy Central Hotel five years before. Although all the staff and customers had been accounted for, an unidentified body was found in the remains. The autopsy revealed that the dead man had been shot through the heart.

In the course of his investigation, Rebus discovers that the dead body belonged to Tam Robertson, a criminal who used to work for Cafferty. Moreover, it turns out that he was shot during a poker game by Aengus Gibson (also known as "Black Aengus") – "one of Scotland's most eligible young men" (64) and the sole heir to the Gibson brewing business. Aengus was a wild drunk at the time of the fire but has since reformed. Before Rebus can confront Aengus, he commits suicide. When the detective reads his journal, it becomes clear that Aengus has killed himself because he thought he was about to be arrested for the murder of Robertson. The journal also reveals that it was Cafferty who forced the gun into Aengus's hand, getting his fingerprints on it. Yet, despite the fact that it was Cafferty who pulled the trigger, Aengus confesses in his diary that he is not completely innocent:

> You know, dear friend or foe, I liked the feel of that gun in my hand. And when Cafferty put my finger on that trigger …he *did* squeeze it. I'm certain of that. But supposing he hadn't? Would I still have fired, with his strong unfailing hand on mine? (309).

The plot of Rankin's novel references that of Hogg in that it is also a story of an innocent person who is cajoled by a devil-like figure (Cafferty) into committing a murder. Moreover, part of the narrative consists of the confessions of the unwitting murderer, or "justified sinner", which are narrated in the first person. Nevertheless, the similarities end there. *The Black Book* is not so much a re-writing of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions* as an example of a text which uses some of the tropes present in Hogg's novel.

Although Cafferty bears some resemblance to the devil, he is merely a devilish villain rather than a supernatural entity. Moreover, there is also no ambiguity in the story as to whether Cafferty really exists, or whether he is an evil double, a figment of Aengus's imagination.

The novel also deals with one of the themes present in Hogg's novel: the subtle difference between justice and evil. At the end of the novel Rebus uses Andrew McPhail, a former child molester, as an unwitting bait to frame Cafferty. He does it because he believes that McPhail deserves punishment for his past deeds and does not accept that fact that McPhail has been rehabilitated. He has his own idea of what is just and right:

> After almost an hour, he started the engine, mostly because he was getting cold. He didn't go anywhere except for in his head, and slowly but surely, with backtracking and rerouting along the way, the idea came to him. Let the punishment fit the crime. Yes, but not Cafferty's punishment. No, not Cafferty's. Andrew McPhail's. (310)

As Hogg says, "To the wicked, all things are wicked; but to the just, all things are just and right" (*Private Memoirs and Confessions* 13; opening epigraph to *The Black Book*). It seems then that Rebus is the real "justified sinner" in the novel; however, the action he takes against McPhail has no religious justification behind it.

Even if Cafferty is not a supernatural entity, his characterisation as a devilish villain, or a devil-like figure is continued throughout the series. For example, in *Fleshmarket Close* Cafferty is depicted sitting in a Jacuzzi with built-in lights that change colours: "'Red suits you,' Rebus stated. 'The Mestopheles look?' Cafferty chuckled" (219). Cafferty's "chuckle" is his trademark and brings to mind a devilish laughter. In *The Naming of the Dead*, one but last novel of the series, Rebus seems to be completely overwhelmed by Cafferty and unable to resist his influence. Cafferty is yet again portrayed in a demonic way: "He started chuckling again, his face lit from below the dashboard. He seemed all shadows and smudges, a preparatory sketch for some grinning gargoyle" (208). Moreover, we find out that he has a "hypnotic voice" (312). Rebus recognizes this and thinks, "I'm in Hell. […] This is what happens when you die and go downstairs. You get your own personal devil…" (208). As if answering Rebus's thoughts Cafferty cries "Salvation awaits!" and drives into a hall of the church (208). As in the case of Robert Wringhaim the

effect Cafferty has on Rebus is observed by others. Siobhain for example observes, "He does something to you…your voice, your face" (93).

Despite the fact that Rebus clearly despises Cafferty, calling him "the disease", (*The Black Book* 192), or saying that "he carries a virus – everyone he touches gets hurt in some way" (*The Naming of the Dead* 152), the bond between the two characters seems to grow stronger over the series. In *Set in Darkness* Cafferty is released from prison, supposedly because he has cancer, and despite the fact that Rebus is not happy to see him out, he feels for the criminal too:

> Cafferty's scowl looked even more pained. But it wasn't that…he was in real pain. He bent forward, hand going to his stomach. […] 'You okay?' Rebus asked trying not to sound too concerned.
>
> Cafferty caught his breath at last, patted Rebus's forearm as though reassuring a friend.
>
> 'Bit of indigestion, that's all.' He picked up his drink again. 'We're all on the way out, eh, Strawman? […] I'll bet most of your CID colleagues are younger, college-educated. The old ways don't work anymore, that's what they will tell you.' He opened his arms. 'If I'm a liar, let me hear it.'
>
> Rebus stared at him, than looked down. 'You're not a liar.'
>
> Cafferty seemed pleased to have found common ground. (336)

In *The Naming of the Dead*, Cafferty repeatedly visits Rebus at his home offering him help with the investigation and the detective relies on the information obtained from the gangster. The similarity between the two characters is even more evident than in the previous novels:

> He kept watching Cafferty during the rest of the silent ride back into town. The man had killed and got away with it – probably more time than Rebus knew. He'd fed victims to the hungry pigs on a Borders farm. He'd ruined countless lives, served four jail terms. He'd been a savage since teenage years, served an apprentice ship as enforcer to the London mob… So why the hell was Rebus feeling sorry for him? (213)

The answer is because he recognizes that they have so much in common. Despite his contempt for the gangster's actions Rebus feels certain ties with Cafferty because they both belong to the same generation and share

a similar working-class background. They might stand on different sides of the law, but both men are aging and find the world around them less and less comprehensible. Additionally, they both need to fight to defend their positions: Rebus in the police, Cafferty in the criminal world. Cafferty recognizes that bond too and asks Rebus out for a drink. When Rebus turns down the invitation Cafferty snorts but says nothing. "All the same Rebus could tell the man wanted him to change his mind. Wanted them to have that drink together, sitting opposite one another as the night circled them on tiptoe" (213). And later on, when Rebus states "Judgement day's coming Cafferty. For you and me both" (350). Cafferty shakes his head and replies: "I see us in a couple of deckchairs, somewhere hot but with ice-cold drinks. Reminiscing about the sparring we used to do, back in the days when the good guys thought they knew the bad guys" (350).

To sum up, the relationship between Rebus and Cafferty is characterised by mutual dependency (Petrie 154). This is emphasised by the fact that Cafferty saves Rebus's life twice, and the last novel of the original series, *Exit Music*, concludes with Rebus giving Cafferty a heart massage, the last words of the novel being: "'Tell me he's going to be alright'" (380). In *Standing in Another Man's Grave,* we learn that Rebus did save Cafferty's life, and the gangster feels so grateful that they regularly go out drinking together. Clearly one cannot exist without the other.

Brian Diemert points out that: "It is often the case in hard-boiled fiction that only the finest of distinctions allows us to separate detective from criminal in any real moral or ethical sense" (176). Stefano Tani argues that the detective and the criminal are two sides of the same coin: each depends on the other for his existence. The murderer, in effect, "invents" the detective who must chase the murderer; in other words, the detective exists because the murderer exists (*The Doomed Detective* 6). However, the motif of the double also invokes Gothic fiction. As Spooner points out: "The doubling of the detective with the criminal is another feature of crime fiction drawn from Gothic convention" (251). Also, Lee Horsley notes that: "The noir thriller is very often, like both *Frankenstein* and *Jekyll and Hyde*, a fantasy of duality" (230).

In the Rebus novels the theme of duality also pervades the presentation of Edinburgh. As I have shown in the previous chapter, Edinburgh is presented as a "schizophrenic city", "the place of Jekyll and Hyde". On the surface it is a genteel place; however, underneath this façade lurks menace.

Rankin's interest lies in the "hidden city" (*Hide and Seek* 52). Rankin has repeatedly stressed that he wrote about Edinburgh "to make sense of it" (See for example *Rebus's Scotland* 83). Bearing that in mind, we should note that his choice of the detective as his protagonist is not accidental. As Petrie points out, "The figure of the detective provides an appropriate formal device by which the city can be explored" (139). As an officer of the law, Rebus has access to various areas of the city and different layers of its society. Thus, he can move easily between its underworld and its elite. Sometimes his duties take him to a housing estate on the edges of the city whereas on another occasion he is invited to a clay pigeon shoot at the home of the Scottish Office's Permanent Secretary. As Rankin himself puts it: "I wanted to use a character who would have access to all areas; to rich and poor – to the New Town and housing estates – and I thought a copper was perfect in a way that a doctor wouldn't be" (Bruce-Gardyne).

The city that Rebus uncovers is a city full of contrasts: it is the city of the rich and the poor, the old and the new, the past and the present. Rebus explores both the underworld and "the overworld" of the city only to discover that the two are closely connected. For example, in *Hide and Seek* his investigation leads him into the discovery of a private underground club where highly connected people can put bets on illegal fights. The fighters come from socially deprived areas and are paid in money and drugs "to knock the daylights out of one another and keep quiet about it afterwards" (244). There are also "guest bedrooms" where the club members can take sexual advantage of "rent boys" brought back from Calton Hill[83] while the spectators watch through a two-way mirror. As Rebus finds out, the club is attended by key members of Edinburgh's elite. Some of the club members are, ironically, the same public-spirited businessmen who have been helping to finance the anti-drug campaign. The club is called "Hyde's club", which is a non-too-subtle reference to Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

In fact, there are more intertextual references to Stevenson's masterpiece. The title itself references thoughts of Dr. Jekyll's lawyer, Mr. Utterson during his search for Mr. Hyde: "If he be Mr. Hyde, […] I shall be Mr. Seek" (264). The novel opens with a quote from *Jekyll and Hyde* and goes on to use quotes from the novella at the start of each section. Moreover,

[83] Calton Hill is located in central Edinburgh, just to the east of Princes Street. It used to be infamous for being inhabited by male sex workers, drug users and homeless people.

Rankin borrows many surnames from Stevenson – Poole, Enfield, Carew, Lanyon and Utterson. Stevenson's childhood home, Heriot Row, is also mentioned. However, most blatantly, one of the characters, James Carew, who is a successful estate agent and respected citizen by day and one of Hyde's members by night, leaves a suicide note that reads: "If I am the chief of sinners, I am the chief of sufferers also" (181).

The novel becomes an obvious re-writing of Stevenson's novella (Rebus is even reading Stevenson's work in the book). Rankin admits that it was his intention as with *Knots and Crosses* reviewers had failed to notice the relationship between the two texts: "I was determined to try once more to drag Stevenson's story back to its natural home of Edinburgh, and to update the theme for a modern-day audience" (*Hide and Seek*, Introduction xi)[84].

However, it is not only the duality of the human soul that is depicted in this novel, but also the dual nature of the city and its society. Towards the end of the story Finlay Andrews, Rankin's Mr. Hyde, confesses:

> I suppose they'd have a job finding a judge to try me, fifteen good men and true to stand as jury. They've all been to Hyde's. All of them. Looking for a game with just a little more edge than those played upstairs. I got the idea from a friend in London. He runs a similar establishment, though with perhaps less edge than Hyde's. There's a lot of new money in Edinburgh, John. Money for all. Would you like money? Would you like a sharper edge to your life? Don't tell me you are happy in your little flat, with your music and your books and your bottles of wine. (247)

The end of *Hide and Seek* leaves Rebus disillusioned. Although the policeman is able to arrest Hyde's owner and some of its high-profile members, all the prisoners die suspicious deaths: the scandal is covered up. The whole truth about Hyde's Club remains hidden and the villains are never brought to justice. Even Rebus considers giving up the chase – the novel ends with him holding a lit match over the photographic evidence from the club, but we never find out whether he decides to burn it and thus sustain the status quo (261).

[84] Interestingly, one of the ten mysterious Edinburgh book sculptures, which I mentioned earlier, was inspired by Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* and made from a copy of *Hide and Seek*. It can be viewed in the R. L. Stevenson section of the Writers' Museum.

The theme of societal corruption is raised in a few other novels. For example, in *Let It Bleed* the detective investigates three suicides and one murder which at first glance seem to be unrelated, but as it turns out are all linked to a large-scale fraud that involves key members of Edinburgh's political and economic life such as the Lord Provost and the Permanent Secretary of the Scottish Office. Once again, the different layers of the society are linked: "Scotland was a machine, a big machine if you looked from the outside. But from the inside, it assumed a new form – small, intimate, not that many moving parts, and all of them interconnected quite intricately" (258).

Furthermore, in *Let It Bleed*, in a very Gothic way, Rankin uses the detective's body as a metaphor of the rotten state of society: Rebus has an abscess in his jaw, which can only be lanced if a hole is drilled into one of Rebus's teeth. The poison in Rebus's tooth becomes the symbol for the poison that has to be bled out of society.[85] Whenever Rebus feels that somebody is dishonest or untrustworthy he unwillingly touches the bad tooth and mentions the poison still left in the bone:

> Lauderdale sat up as best he could. 'Let it go', he advised. 'For once in your dunder-headed life, just walk away'.
>
> Rebus put the chair back where he'd found it. 'I can't do that Frank.' He pushed his tongue into the hole again. The poison hadn't all drained yet. (223)

The dentist's comment: "Drill into the poison, and you relieve the pressure" (199) corresponds to Rebus's method of investigation. Although his superiors (like DCI Lauderdale in the quotation above) do not want him to follow up his findings, it does not stop Rebus from purifying the society from its poison.

Throughout the series Rankin presents the Scottish capital as a place infested with crime, a representation of a society penetrated by evil:

> It was everywhere, crime. It was the life-force and the blood and the balls of life: to cheat, to edge; to take that body-swerve at authority, to kill. The higher up you climbed into crime, the more subtly you began to move back towards legitimacy, until a handful of lawyers only could crack open your system, and they were always affordable, always on hand to be bribed. Dostoevsky had

[85] This idea was put forward by Natascha Haarstick at the "Crime Fiction Here and There, Now and Then" conference that took place at the University of Gdańsk in November 2012.

> known all that, clever old bastard. He had felt the stick burning from both ends. (*Knots and Crosses* 39)

This is a very Gothic vision of society. In Rankin's fiction crime is not only everywhere, but also everybody is somehow implicated in it. And Rebus is no different:

> He was trying to figure out who or what was responsible for the deaths of Willie and Dixie. This weightless creature he carried? The lads themselves? The police for giving chase? The Lord Provost for agreeing to it all? Maybe even the stepmother for driving Kristie away? Except that it hadn't just been the stepmother, it had been some realization about the Lord Provost himself…Maybe it was the system, the same system Sammy so passionately attacked. A system that had failed Willie and Dixie as surely as it nurtured people like Sir Ian Hunter and Robbie Mathieson. […] Or maybe…just maybe it had been Rebus himself. (*Let It Bleed* 278)

Rankin has clearly been inspired by William McIlvanney and his *Laidlaw* trilogy (*Laidlaw* [1977], *The Papers of Tony Veitch* [1983], and *Strange Loyalties* [1991]) which also addresses the questions of guilt and innocence. In *Laidlaw* the plot follows the investigation of the murder of a teenage girl. The murderer is apprehended; however, the main character, DI Jack Laidlaw, feels that most of the characters in the story are somehow implicated in the murder. When his colleague asks him if he really believes that, he answers: "I don't know, but what I do know is that more folk than two were present at that murder. And what charges do you bring against the others?" (274). He also hints that they are also somehow guilty: "Then there's you with your deodorized attitudes. And me. Hiding in suburbia. What's so clever about us that we can afford to be flip about other people?" (274).

This world view is shared by other Tartan Noir writers. The question: "Who are the real criminals?" is also addressed by Denise Mina in her *Garnethill* trilogy. The main protagonist, Maureen O'Donnell, is an incest survivor yet her family refuses to believe that she was abused by her father and would gladly put her into care. In a way, their denial becomes as big a crime as her father's abuse. In the first part of the trilogy Maureen finds her boyfriend murdered in her living room. The police who are supposed to be investigating the murder treat her with an open hostility and contempt, even when it becomes clear that Maureen is not responsible for the death. The

investigating detective tries to manipulate her and even use the information that she had received psychiatric treatment as a weapon against her (*Garnethill* 40-41). Later on, it becomes clear that the police are not so much interested in finding Douglas's killer as in finding someone who can take the fall and they are prepared to use all methods possible to achieve their goal. Throughout the trilogy the police are characterised by their careless and ruthless approach. For example, during the investigation into the sexual abuse that took place in one of the city's mental hospitals, the police insist on interviewing Siobhain, a surviving rape victim, who as a result is left almost catatonic. As it turns out, Siobhan and the other patients were abused by one of the doctors, somebody whose duty was to care for them. Similarly, while the police are entrusted with a duty of care toward victims of crime, their conduct mirrors that of the perpetrator, as they exploit their authority and position to intimidate those they are meant to protect.

The interest in the issues of guilt and innocence features prominently in other works by Mina and is central to reading crime novels of such writers as Paul Johnston, Louise Welsh or Val McDermid. Indeed, it seems to be one of the main thematic interests in Scottish crime fiction.

To sum up, the presentation of Edinburgh as a Jekyll/Hyde city is a running feature throughout the Rebus series. This is also underlined by Sandrock who argues that the concept of the "Caledonian Antisyzygy" features prominently in Rankin's Rebus novels as they are marked by the extreme social, cultural and architectural oppositions that are said to shape the city of Edinburgh and its people (83). Arguably, the motif of divided city can be found in the fiction of other Tartan Noir writers. For example, William McIlvanney painted a similar picture of Glasgow in his *Laidlaw* trilogy:

> He felt bruised with contradictions. Where he had been was being mocked by where he was. Yet both were Glasgow. He has always liked the place, but he had never been more aware of it than tonight. Its force came to him in contradictions. Glasgow was home-made ginger biscuits and Jennifer Lawson dead in the park. It was the sententious niceness of the Commander and the threatened abrasiveness of Laidlaw. It was Milligan insensitive as a mobile slab of cement, and Mrs Lawson, witless with hurt. It was the right hand knocking you down and the left hand picking you up, while the mouth alternated apology and threat. (*Laidlaw* 72)

And Quintin Jardine has demonstrated a similar sentiment about Edinburgh:

> As a city, Edinburgh is a two-faced bitch.
>
> There is the face on the picture postcards, sunny bright and shining at the world like a toothpaste ad.
>
> But on the other side of the looking glass lies the other face: the real world where all too often the wind blows cold, the rain lashes down and the poverty shows on the outside. (*Skinner's Rules* 3)

In addition, Paul Johnston has explored the dual nature of the city in his futuristic anti-utopia *Body Politic.* The novel is set in a fictitious Edinburgh of the future which is governed by the Council of City Guardians (a body which evolved from the Enlightenment Party that won the last election). Johnston shows the city as split into two: the impressive historic city centre, which is devoted solely to the tourists, is brightly lit, clean and safe while the districts around it, which are inhabited by ordinary citizens, are poor, dilapidated and dark. In the course of his investigation, the private detective Quintilian Dalrymple, moves between the two exposing the hidden truth behind "Enlightenment Edinburgh".

One could multiply the examples of such a portrayal of both Edinburgh and Glasgow. The use of the motif of the double in the description of Scotland's urban spaces shows that the texts put under the umbrella of Tartan Noir are mostly written in the tradition of American hard-boiled detective novels which examine the juxtaposition of what is seen and what is hidden (See Chapter 2).

Scottish Gothic

As I have shown above, the theme of duality is central to the reading of the Rebus novels[86]. With his interest in the double Rankin presents a resonance that is particularly Scottish. For a long time now, Scottish literature has been

[86] See also Diemert 179.

strongly influenced by the Gothic and one of the recurrent thematic features has been the motif of the double[87].

The emergence of the Gothic aesthetic in Scotland can be related to two historical events: the 1707 Union between the parliaments of England and Scotland and the Jacobite Rebellions that followed. These two historical events created a divided nation, split into three different groups: the supporters of the Jacobite cause, Unionists, and finally those who remained undecided in their allegiances. Consequently, the nation lost its coherent identity with the people split between the idea of being "Scottish" and that of being "British". In "Scottish Gothic" Angela Wright observes: "These events [the Union and the Jacobite Rebellions] were of course intimately connected: together, their shadows were cast over the literary impossibility of a coherent Scottish identity" (73).

A similar observation can be found in the entry on Scottish Gothic in *The Handbook to Gothic Literature*: "The Union produced a situation in which the Scottish national identity was felt to be slipping away, like sand through the fingers" (Mack 208). Wright argues that nineteenth century Scottish writers explored this national identity crisis by using Gothic conventions:

> With time and perspective, the nineteenth-century fiction of Walter Scott, James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson began to exhume this crisis in a particularly Gothic manner. To analyse their nation's fragmentation, these authors used recognisable Gothic tropes. Tales of haunted doubles, disowned sons and ineffectual heroes populate their fictional explorations of Scotland's fractured state. (73)

The choice of the Gothic mode as means of addressing the lack of coherent national identity seems to be related to the fact that Gothic fiction explores cultural absences. For example, in the Victorian period it became a vehicle for exploring such notions as repressed sexuality or gender. This particular feature of Gothic fiction is discussed at length by Rosemary Jackson in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*. As she points out, "Fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced

[87] This is argued by a number of scholars. See for example Kirsty MacDonald "Scottish Gothic: Towards a Definition," David Punter "Heartlands; Contemporary Scottish Gothic," or Allan Bisset's introduction to *Damage Land: New Scottish Gothic Fiction.*

as absence and loss" (3). It follows that themes of the fantastic revolve around this problem of articulating the un-said (Jackson 48).

Therefore, one can argue that, in Scottish Gothic fiction in the 19th century the motif of the double becomes the embodiment of national anxieties i.e. lack of a coherent identity of the Scottish nation after the Union of 1707. The idea of split personality is examined by both Hogg and Stevenson; however, the theme of the double is also very much present in contemporary Scottish literature. As Allan Bisset points out, "Scottish writers, for their part, have returned time and again to themes of disunity and schizophrenia" (2). A similar observation is made by Gavin Wallace who notes that "Whether conscious or unconscious, for better or for worse, duality, division and fracture persist at the prevailing creative and critical tools in Scotland" ("Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity" 218).

Critics have frequently used Gregory Smith's term "Caledonian Antisyzygy" in order to express this pervading duality of the Scottish character. Smith introduced his concept in *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). He claimed that Scottish literature is governed by two different moods: realism and romantism/the fantastic. Moreover, according to Smith, both Scottish literature and Scottish identity are marked by the interaction of oppositional forces, "a zigzag of contradictions", which reaches from the social to the cultural to the political sphere:

> Perhaps in the very combination of opposites – what either of the two Thomases, of Norwich and Cromarty, might have been willing to call "the Caledonian antisyzygy" – we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgment, which is the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered. If therefore, Scottish history and life are, as an old northern writer said of something else, "varied with a clean contrair spirit", we need not be surprised to find that in his literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory. (4-5)

Smith's book was written during 1918-1919 and, as Gerard Carruthers observes, "was consonant with the new *zeitgeist* in which the Treaty of Versailles and its encouragement of the national and cultural independence of smaller nations was soon to be signed. In line with this mood, Smith sought to emphasise the historic distinctiveness of Scottish creative utterance" (11).

The poet Hugh MacDiarmid elaborated on the concept of Caledonian Antisyzygy in his essay, "The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea", which was first published in two parts in *The Modern Scot* (1931-2)[88]. The notion is most frequently cited in reference to the seemingly morally contradictory quality of the works of Robert Louis Stevenson and James Hogg, but is also applied to contrasts between the Highlands and the Lowlands, or Protestantism and Catholicism. Although Smith's oversimplification of Scottish identity has been criticised recently, the fact remains that "the idea that Scotland's writing has such a duality at its heart is one that endures" (Braidwood 2012)[89].

As I have discussed above Caledonian Antisyzygy pervades Rankin's fiction. It can be found both in his representation of the characters and the setting. Petrie suggests that it is "Rankin's fascination with the theme of duality and its elaboration in the Scottish literary tradition of Hogg and Stevenson that gives his [fiction] much of its distinctive force" (150) and one would find it difficult to disagree with this statement.

Conclusion

Rankin's novels provide an example of the coincidence of crime fiction and the Gothic. The series has been penetrated by the Gothic themes of duality and the return of past upon the present. Moreover, gothic motifs such as ghosts, the devilish villain and the double are used repeatedly throughout the series. In addition, the setting echoes Gothic fiction. Rankin also refers to seminal works of the Scottish Gothic – Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* and Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The Rebus novels combine the conventions of the hard-boiled tradition of realist social criticism together with the structural and thematic realism of the police procedural and Gothic tropes in order to examine the social themes pertinent to Scotland and its society, which is, of course, something that the Scottish Gothic has always done.

[88] See *Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid* 56-74. *The Modern Scot* was a magazine published from 1930 to 1936. It was later amalgamated with *The Scottish Standard* to form *Outlook*.

[89] For a comprehensive discussion on the Caledonian Antisyzygy, see Gerard Carruthers, *Scottish Literature*, ch. 1.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Matter of Scotland

Some people said the weather made the Scots: long drear periods punctuated by short bursts of enlightenment and cheer. There was almost certainly something to the theory. It was hard to believe this winter would end, yet he knew that it would: knew, but almost didn't believe.

Let It Bleed 308

The psycho-social novel

The previous chapters have shown that Rankin's novels contain signs that point to different sub-genres of crime fiction and that his fiction is penetrated by the motifs of the Gothic novel. However, Rankin's fiction is also characterised by a focus on the psychological state of the characters as well as the strong focus on contemporary social issues. One can argue then that his fiction is also marked by the presence of genre-markers of the psychological-social novel[90]. The genre category of the psychological-social (or psycho-social) novel is a term coined by David Malcolm[91]. It is as an adaptation for British literary history of what Boris Tomashevsky called "the psychological novel":

> The psychological novel […] is normally set in contemporary life […]. The usual nineteenth-century novel belongs to this type with its love intrigue, abundance of social description, etc. […] The characteristic feature of novels of this kind is an adulterous intrigue (the theme of material infidelity). Other types of novel which lean towards this type are the family novel with its roots in the eighteenth-century morality novel, the ordinary "popular novel", in English and German family magazines for "family reading" (the so-called "bourgeois novel"), the "novel of everyday life", the "boulevard novel" and so on. ("Literary Genres" 91)

[90] I have discussed this also in "Tartan Noir: Crime, Scotland and Genre".
[91] See: "Contemporary British Espionage Fiction: Some Transformations of the Genre".

In "Contemporary British Espionage Fiction: Some Transformations of the Genre" Malcolm claims that the psychological-social novel has been a dominant tendency within British prose fiction since the mid-twentieth century. In a certain sense, he argues, the British have never stopped writing nineteenth-century novels (71).

It is essential at this point to list the signs of the psychological-social novel. First of all, the novel is typically set in contemporary life. Next, it is a piece of fiction which is concerned with the spiritual, emotional and mental lives of the characters rather than with plot and action. Moreover, the psychological-social novel demonstrates interest in nation and history. It is also concerned with contemporary social problems; hence, there is an abundance of social description, and the text tries to draw people's attention to the shortcomings of the society it describes[92]. All of the above-mentioned genre-markers can be found in the Rebus novels.

A complex Scot

There is little physical description of the main characters in the Rebus novels, so the reader's perception of them is shaped largely by their words and actions. A lot of text focuses on Rebus's emotions, feelings and memories. This is very prominent from the very beginning of the series. In the previous chapter I illustrated how in *Knots and Crosses* Rebus is both metaphorically and literally haunted by his past life in the army and SAS. Throughout the novel the memories of his military past keep coming back and become a chief concern of the story. This is of course for two reasons: first, in Rebus's past there is a key to solving the crime puzzle, and second, Rankin is concerned with the detailed characterisation of his hero. So, from the start of the series Rebus's emotional life is as important as (or perhaps even more important than) his adventures. Hence, the detective's psychological state is given a lot of attention. This interest is also shown by the shift of the narrative pattern. Most of the story is told by a third-person omniscient narrator, but at one point the text shifts into the first-person narrative. This is when Rebus is hypnotized by his brother Michael to help him bring back the memories he has suppressed (157-172). The shift of narrative technique illustrates also

[92] This understanding of the genre underlies Malcolm's discussion of espionage fiction; see "Contemporary British Espionage Fiction" (72-89).

the shift of focus: the detective's memories and emotions become more important than anything else.

The theme of the past returning in the present is touched upon in the other novels of the series. Sometimes it is an echo of a past case; sometimes the text focuses on the personal reminiscences of the detective. Sometimes the two are combined when Rebus's investigations lead him into places that bring back memories from the past. For example, in *Set in Darkness* Rebus drives to St Andrews in order to see an ex-wife of the murder victim and the journey inevitably takes him back in time to "the haunt of childhood holidays" (186):

> A neighbour had usually given the family a lift: Mum and Dad, and Rebus and his brother. Three of them crushed against each other on the back seat, bags squashed by their knees and legs, beach balls and towel resting on their laps. The trip would take all morning. Neighbours would have waved them off, as though an expedition were being undertaken. Into the dark continent of north-east Fife, final destination a caravan site, where their four-berth rental awaited, smelling of mothballs and gas mantles. At night there'd be the toilet block with its skittering insect life, moths and jenny-long-legs casting huge shadows on the white-washed walls. Then back to the caravan for games of cards and dominoes, their father usually winning except when their mother persuaded him not to cheat.
>
> Two weeks of summer. It was called The Glasgow Fair Fortnight[93]. He was never sure if 'fair' was as in festival or not raining. He never saw a festival in St Andrews and it seemed to rain often, sometimes for a whole week. Plastic macs and long bleak walks. When the sun broke through, it could still be cold; the brothers turning blue as they splashed in the North Sea, waving at ships on the horizon, the ships their father told them were Russian spies. There was an RAF base nearby; the Russians were after their secrets. (186-187)

Those childhood memories become a chief concern of the whole of chapter 17, so that one could be under the impression that the sole purpose for Rebus's visit to St Andrews is to revisit the places from his childhood, but of course it is not – the trip provides useful information that will help to solve the case. Similarly, in the novella "Death Is Not the End" the plot becomes an

[93] "The Glasgow Fair Fortnight" is traditionally the time when Glaswegians would take their annual holiday. In the 1950s and 1960s tens of thousands of people would take part in the annual exodus "doon the watter" or further afield to the East coast (For more information, see "Reliving Glasgow Fair Fortnight").

excuse to give us more information about Rebus's teenage years. This is because one of the two investigations which are simultaneously carried out by Rebus is a personal one as he is looking for a missing son of his old school friends. It follows that Rebus's memories from his school days come into focus, especially those of his best friend Mitch and the events at the last school dance which led Rebus to join the army (363-365). We also learn that at school he was in a relationship with the missing boy's mother. Moreover, the whole story is full of memories connected with the detective's hometown and his parents:

> He thought about his parents and the rest of the family and remembered stories about Bowhill, stories which seemed inextricable from family history: mining tragedies; a girl found drowned in the River Ore; a holiday car crash which had erased an entire family. Then there was Johnny Thomson, Celtic goalkeeper, injured during an 'Old Firm' match. He was in his early twenties when he died, and was buried behind those gates, not far from Rebus's parents. *Not Dead, But at Rest in the Arms of the Lord*. (364)

These are some of the examples of when the plot is interwoven with the memories and recollections of the detective, something that is a staple feature of Rankin's fiction. As a result, the series becomes not only the compilation of the cases that Rebus had worked on, but also a history of his life. A history that is scattered between the novels and like a jigsaw puzzle needs to be pieced back together[94]. Unlike some series characters, e.g. P.D. James's Adam Dalgliesh, John le Carré's George Smiley or Ian Fleming's James Bond, Rebus ages between the books and is affected by every case he had worked on, which means that the series depicts the development of his character. As Rankin says:

> I took a decision early on in the series that John Rebus would live in 'real time'. After all, if I wanted to write about the changing face of Scotland, it was more realistic if my detective was allowed to change, too. Rebus is affected by every case he works on, and carries with him the ghosts of every victim. (*Rebus's Scotland* 20)

[94] Rankin claims that he never spent too much time looking at Rebus's chronology so "it's down to luck rather than planning that the facts of his life remain consistent (more or less) over the course of the series – though I've been fortunate in later years that a fan has compiled a database for me, including a Rebus 'time-line'" (*Rebus's Scotland* 20).

Consequently, in all the novels of the series the mood, emotions, and memories of the detective are given a lot of focus. Throughout the series we learn about Rebus's background (his childhood and teenage years in his hometown of Cardenden), his army days, his failed marriage as well as his unsuccessful relationships with various women:

> Rebus had always found relationships with the opposite sex difficult. He'd grown up in a mining village, a bit behind the times when it came to things like promiscuity. You stuck your hand in a girl's blouse and next thing her father was after you with a leather belt. Then he'd joined the army, where women were by turns fantasy figures and untouchables: slags and madonnas, there seemed no middle ground. Released from the army, he'd joined the police. Married by then, but his job had proved more seductive, more all-consuming than the relationship – than *any* relationship. Since then, his affairs had lasted months, weeks, mere days sometimes. Too late now, he felt, for anything more permanent. (*Black and Blue* 190)

Rebus is generally shown as isolated from his family, friends and colleagues. At the end of *Knots and Crosses* he puts his brother Michael into jail. In *The Black Book* Michael comes out of prison and for a short moment the brothers are reunited before Michael disappears again from Rebus's life. We only hear about him again when he dies at the beginning of *The Naming of the Dead*. The relationship with his daughter Samantha also proves to be a challenging one. In *Knots and Crosses* Rebus is already divorced, but he still gets to spend time with his daughter. However, sometime between the first and second novel of the series Rhona, Rebus's ex-wife, takes Sammy to London, so they start growing further apart. When Rebus is called to London on a case in *Tooth and Nail,* the meeting between the father and the daughter is an awkward one, polite chit-chat rather than a true conversation (68). By the time we get to *The Hanging Garden* Samantha is described as someone quite distant: "Chat at the bar, cigarettes and laughter, a fug of heat and alcohol: he knew these things better than he knew his own daughter" (4). At the same time the narrative is peppered with Rebus's memories from Samantha's birth and her childhood. This is another example which shows that the detective is constantly haunted by the past. Although in *The Hanging Garden* Samantha gets hit by a car and Rebus crosses several lines, both moral and professional, to find out the culprit the accident does not change the relationship between father and daughter in the long run. In the next novel

of the series, *Set in Darkness*, Sammy is hardly mentioned. One evening Rebus thinks about calling her, but as he looks at his watch he decides it is too late – "it was always too late by the time he remembered" (295). Their strained relationship becomes central to the plot of *A Song for the Dark Times.*

The only real relationship that Rebus has is with his job: "He […] gave himself to it the way he had never given himself to any person in his life. Not his ex-wife, not his daughter, not Patience, not Michael" (*The Black Book* 93). Although Rebus is alienated from both his colleagues and family, he often becomes personally involved in the investigation he is conducting and feels emotionally attached to the victims. As we read in *Set in Darkness*, "Most people just got on with their lives, but a detective's life was made up of other people's lives" (223). And it seems to be true about the life of John Rebus. For example, in *Black and Blue* he tells his colleague and friend Jack Morton about a murdered prostitute:

> […] I knew her, Jack. I mean, I'd met her a couple of times. First time, it was business, I was pulling her in. But then I came down here looking for her. [...] 'We sat and talked. Next thing I knew she was dead. It's different when you know someone. You remember their eyes. I don't mean the colour or anything, I mean all the things their eyes told you about them'. He sat in silence for a moment. 'Whoever killed her, he couldn't have been looking at her eyes'. (294)

The detective shows more feelings for a stranger than he usually does for people close to him. Because Rebus always becomes mentally and emotionally involved in the cases that he is investigating he finds it difficult to separate his work-life from his personal life and often becomes obsessed with cases unable to forget about them. Of course, that is exactly what makes him a good detective, although Rankin shows that this is not the only way to be successful in this profession. Siobhain Clarke though often seen by her bosses as "another John Rebus" generally takes a different approach to her job. In *Set in Darkness* Siobhain wonders if they could get some payment for the overtime:

> 'Might help pay for the Christmas shopping…if I ever get time to do any.'
> 'Christmas?'
> 'You know, festive time of year, coming up fast.'
> He looked at her. 'You can just switch off like that?'
> 'I don't think you have to be obsessed to make a good detective.' (326)

Rebus's obsession with casework and the dark side of human nature is a way of escaping his own problems: "[H]is enjoyment of the job was essentially voyeuristic and cowardly. He concentrated on the minutiae of other people's lives, other people's problems, to stop him examining his own frailties and failings" (*The Falls* 111).

Alcohol is another means of escape for the detective. Except for the short period, sometime between the events of *Black and Blue* and *The Hanging Garden* when Rebus sobers up, drinking is a constant element of his day-to-day life. Alcohol fills the emotional void as well as helps him to forget about past cases and the cruelty of the world:

> And he felt the sudden pang of desire for a drink [...] A long bar-room session of reminiscence and tall tales with no bodies buried in walls or dumped in summer houses. A drink in some parallel universe where people had stopped being cruel to each other. (*Set in Darkness* 48)

As I have mentioned in the previous chapter, in *Dead Souls,* perhaps the bleakest novel in the series, we find Rebus drinking alone surrounded by the ghosts of victims and dead colleagues. However, Rebus also drinks to forget about his personal failures:

> One of the reasons Rebus drank was to put him to sleep. He had trouble sleeping when sober. He'd stare into the darkness, willing it to form shapes so that he might better understand it. He'd try to make sense of life – his early disastrous Army years; his failed marriage; his failings as father, friend, lover – and end up in tears. And if he did eventually stumble into sober sleep, there would be troubled dreams, dreams about aging and dying, decay and blight… Drunk, his sleep was dreamless, or seemed that way on waking. (*Let It Bleed* 227)

Rebus's drink problem is a running feature of the series (as well as his nicotine addiction)[95] and can be seen as a cliché – it is after all a typical representation of the hard-boiled detective. However, as Marie Hologa

[95] Interestingly, in the post-retirement novels Rankin presents a significantly tamer version of his detective hero: due to health problems Rebus quits smoking, cuts down on drinking and even goes for walks with his adopted dog. It is another example of the character's evolution, but I also see it as another way in which Rankin constantly challenges the genre conventions and defies reader's expectations.

demonstrates in "'Snort for Caledonia' – Drugs, Masculinity and National Identity in Contemporary Scottish Detective Fiction", the representation of a Scottish detective as an addict very much reflects the statistics of alcohol abuse in Scottish society, so in that context it stops becoming just a literary convention, but gives the novels a sense of verisimilitude. Some of the most "realistic" descriptions in the novels are those of the pubs and the people that frequent them:

> They ended up in the Horseshoe Bar. It was central and crowded with people who took their drinking seriously, the kind of place where no one looked askance at a tea-stained shirt, so long as the wearer had about him the price of his drink. Rebus knew immediately that it would be a place of rules and rituals, a place where regulars would know from the moment they walked through the door that their drink of preference was already being poured for them. (*Resurrection Men* 266)

> Daytime drinking was special. In a bar, time ceased to exist, and with it the outside world. For as long as you stayed in the pub, you felt immortal and ageless. And when you stumbled back out from twilight into raging daylight, people all around you going about their afternoon's business, the world had a new shine to it. After all, people had been doing the same damned thing for centuries: plugging the holes in their consciousness with alcohol. (*The Falls* 222)

Another distinctive feature of the detective is his love of music. In *Knots and Crosses,* we find him listening to jazz and in *Hide and Seek* to The Beatles, but in *Strip Jack*, the fourth novel of the series, Rebus is revealed to be an ardent Stones fan and this carries through the rest of the series. Additionally, in latter novels Rebus is listening to a lot of old (often obscure) rock music. Music plays quite an important role in the whole series, something that is reflected in Rankin's choice of the titles.[96] There are countless references to various artists and songs, sometimes very obscure ones (even Rankin's new

[96] Rankin used the titles from the classic Rolling Stones albums for *Let It Bleed*, *Black and Blue* and *Beggars Banquet*. The title *The Hanging Garden* comes from a track on The Cure's 1982 *Pornography* LP. *Dead Souls* comes from the 1979 Joy Division single, which in turn took its title from an unfinished novel by Nikolai Gogol. *The Falls* is a song by Mutton Birds and *Exit Music* was inspired by a Steven Lindsay LP. *Standing in Another Man's Grave* is a misheard lyric from a Jackie Leven song "Standing in Another Man's Rain". Finally, *Even Dogs in the Wild* is a nod to a song by *The Associates* whereas *Rather Be the Devil* is inspired by the song "I'd Rather Be the Devil" by John Martyn.

wave band from his university days, *The Dancing Pigs*, makes an appearance in *Black and Blue*.)

The musical references serve to set the mood for both character and plot development, but we also learn a lot about Rebus through his record collection. His taste in music suggests that he is middle-aged and comes from a working-class background as well as that he is a bit of a rebel. Later on, in the series Rebus's music taste also underlines the fact that he has become a "dinosaur" in the police force. The much younger Siobhain listens to music that is more contemporary and in *A Question of Blood* Rebus feels excluded during the interrogation of the witness as she and Siobhain talk about Robbie Williams (73).

Moreover, the musical references often add a movie-feel to the scenes:

> He went over to the hi-fi. After a drink, he liked to listen to the Stones. Women, relationships and colleagues had come and gone, but the Stones had always been there. He put the album on and poured himself a last drink. The guitar riff, one of easily half a dozen in Keith's tireless repertoire, kicked the album off. I don't have much, Rebus thought, but I have this. (*Let It Bleed* 38)

Rebus is also characterised by his obsessive relationship with his work. He never seems to go away on holiday and whenever he is forced to take time off work he is deeply unhappy and continues to work unofficially, "on the side". The lack of work always exposes the emptiness of his life:

> Police routine gave his daily life its only shape and substance; it gave him a schedule to work to, a reason to get up in the morning. He loathed his free time, dreaded Sundays off. He lived to work, and in a very real sense he worked to live, too: the much-maligned Protestant work-ethic. Subtract work from the equation and the day became flabby, like releasing jelly from its mould. Besides, without work, what reason had he not to drink? (*Let It Bleed* 122)

Similarly in *The Naming of the Dead* we read:

> Summer weekends, appearing endless and unchangeable. Nowadays, Rebus hated them. Hated that so little would happen to him. Monday mornings were his true release, a break from the sofa and the bar-stool, the supermarket and curry-house. His colleagues returned to work with stories of shopping exploits, football games, bike rides with the family. Siobhain would have been to Glasgow or Dundee, seeing friends, catching up. Cinema walks and trips by

> the Water of Leith. Nobody asked Rebus any more how he spent the furlough. They knew he'd just shrug. […] Without the job, he almost ceased to exist. (51)

Nevertheless, Rebus's love of work is not only a result of his emotional isolation but also has a religious dimension to it – as the quote above suggests it can be seen as an example of the Protestant work ethic. Diemert argues that Rankin's novels are never without a religious context (168). Although it is true that the topic of religion plays an important role in the whole series it is important to note that it is more prominent in some novels than others.

In the beginning of the series Rebus is presented as a Christian believer (*Knots and Crosses* 8, 11) who often prays and addresses God in his thoughts, even if he stopped church-going some time ago. Again, the protagonist is an outsider and does not feel that he belongs to the community:

> He hated congregational religion. He hated the smiles and the manners of the Sunday dressed Scottish Protestant, the emphasis on a communion not with God but with your neighbours. He had tried seven churches of varying denominations in Edinburgh, and had found none to be to his liking. He had tried sitting for two hours at home of a Sunday, reading the Bible and saying the prayer, but somehow that did not work either. He was caught; a believer outwith his belief. Was a personal faith good enough for God? (*Knots and Crosses* 71)

In *Knots and Crosses* Rebus's vision of God is very much that of the almighty and threatening deity from the Old Testament. After he finds himself in hospital he reads the stories of Moses, Samson, and David, "refreshing his memory of their power and their moral strength" (127), before coming to the B*ook of Job*:

> When an innocent man suddenly dies,
> God laughs.
> God gave the world to the wicked.
> He made all the judges blind,
> And if God didn't do it, who did?
>
> If I smile and try to forget my pain,
> All my suffering comes back to haunt me;
> I know that God does hold me guilty.
> Since I am held guilty, why should I bother?
> No soap can wash away my sins. (127)

The above quoted excerpt depicts an important characteristic of Rebus: he feels guilty and the feeling haunts him throughout his life (I have discussed this in a previous chapter). And his feelings of guilt have a Catholic (rather than Protestant) dimension to them. In subsequent novels in the series Rebus gradually loses faith. He tries different churches and in *The Black Book* he even goes to confession (despite not being a Catholic [226--227]), but by *Black and Blue*, he has definitely abandoned formal religion, and as Plain argues, "is left only with the painful residue of Scotland's dominant creeds: Catholic guilt and the Protestant work ethic" (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 63).[97] The focus on the spiritual life of the detective hero is another example that shows that the Rebus novels are penetrated by motifs of the psychological fiction. Faith is another defining feature of Rebus and his relationship with God is something that evolves over the course of the series giving the reader the sense that the events experienced by Rebus change and shape the hero[98].

Although the prime focus of the series is on Rebus, other characters are also presented not only through their actions, but also through their thoughts, memories and emotions. This is most significant with the character of Siobhain Clarke who over the course of the series becomes almost as important as Rebus himself.

To sum up, all the Rebus novels show a deep interest in the psychological and mental life of the main protagonist and to an extent of other characters (e.g. Siobhain, Fox). Although the novels are largely plot-driven, the detailed characterisation of the protagonist is also important, which means that the reader follows the narrative not only to find out "whodunnit", but also to learn more about the characters and to follow their personal stories. Rankin's decision to use some returning characters throughout the series also helps to arouse the reader's interest in reading all the novels in the series.

It is worth pointing out at this point that the focus on the psychological state of the protagonist is also a running feature of the fiction of other Tartan Noir writers. For example, the focus of Denise Mina's *Garnethill* trilogy is not only on the mystery, but also on the mental state of the main protagonist, Maureen O'Donnell, who is an incest survivor with a history of mental illness.

[97] Haarstick suggests that Rebus's gradual loss of faith coincides with the increase of the role of the character of Cafferty in the novels ("Tales of Doubles and Devils").

[98] For more on the theme of religion in the Rebus novels see Diemert.

The question of the narrative is not only whether Maureen will find and punish people responsible for the sexual and physical abuse of mentally ill female patients, but also whether she will manage to preserve her own sanity in the process. This interest with the psychology of the character is a recurrent characteristic of all the novels by Mina. Similarly, Lin Anderson's series of novels featuring a forensic specialist, Dr Rhona MacLeod, shows a strong interest in the family and love life of the heroine. Over the course of the series the development of the heroine's relationship with her partner Sean and her lost son becomes as important as the development of the crime intrigue. In addition, the narrative of Louise Welsh's debut novel *The Cutting Room* (2002) perfectly captures the mood of the main protagonist, Rilke, as well as his sexual desires.

One could multiply the examples of the use of the motifs of the psychological novel in the fiction of other contemporary Scottish crime writers. One can find such motifs in the works of such different authors as William McIlvanney, Paul Johnston, Val McDermid and Alexander McCall Smith. In fact, I would argue, that a deep focus on the psychology of the characters is characteristic of the contemporary English crime novel (cf. for example the works of Ruth Rendell) and by extension the European crime novel (e.g. Scandinavian "Nordic Noir" writers such as Larsson or Nesbø).

Edinburgh and Scotland

Although John Rebus is undoubtedly the main hero of the series, one can argue that there is another protagonist in the Rebus novels; namely, the city of Edinburgh. As I mentioned earlier, the Scottish capital is a running feature in almost all of the novels except for *Tooth and Nail* which is set in London. In *Rebus's Scotland* Rankin, who was born and raised in Fife, says that he wrote about Edinburgh to make sense of his adopted home, but also to re-imagine and re-write the city:

> Living in Cardenden as a teenager, I'd written about the place to try to make sense of it. I was asking: how do I fit into the scheme of things? I was also making my home town seem more exciting and romantic than it really was. (83)

As we have seen in the previous chapters the Edinburgh that Rankin portrays is a city full of contrasts. On the one hand, it is one of the most

beautiful cities of the world; on the other it is riddled with social problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, crime and violence as well as corruption and various forms of exploitation: sexual, physical and economic.

However, Rankin's presentation of Edinburgh goes far beyond the typical representations of the city found in the hard-boiled detective story and the police procedural. The novels give a very strong sense of the place: both its character and the people who inhabit it:

> Reticence was an Edinburgh tradition. You kept your feelings hidden and your business your own. Some people put it down to the influence of the Church and figures like John Knox – she'd heard the city called "Fort Knox" by outsiders. But to Jean it was more to do with Edinburgh's geography, its louring rock-faces and dark skies, the wind whipping in from the North Sea, hurtling through the canyon-like streets. At every turn you felt overwhelmed and pummelled by your surroundings. Just travelling into town from Portobello, she felt it: the bruising and bruised nature of the place. (*The Falls* 372)

Rankin's depiction of Edinburgh also provides an interesting example of the point where the world of fiction merges with reality: in Edinburgh you can go on a "Rebus walk" and see places depicted in the novels including pubs which bear a plaque "John Rebus drinks here". The most famous of them is of course the Oxford Bar, Rebus's favourite "waterhole" which was first identified by name in *Mortal Causes*. As one reviewer points out:

> The fact that it actually exists, along with other bars, shops and monuments featured in the books, makes Rebus – and Rankin – fascinating companions for visitors wanting to explore both the celebrated and the darker sides of the city. (Bruce-Gardyne)

To begin with Rankin did not use real locations as much, but as the series developed it became his trademark. He uses real locations as well as inventing fictional ones, successfully combining the two to create "Rebus's Edinburgh"[99]. Consequently, his novels became quasi-guidebooks offering

[99] Barry Forshaw has described the real locations in the Rebus novels in a chapter entitled "Ian Rankin's and Inspector Rebus's Edinburgh" in *Following the Detectives: Real Locations in Crime Fiction* (2010). Rankin himself elaborates on the merger of reality and fiction in his novels in the semi-autobiographical *Rebus's Scotland*. The interface between fiction and reality is also discussed by Marie Hologa in "Resurrecting the Old Town: Body Snatchers, Ghost Tours and Edinburgh Tourism".

the readers a chance to get to know Edinburgh first through the text and next on their own comparing and contrasting it with the reality; for example during a "Rebus walk" around Edinburgh. Rankin's internet website includes a map of Edinburgh with marked locations from the novels. It is as if Rankin invites the reader to go beyond the text and fill in the gaps with his or her own experience of reading the city. If one can say that Rankin is re-imagining the city, then surely one can also say that the reader is encouraged to do the same. In a way this is a new chapter in the long tradition of playing games with the reader that has been characteristic of crime fiction. There is no denying the fact that all of this helps to create hype and one can only wonder how much of a conscious marketing strategy that is. As Sandrock points out "the local tourist industry has been quick to spot the potential for Rankin's novels as source of commodification" and "the Rebus series has become the focus of various cultural events hosted by the city as well as of an independent tourist business" (87)[100].

Although most of the plots of the Rebus novels revolve around Edinburgh, some novels take the detective outside of his stomping ground and consequently his comfort zone. A few of the novels feature descriptions of Glasgow, which is usually presented in juxtaposition to Edinburgh (the rivalry between the two cities is infamous):

> Scotland's two main cities, separated by a fifty-minute motorway trip, were wary neighbours, as though years back one had accused the other of something and the accusation, unfounded or not, still rankled. (*Black and Blue* 54)
>
> He began to walk, not very sure in which direction he was headed. The city centre was laid-out American-style, a grid system of one way streets. Edinburgh might have its monuments, but Glasgow was built to monumental scale, making the capital seem like Toytown. (*Black and Blue* 83)

Moreover, it is not only the two cities that are compared throughout the series, but also their inhabitants. For example, in *Mortal Causes* Rebus works at the crime scene with DCI Kilpatrick from Glasgow and his reaction to his colleague is built on prejudice and stereotypes:

> Kilpatrick's was a Glaswegian accent, managing to be deeply nasal even when reduced to a whisper, and managing, too, to be full of irony and a belief that

[100] For more on the commodification of Rankin's novels, see Sandrock 87-90.

> Glasgow was the centre of the universe. Usually, Glaswegians somehow added to all this a ubiquitous chip on their shoulder, but Kilpatrick didn't seem the type. […] Yes, and Glaswegians could be patronizing bastards, too. (37)

As Rankin himself notes:

> Readers have pointed out that Glasgow gets a raw deal in the Rebus novels. I explain to them that it's not my fault. Cops mistrust colleagues even within their own division, so the chances of Rebus having friendly relations with Strathclyde police were always going to be remote. […] the antipathy of the two cities stretches back through history. The antagonism noted by Edwin Muir in the 1930s – "ridiculous in essence, jocular in expression and acrid in spirit" – survives to this day. (*Rebus's Scotland* 108)

Whenever Rebus ventures outside Edinburgh, he becomes an outsider travelling through a country which is not coherent nationally or culturally. This is perhaps most prominent in *Black and Blue* in which Rebus's investigation takes him all over the country and therefore the novel features descriptions of various parts of Scotland: not only the Central Belt area, but also the West Coast, the Highlands and Shetland. Each part is presented as different from the others with its own local identity. For example, when visiting Shetland Rebus realises that he feels "just about as foreign as he ever had in his life" (417). Rankin presents a country which is not even linguistically coherent; for example, in Aberdeen, "when they asked you where you were from, it sounded like they were saying 'Fury boot ye frae?'" (*Black and Blue* 164). As Plain argues:

> As Rebus moves between Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen and Shetland he constantly encounters new challenges – topographical, conceptual, and linguistic – and each location comes to act as a new frontier, complicating the reader's sense of Scotland as a coherent national unit. (27)

We can find similar observations in other novels of the series. For example, in *The Black Book* Rebus visits his hometown of Cardenden where he bumps into an old school friend and while listening to her realises how much of the accent and the dialect (and consequently some form of local identity) he had lost over the years (255).

In *Mortal Causes* Rebus visits the Borders and comments on the "schizophrenic nature" of the place: the land that is somewhere between

Scotland and England and therefore is not distinctively "Scottish", but it is not really "English" either:

> Whenever John Rebus had cause or inclination to drive through any town in the Scottish Borders, one word came to his mind. Neat. The towns were simply laid out and almost pathologically tidy. The buildings were constructed from unadorned stone and had a square-built no-nonsense quality to them. The people walking briskly from bank to grocer's shop to chemist's were rosy cheeked and bursting with health, as though they scrubbed their faces with pumice every morning before sitting down to farmhouse fare. The men's limbs moved with the grace of farm machinery. You could present any of the women to your own mother. She'd tell them you weren't good enough for them. (119)

This seems like a world away from Glasgow with its "maze of one-way streets and ill-signposted intersections" (*Black and Blue* 67) or Edinburgh with its Old and New Town.

However, it is interesting to note here that although the novels paint a picture of modern Scotland, Rankin, unlike for example William McIlvanney or Irvine Welsh, generally chooses not to use the Scottish vernacular. Many Scots words appear, e.g. "bairn", "dreich", "smirr", "wersh", or "shoogly", there is also an occasional mention of the local accent, but most of the text is written in Standard English. In *Rebus's Scotland* Rankin explains that this is thanks to his father "who'd found [James] Kelman's linguistics experiments heavy-going. Anxious not to alienate too many readers, I use Scottish words sparingly, measuring them for their effect and ensuring that context explains them to outsiders" (52).

Furthermore, it is worth pointing out that although the novels are focused on the here and now, due to fact that they span over thirty years there is an almost historical feel to the earlier books in the series. For example, in the first few novels Rebus does not own a mobile phone and often uses a payphone, and when he needs to type the case notes he does so on a typewriter rather than a computer. Computers and the Internet play a big role for the first time in *The Falls* (first published in 2001), but when reading it today the parts of the text which are concerned with IT seem somewhat outdated, which fortunately does not affect the reception of the novel as a whole. The landscape of Edinburgh has also undergone some changes over that period. As Rankin himself notes:

> Edinburgh keeps evolving as a city, which means that some of the early novels already have a 'historical' feel to them. The near-uninhabitable tenements of Niddrie and Craigmillar, as described at the start of *Black and Blue*, have almost disappeared entirely to be replaced with hospitable housing. The waterfronts of Leith and Granton have been gentrified – or are at the planning stage. Infamous gap-sites such as the ones behind the Usher Hall are on the eastern side of Leith Street have been replaced with modern developments, and a stretch of Lothian Road has been transformed into the 'Financial District', complete with Sheraton Hotel and Spa (as mentioned in *Set in Darkness*). (*Rebus's Scotland* 93)

Here is how we see the changes to the Marchmont area through the eyes of Rebus:

> Rebus had lived in his tenement twenty-odd years, and had seen the area change. Fewer families and old people, more students and young, childless couples. The groups didn't seem to mix. People who'd live in Marchmont all their lives watched their children move away, unable to afford places nearby. Rebus didn't know anyone in his tenement now, or the ones either side of him. As far as he could tell, he was the only owner-occupier left. More worrying still, he seemed to be the oldest person there. (*The Falls* 81)

The novels record the changing face of Edinburgh, but also of Scottish society. The novels are full of observations about Scottish society and culture. For example, in *The Falls* Rebus stops on his way to work in order to get a double *latte* from a *barista* (both words are emphasised in the original text) who is selling take away coffee from a converted police-box (24). When conducting door-to-door interviews Rebus and his colleague encounter people who work "in the financial sector", are "training consultants" and "event organisers" provoking Rebus to wonder: "Does no one have real jobs any more [original spelling]?" (32). In addition, as I mentioned before, throughout the series considerable attention is given to drinking culture, but also, for example, to eating habits:

> The Scots had an unbelievable record for heart disease and tooth decay, both the result of the national diet: saturated fats, salt and sugar. She'd wondered what it was that made Scottish people reach for the comfort foods, the chocolate, chips and fizzy drinks: was it the climate? Or could the answer lie deeper, within the nation's character? (*The Falls* 391)

The Rebus novels establish Edinburgh (and to an extent Scotland) as a specific rather than representative locale by painting a detailed picture of the city and its inhabitants. Edinburgh plays such an important role in the series that it can be seen as yet another protagonist. Therefore, one could suggest that the Rebus novels can be seen as what one could call "The Edinburgh novel" – a variation on "The Glasgow novel" – a genre category coined by Moira Burgess. In *The Glasgow Novel: 1870-1970: A Bibliography* (1972) Burgess provides the following definition of the genre:

> [a] novel set wholly or substantially in Glasgow (or in a quasi-fictional city readily recognisable as Glasgow) or which, though perhaps containing only a short Glasgow section, conveys a genuine picture of the life, character or atmosphere of the city. Hence it is not necessarily (though in practice it is very often) written by a Glasgow author; conversely, books by Glasgow authors not set in the city are not included. (9)

Burgess also uses certain shorthand terms in the annotations to denote groups or schools among Glasgow novels: urban kailyard; industrial or proletarian novels; the gangland novel; and the realistic novel[101]. However, in the third edition she admits that since the first edition, which listed only the novels published before 1970, a lot of novels have been published that do not fit neatly into any of these categories (8).

In the first edition Burgess ignores, as she phrases it, "the light detective novel"; however, the second edition features McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* and *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, whereas the third edition adds *Strange Loyalties* and also includes a contribution from Rankin; namely, *Black and Blue*, which, although set primarily in Edinburgh, also depicts the landscape, character and atmosphere of Glasgow.

So far nobody has seriously discussed the idea of such a genre category as "the Edinburgh novel"; however, in my opinion, the Rebus novels could be seen as an example of a such genre variant. If one was to come up with a definition then, to paraphrase from Burgess's definition, it could go as follows:

> "Edinburgh novel" is a novel set wholly or substantially in Edinburgh (or in a quasi-fictional city readily recognisable as Edinburgh) or which, though

[101] For a description of each term, see Burgess, *The Glasgow Novel: 1870-1970: A Bibliography* (7-8).

> perhaps containing only a short Edinburgh section, conveys a genuine picture of the life, character or atmosphere of the city.

The most famous "Edinburgh novel" is of course *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) by Muriel Spark. Other examples could include Alexander McCall Smith's *44 Scotland* series (2004-) and *The Sunday Philosophy Club* series (2004-), the novels of Irvine Welsh, Paul Johnston's Quint novels (1997-), or Kate Atkinson's *One Good Turn* (2006). Or even to look at more classical texts the fiction of Sir Walter Scott (e.g. *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*) or Robert Louis Stevenson (e.g. *Kidnapped*). One could multiply the examples. In fact, one could suggest that whereas the Glasgow novel enjoyed its heyday in the late 80s and early 90s, a lot of more recent novels put Edinburgh at the core of their text; something that seems to have been inspired by the fact that Edinburgh became the world's first UNESCO City of Literature, a pioneer in an international network of UNESCO creative cities.

The idea of such a genre-variant as the Edinburgh novel is certainly an interesting one; nevertheless, it requires further study as to fully argue this case one would have to look at a wider range of texts, which is beyond the scope of this discussion.

The state of Scotland

As the series developed, Edinburgh (and Scotland by extension) became a vehicle for exploring issues connected with "the state of Scotland". As Messent points out: "Rankin is clearly interested in addressing major social issues in his police novels, especially as they figure within a Scottish political and cultural context" ("The Police Novel" 182). Whereas the earlier novels in the series, such as *Knots and Crosses* and *Tooth and Nail,* focused on serial killers and murderers, the criminal underworld (*Hide and Seek*, *The Black Book*, *Mortal Causes*), or institutional corruption (*Hide and Seek*, *Let It Bleed*), the latter novels take on more ambitious topics.

Of course, crime fiction always focuses on social issues as it either sustains or challenges the status quo. And it is true that the earlier Rebus novels also, to a certain extent, contain social criticism as they touch upon such issues as social exclusion, internal police politics and corruption in high

places (as for example in *Hide and Seek*)[102]. However, it is in the later novels of the series that social criticism becomes much more evident.

Many novels elaborate on the issue of the blurred lines between good and evil and the moral responsibility of those in power (*Let It Bleed*, *The Hanging Garden*, *Dead Souls*, *A Question of Blood*, *The Naming of the Dead* and others). A few novels in the series paint a grim picture of (real and fictional) housing schemes thus providing commentary on social divisions and exclusion:

> Niddrie, Craigmillar, Western Hailies, Muirhouse, Pilton, Granton... They all seemed to him like some horrible experiment in social engineering: scientists in white coats sticking families down in this maze or that, seeing what would happen, how strong they'd have to become to cope, whether or not they'd find the exit... He lived in an area of Edinburgh where six figures bought you a three-bedroomed flat. It amused him that he could sell up and be suddenly rich... except, of course, that he'd have nowhere to live, and couldn't afford to move anywhere nicer in the city. He realised he was just about as trapped as anyone in Niddrie or Craigmillar, a nicer model of trap that was all. (*Black and Blue* 106)

The theme of social exclusion is also explored in *Fleshmarket Close*, which examines the situation of immigrants and asylum seekers. The novel opens with the murder of a Kurdish asylum-seeker in the impoverished Knoxland estate. The estate is presented as a space which is not only ignored and forgotten by mainstream society, but also as a source of many social problems:

> Gayfield Square [a police station] was on the periphery of the elegant New Town, behind whose eighteenth- and nineteenth-century façades anything could be happening without those outside being any the wiser. It certainly felt

[102] It is also worth pointing out that a lot of the short stories featuring DI John Rebus are devoid of any social criticism. They mostly tell stories of perpetrators who commit a crime for a reason. Rebus finds out who is responsible for the crime and thus restores order and sustains the status quo. So, in terms of genre, the short stories are closer to classic detective stories rather than to hard-boiled ones. The same can be said about plays featuring Rebus. For example, *Rebus: A Game Called Malice* unfolds during an elegant dinner party hosted in a grand Edinburgh townhouse. The plot opens with a staged murder-mystery game, which turns into a real murder investigation when a genuine corpse is discovered within the house. The play clearly bears all the hallmarks of a locked room murder mystery typical of Agatha Christie and other classical detective writers.

> a long way from Knoxland, further than the three actual miles. It was another culture, another country.
>
> Knoxland had been built in the 1960s, apparently from papier mâché and balsa wood. Walls so thin you could hear the neighbours cutting their toenails and smell their dinner on the stove. Patches of damp bloomed on its grey concrete walls. Graffiti had turned the place into 'Hard Knox'. Other embellishments warned the 'Pakis' to 'Get Out', while a scrawl that was probably only an hour or so old bore the legend 'One Less'.
>
> What shops there were had restored to metal grilles on windows and doors, not even bothering to remove them during opening hours. The place itself was contained, hemmed in by dual carriageways to north and west. The bright-eyed developers had scooped out subways beneath the roads. Probably in their original drawings, these had been clean, well-lit spaces where neighbours would stop to chat about the weather and the new curtains in the window of number 42. In reality, they'd become no go areas for everyone but the foolhardy and suicidal, even in daytime. Rebus was forever seeing reports of bag-snatchings and muggings. (3-4)

The murder, at least at first glance, looks like a "race crime". The investigation which follows takes Rebus from illegal sublets inhabited by the immigrants to Whitemire, a detention center for immigrants, which is not much different from a prison (134). Consequently, the issues of ethnicity, racism and people's attitudes to immigration become central to the narrative with Rebus noting gloomily that: "'We're a mongrel nation, always have been. Settled by the Irish, raped and pillaged by the Vikings. When I was a kid, all the chip shops seemed to be run by Italians. Classmates with Polish and Russian surnames…' He stared into his glass. 'I don't remember anyone getting stabbed because of it'" (148). Interestingly, the narrative also reveals that Rebus's grandfather came from Poland making Rebus "a mongrel" himself.

As ever, Rankin shows that everyone is somehow implicated. When Mohammad Dirwan, an Asian solicitor who works with refugees in Scotland, describes the desperate situation of asylum-seekers in Scotland, he assumes that Rebus, as a police officer, is "part of the same apparatus of state" (124) and therefore supports the immigration policy. Although Rebus responds with indignation, Storey's next questions are valid: "Maybe you have Arab or African friends, Inspector? Any Asians you go drinking with? Or are they just

faces behind the till of your local newsagent's…? (124-125). In the end, Storey tells the detective "We are *all* racist, Inspector…even me" (127).

Indeed, when Rebus meets Felix Storey, a black immigration officer from London, the first thing he notices about him is the colour of his skin: "The man was black. And tall, built from muscle. As he stepped forward from the shadows, what Rebus saw first were the whites of his eyes" (205). Moreover, the detective is immediately suspicious of the stranger and feels endangered, which clearly comes from prejudices connected with black people. Importantly, Storey is at first equally suspicious of Rebus, which confirms the earlier statement of Dirwan that we are all prejudiced towards people of another race. However, after Rebus and Storey share a few whiskeys and Rebus explains to Storey that the term "Scotch", is not used in Scotland as its considered derogatory, the detective stops seeing the race of the immigration officer who is later referred to as "the Englishman" (208), drawing the reader's attention to a division that is more deeply rooted in the Scottish psyche.

Mortal Causes, on the other hand, explores the theme of sectarianism. Set against the backdrop of the Edinburgh International Festival, the novel opens with the discovery of the corpse of a brutally murdered young man. It emerges that the corpse belongs to the estranged son of "Big Ger" Cafferty, Billy Cunningham, who has been working for an underground Scottish nationalist group called the "Sword and Shield" – a terrorist organization with links to Northern Ireland. Consequently, the plot provides a springboard for the discussion of issues connected with nationalism and the Catholic--Protestant sectarian divide which still pervades Scotland. When Rebus and Siobhain examine the victim's room they find, somewhat surprisingly, a "Hearts pennant above the bed, and a Union Jack flag on which the Red Hand of Ulster was centrally prominent, with above it the words 'No Surrender' and below it the letters FTP" (46) as well as cassette tapes with Orange songs – "Their titles said it all: *The Sash and Other Glories*, *King Billy's Marching Tunes*, *No surrender*" (47). Sectarian hatred is shown as something ordinary and entrenched in Scottish society and culture. As Rebus comments: "It *is* nothing special. There are hundreds of people with the same flag, the same music-tapes. Christ, I've seen them" (77). And later on, when he watches the Orange parade he observes that the man in charge looks "chillingly ordinary" (159):

> Because he was ordinary, they all were, all these semi-inebriated working men and retired men, quiet family types who might belong to the British Legion or their local Ex-Servicemen's Club, who might inhabit the bowling green on summer evenings and go with their families on holiday to Spain or Florida or Largs. It was only when you saw them in groups like this that you caught a whiff of something else. Alone they had nothing but a nagging complaint; together, they had a voice: the sound of the *lambeg* [a large Irish drum] dense as a heartbeat; the insistent flutes; the march. (159)

Billy's loyalties to both Scottish nationalism and the Union Jack are rather contradictory, but they reflect the complex nature of national identities and allegiances within the UK. The novel shows how people's identities can be mixed up; for example, one could be both an Orange man and a Scottish nationalist.

The novel presents the sectarian divide as a regular feature of the Scottish landscape; even Rebus has been touched by this aspect of Scottish tradition and history. As we find out, he also "marched in his youth" (159) and also has served in the armed forces in Northern Ireland –"Early in the history of 'the Troubles,' 1969, just as it was all boiling over; so early that he hadn't really known what was going on, what the score was; none of them had, not on any side" (81). Moreover, the novel highlights some of the other divisions present in Scottish society: Rebus takes an immediate dislike to both DI Abernathy (because he is English) and DCI Kilpatrick (because he is from Glasgow). Thus, like a few other novels in the series, the novel shows Scotland as a country full of divisions: cultural, political and religious.

Like most Scottish writers since the 1980s Rankin has also written about Scottish identity and Scottish independence. The theme of devolution is addressed in *Dead Souls* and *Set in Darkness*. As I mentioned before, *Dead Souls* ends with Rebus walking towards the building site on Holyrood (the site of the new devolved parliament). The detective is convinced that "the stories and horrors of the city's past and present" will "come rising in the digger's steel jaws, bubbling to the surface as the city began its slow ascent towards being a nation's capital once again" (481). Although Rebus tells himself "It's the Old Town, that's all" (481) the bloody past does return in the next novel – *Set in Darkness.* The novel opens with Rebus standing "in the midst of one of the biggest building sites in Edinburgh's history" (4) – at the future site of the new devolved parliament. The new parliament building is being built symbolically opposite the Queen's house. On the one hand, there

seems to be a sense of change in the air; things starting from the beginning. The new parliament means writing a new chapter in Scottish history. A tree, which was planted by the Queen and is now "drooping forlornly, surrounded by rubble" (8) symbolises the reclining power of the monarch in Scotland. However, Queensberry House has its own dark history. It is the very place where the Act of Union was signed. On the night of the signing the secretary of state's son killed a servant, roasted him on the fire and ate him. Rankin metaphorically suggests that the new country is going to be built on its dark, bloody past.

The novel voices different opinions about independence through different characters. Rebus, as ever, has got mixed feelings about the whole thing:

> Strategies for policing in the New Scotland. Everyone called it SPINS. Committee upon committee… it felt to Rebus as if they were building a paper tower, enough 'Policy Agendas', 'Reports' and 'Occasional papers' to completely fill Queensberry House. And the more they talked, the more that got written, the further away from reality they seemed to move. Queensberry house was unreal to him, the idea of the parliament itself the dream of some mad god: 'But Edinburgh is a mad god's dream/Fitful and dark…'[103]. (11-12)

However, the overall message of the novel is rather pessimistic and cynical about the future of devolved Scotland – the novel finishes with Cafferty back in charge of "*his* Edinburgh" (465).

The topic of Scottish independence is touched upon again in *Exit Music*. The novel, which was supposed to be the final one in the series, is set over just ten days and begins with the killing of a dissident Russian poet after a reading in Edinburgh, at a time when a group of post-Soviet billionaires is on a trip to the city to scout investment possibilities in the devolved Scotland. Rebus immediately sees conspiracies everywhere, but in the end, the solution turns out to be far simpler: the victim was in the wrong place, at the wrong time and his death had nothing to do with politics. This does not mean, however, that the novel is devoid of political interest; on the contrary, Rankin puts politics right at the heart of the text. In *Exit Music* Rankin takes a close

[103] Quotation from the poem "Edinburgh" by Hugh MacDiarmid. A fragment of the poem has been carved on the Canongate Wall (part of the Scottish parliament buildings) as one of the twenty-six quotations of relevance to Scotland and the parliament.

interest in the politics of the time: the question of Scottish independence and the ways of exploiting it. In Rankin's rather grim vision, people who would benefit the most if Scotland became an independent country are represented by a seedy banker, a career politician and a ruthless gangster.

Generally, topical interest is one of the staple characteristics of the whole series. For example, *The Naming of the Dead* borrows the background of the G8 summit taking place at Gleneagles on 7 July 2005[104]. Other novels explore such themes and issues as, for instance, sex slavery (*The Hanging Garden*), the Scottish oil industry (*Black and Blue*), or paedophilia (*Dead Souls*).

However, it is important to point out that although all of the novels to a lesser or greater extent are characterised by topical interest, some of them also explore stories from the documented past. For example, *Black and Blue* brings back the figure of "Bible John", a real serial killer who threatened Glasgow in the 1960s and was never caught. *The Hanging Garden*, on the other hand, uses as a backstory the history of a massacre that took place in a French village, Oradour-sur-Glane, during the second world war when the Nazis killed the population of the entire village. And finally, *The Falls* evokes the urban folktale of Edinburgh's body snatchers. Rankin brings back an old mystery surrounding the seventeen miniature coffins containing little wooden figures which were found hidden in a cave at Arthur's Seat back in 1836. There are a number of theories surrounding the mystery of the coffins. One of them suggests that the coffins represent a mock burial, possibly for the seventeen known victims of Burke and Hare.[105] In the novel a miniature coffin is found after a girl had been abducted which brings the old story to light. Once again Rankin shows how one can never escape the past; it always repeats itself. In the 21st century version of the story the coffins are made by a serial killer and the city's pathologist in one – an obvious reference to Dr Knox and Burke and Hare. However, in the ironic turn of events, it turns out that the most recent coffin was made by a local artist who is looking to

[104] One of the rather comical moments in the book is when Rebus bumps into George W. Bush on his bicycle, a reference to a real incident involving the American president who collided with a police officer during a bike ride on the grounds of the Scottish hotel hosting the G8 summit.

[105] William Burke and William Hare were Irish immigrants who committed a series of murders in order to sell bodies as dissection-material to Dr Robert Knox, an anatomist, for his lectures. At that time many people believed that a dissected body would not rise to life at the last judgment hence the coffins' purpose might have been to aid the victims to be resurrected ("An Unsolved Mystery: The Coffins Found on Arthur's Seat").

make money from Edinburgh's murky past. One can only wonder if this is a piece of conscious or sub-conscious self-criticism as Rankin also makes money from the exploration of Edinburgh's past.

As one can see from the examples discussed above, crime is only one of the thematic interests of these stories. The real interest is in Scotland and its society. As Messent rightly observes, "Rankin is clearly interested in addressing major social issues in his police novels, especially as they figure within a Scottish political and cultural context" (182). One can argue that Rankin uses the framework of the crime novel as a vehicle for examining "the state of Scotland". This is discussed, among others, by Petrie:

> Rankin has created a vast canvas upon which broad and challenging themes and ideas have been subsequently elaborated and developed to great effect. The series as a whole has tended to rely on the by now familiar device of the tenacious, instinctive detective refusing to be distracted from the scent. But while some of the early novels featured lone killers and psychopaths, the more ambitious additions have Rebus uncovering entrenched structures of organized criminal activity or institutional corruption. This in turn raises fundamental, social, psychological, political and economic questions pertinent to the state of contemporary Scotland, and arguably Rankin's real motivation as a writer. (152)

Plain develops this argument even further and argues that "Rankin is less interested in whodunit, or even particularly in why they did it, than in what it means to live in a society in which such crimes are possible" (*Ian Rankin's Black and Blue* 29). I agree with Plain up to a point. In my opinion, the Rebus novels are still primarily detective novels albeit with a much greater focus on social issues and the psychology of the characters. However, the fact that they belong to the genre of crime fiction means that the question "whodunnit?" is still central to their narrative.

This interest in "Scottish issues" is, however, not incidental and is not characteristic only of Rankin's fiction but is a defining feature of all Scottish crime writing. Plain argues this forcefully in "Concepts of Corruption: Crime Fiction and the Scottish 'State'":

> Crime writing has been a vibrant dimension of Scottish literary culture since the 1980's, when a range of writers adopted the genre as a means of exploring systemic rather than individual criminality. The alienated figure of the

> detective was a trope well suited to the articulation of opposition to Thatcherism, and from these polemical roots crime fiction developed into an ideal formula for investigating the state of Scotland. (132)

Similarly, Petrie notes that

> the genre does provide an accessible format through which relevant issues can be interrogated. The centrality of class, gender, national identity and the modern city, alongside considerations of the meaning of morality, justice and criminality in modern society, provides a clear indication of the more weighty dimensions that are contained within contemporary Scottish crime fiction, and equally central to the reimagination of the nation itself. (159)

Some of the writers who are especially worth noticing here are Denise Mina (the *Garnethill* trilogy and Paddy Meehan series), Paul Johnston (the Quint Dalrymple novels), Louise Welsh (*The Cutting Room*), Ian Banks (not a crime writer as such, but his novel *Complicity* is a worthy addition to the genre) and, of course, William McIlvannvey who is considered to be the first Scottish author to engage with the social realities of contemporary Scotland by using the framework of the crime novel.

Conclusion

Novels by Rankin are marked by a concern with nation and history as well as psychological observations. Although these are features that one can expect from a piece of hard-boiled detective fiction, Rankin develops the convention further. His novels can be seen not only as crime fiction novels, but also as psychological novels and "state of the nation" novels. One can see clearly that Rankin's fiction has acquired features connected with the psychological-social novel. Once again, this confirms the arguments for the historical development of the genre, and for the process of ennobling the crime-novel genre.

Conclusions

In *Adventure, Mystery and Romance* Cawelti states that: "To be a work of any quality or interest, the individual version of the formula must have some unique or special characteristics of its own, yet these characteristics must ultimately work toward the fulfilment of the conventional form" (10). This statement is certainly true about Rankin's work. In many ways, the Rebus novels are just formulaic crime novels and the reader is presented with many familiar elements. Yet at the same time, Rankin is playing with the formula, tampering with the genre. The Rebus novels are characterised by genre polymorphism, which provides evidence for the development of the genre of crime fiction.

As seen in Chapter 2, the Rebus novels combine motifs and conventions of the hard-boiled detective fiction with the structural and thematic realism of the police procedural. The result is a hybrid in which the pattern of action, characters and setting all bear resemblance to both sub-genres. DI John Rebus is a police officer representing the status quo, but at the same time acts as a private eye within the police force; the pattern of action is based on the heroic adventure, but the clue-puzzle element is still present and the crime is solved using police procedures; the representation of the city brings to mind the mean streets of the hard-boiled detective story, but the focus on locality also echoes the settings found in the British police procedural. Furthermore, although the author borrows many conventions from the classic examples of the hard-boiled detective stories and police procedurals, he avoids the danger of his fiction becoming too clichéd by employing the conventions selectively and reworking them as appropriate.

Rankin's fiction can also be placed among wider tendencies found in European crime fiction. At the moment of writing, the police novel with a strong focus on social issues and the psychology of the main characters is one of the dominant genre-variants of crime fiction. Although Rankin was not a precursor of this form, he definitely helped to popularise it and forged a path for many other Scottish and European crime writers.

Because of the influence he has had on the crime novel, Rankin has been credited with the creation of a new sub-genre: Tartan Noir. However, Tartan Noir is merely a marketing label and, as this study has suggested, cannot be seen as a genre or genre-variant. The term is used to describe the fiction of very different writers and even though it is true that one can find some elements which are common among the different practitioners of Tartan Noir, it is not enough to talk about the emergence of a new sub-genre.

Although the Rebus novels are clearly crime novels that contain many typical motifs and conventions that one associates with the genre of crime fiction, they also contain genre-markers of two other genres: the Gothic novel and the psychological-social novel.

Crime fiction has always been closely connected with Gothic fiction and Rankin's fiction is a perfect example of the intersection of crime fiction with the Gothic. The novels use the framework of the crime novel, but incorporate themes typical of the Gothic novel, such as the return of the past upon present and duality, as well as such Gothic motifs as the unstable protagonist, the double or ghosts. Moreover, both the atmosphere in the novels and the setting echo Gothic fiction. What is more, Rankin offers a particularly Scottish resonance by elaborating on the tradition of James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson. A closer reading of *Knots and Crosses* and *The Black Book* reveals that they contain intertextual elements which refer to the seminal works of the Scottish Gothic: *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Furthermore, the theme of duality and the motif of the double is a running feature throughout the series and therefore the novels can be read through the lens of the Caledonian Antisyzygy.

Chapter 4 shows that the Rebus novels are also penetrated by the genre-markers of the psychological-social novel, which confirms the process of genre ennoblement as sketched out by Ireneusz Opacki and Alastair Fowler. Popular fiction does, indeed, borrow from mainstream fiction. As the psychological-social novel remains the royal genre in contemporary British literature, it has influenced the popular genre of the crime novel, and Rankin's Rebus novels exemplify that. The novels are concerned not only with plot and the action, but also with the spiritual, emotional and mental lives of the main protagonist (and to an extent other characters).

By increasing the psychological element in his novels, Rankin has successfully created a character that will be remembered and will constitute an example to which other fictional detectives will be compared. Moreover, Rebus novels are also concerned with contemporary social problems and demonstrate an interest in nation and history.

Rankin's fiction expresses that "sense of the poetry of modern life" that Chesterton was looking for in detective fiction. His novels offer an evocation of the modern city and paint a detailed picture of modern society. Even when the novels feature characters or stories from the past, they are marked by topical interest. By exploring up-to-date social themes, Rankin creates fiction which raises important questions pertinent to "the state of Scotland". Even though some of his earlier novels can be seen as underdeveloped, (e.g. *Hide and Seek*, *Tooth and Nail* or *Strip Jack*), the later instalments of the series are thick with plot and character and, even more importantly, engage in social criticism. It is this focus on the issues concerning Scotland and its society which gives his fiction much of its distinctive force. Another distinctive feature is the special role the topography of Edinburgh plays in the whole series. Thanks to the use of real locations and thorough and precise descriptions of the city, the novels offer a very strong sense of place. Moreover, it can be argued that because of the special role that topography of Edinburgh plays in the whole series, the Rebus novels can be seen not only as examples of a crime novel, but also what one could call an "Edinburgh novel".

By employing the conventions of the psychological-social novel, Rankin shifts the focus from the "whodunnit" to the "whydunnit". After we have read the novels, what remains with us is not the gruesome details of the murder, or the details of the police investigation, but rather a better understanding of society. In that respect, Rankin's Rebus novels are Scottish novels as much as crime novels.

Genre-mixture remains one of the central aspects of contemporary British fiction and, as has been shown in this study, it also occurs in popular, non-mainstream fiction such as crime fiction. The fiction of Rankin contains substantial genre-mixing and exemplifies how the crime fiction genre has developed by borrowing from mainstream fiction. The crime novel today plays the role that in the nineteenth century was fulfilled by the realist novel.

It paints a detailed picture of a society and explores social themes and national anxieties. Crime fiction writers are not afraid to tackle subjects which are controversial or difficult and often ignored by mainstream writers. The literary output of Rankin is just one of the examples of commercially successful fiction that offers readers something more than just guilty pleasure. Many other Scottish crime writers produce serious fiction which deserves to be read and written about. Contemporary Scottish fiction is characterised by a plurality of voices and one of these voices, and a very strong one, is the voice of the crime writers.

By Ian Rankin

The Detective Inspector Rebus Series

Knots and Crosses (1987)
Hide and Seek (1990)
Tooth and Nail (1992) [previously published as *Wolfman*]
Strip Jack (1992)
The Black Book (1993)
Mortal Causes (1994)
Let it Bleed (1995)
Black and Blue (1997)
Hanging Garden (1998)
"Death Is Not the End" (1998)
Dead Souls (1999)
Set in Darkness (2000)
The Falls (2001)
Resurrection Men (2002)
A Question of Blood (2003)
Fleshmarket Close (2004)
The Naming of the Dead (2006)
Exit Music (2007)

———————

Standing in Another Man's Grave (2012)
Saints of the Shadow Bible (2013)
Even Dogs in the Wild (2015)
Rather Be the Devil (2016)
In a House of Lies (2018)
A Song for the Dark Times (2020)
A Heart Full of Headstones (2022)
Midnight and Blue (2024)

The Inspector Malcolm Fox Series

The Complaints (2009)
The Impossible Dead (2011)

Other Novels

The Flood (1986)
Watchman (1988)
Westwind (1990)
Doors Open (2008)
"A Cool Head" (2009)
With William McIlvanney *The Dark Remains* (2021)

Writing as Jack Harvey

Witch Hunt (1993)
Bleeding Hearts (1994)
Blood Hunt (1995)

Short Stories

A Good Hanging and Other Stories (1992)
Herbert in Motion and Other Stories (1997)
Beggars Banquet (2002)
The Beat Goes On: The Complete Rebus Short Stories (2014)

Plays

With Mark Thomson *Dark Road* (2014)
With Rona Munro *Rebus: Long Shadows* (2018)
With Simon Reade *Rebus: A Game Called Malice* (2023)

Graphic Novels

With Werther Dell'Edera *Dark Entries* (2009)
With Tim Truman "The Lie Factory" (2013)

Non-fiction

Rebus's Scotland: A Personal Journey (2005)
John Rebus (2007)[106]

[106] A chapbook published by The Mysterious Bookshop in NYC in a signed limited hardcover edition of 100 copies and 1,000 softcover copies; reprinted in the UK edition of *The Beat Goes On: The Complete Rebus Stories* as "Rankin on Rebus".

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