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What is Tartan Noir?

Investigating Scotland's Dark Contemporary
Crime Fiction

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I, Len Wanner, hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in candidature for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, is of my own composition, excluding designated citations, and was not previously submitted for the award of any other degree or professional qualification at this or any other university.

Len Wanner, BA, MA

January the 31st, 2014

Abstract

Contrary to popular belief, Tartan Noir is not a synonym for Scottish noir but a mystifying marketing label for a national literature: dark, contemporary Scottish crime fiction. As it comprises an immense diversity of writing done in such mainstream sub-genres as detective, police, and serial killer fiction, as well as actual noir, I will investigate both the contrasts and the crossovers between said sub-genres. I will show that only few of the writers who are most associated with Tartan Noir write much, or any, noir, whereas most of those who do are not commonly associated with the term. With a view to remedying this, I will discuss the novels which have most influenced the reputation of Tartan Noir alongside those which have most influenced its identity. And by showing how this literature integrates the tension between several highly charged counter concepts – such as conformity and individuality, convention and innovation, sensationalism and thoughtful social, cultural, and political commentary – I hope to demystify Tartan Noir, that is, define the term and refine its use.

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Introduction

What is Tartan Noir? Perhaps surprisingly, it is not a synonym for Scottish noir. Instead, Tartan Noir is a mystifying marketing label for a national literature – dark contemporary Scottish crime fiction – and, as I hope to show, this literature comprises a broad range of shades and sub-genres besides noir. Why, then, did Ian Rankin – the man who coined the term and, as the so-called ‘King of Tartan Noir’, set the terms of the literature’s perception – use the word noir? “Well,” he said when I asked him, “there’s no tradition of crime fiction in Scotland but there is a great tradition of quite dark, psychological, Gothic horror stories. Specifically in the ‘70s, I think in Glasgow, there was a move towards a kind of realistic school of writing about working class life, writing about hard men, writing about hard lives, and writing about urban experience. So it was a move away from the ‘kaleyard’, which was this romanticised view of Scotland. I think crime fiction tapped into that very nicely, and because there was no tradition of crime fiction in Scotland it meant a completely level playing field. Nobody had to be worried about writing in a certain tradition, and most of us weren’t influenced by the English... because there was no Agatha Christie figure you didn’t feel you were looking over your shoulder and you had to write a certain kind of book. So, in fact, there’s a huge catholicism to Scottish crime fiction... But the balance has swung towards noir, quite dark fiction” (Rankin 2011: 3-4). Now, while Rankin is undoubtedly right in referring to Tartan Noir as a broad church of literary innovators, he is just as undoubtedly wrong in claiming that it was built on a ‘completely level playing field’, separate from the influence of any English tradition, and without the help of many Scottish imitators. Even if he himself has never looked over his shoulder or felt he had to write a certain kind of book, countless compatriots of his have looked South and many specifically to 221B Baker Street, London, where crime fiction’s perhaps most illustrious pioneer left a physical monument to the fact that, contrary to Rankin’s claim, there most certainly is an ‘Agatha Christie figure’ in Scotland. His name, of course, is Arthur Conan Doyle, and while nobody had to be ‘worried’ about writing in his tradition, as Rankin puts it, so many fictional gumshoes have followed in the footsteps of his private detective, Sherlock Holmes, that the latter has become a byword of detective fiction both at home and abroad. So, as most readers will already know, most detective fiction is far too concerned with brainteasers, heroic individualism, and the restoration of order to be noir in any meaning of the word bar the literal, French meaning of black. And it is in this meaning only that noir is the right choice of word when Rankin claims that ‘the balance has swung towards noir, quite dark fiction’.

The meaning first brought to mind by such literary commentary, however, is that of the art term noir, as in *noir fiction* or *film noir*, so it is misleading to refer to Scottish crime fiction en masse as noir. Noir, after all, is a broad ideological concept with shades of meaning such as ‘working class tragedy’, ‘transgressor fiction’, and ‘psycho thriller’, but it is not quite broad enough to include the mainstream, let alone the kind of fiction that features cantankerous but moralistic coppers figuring out whodunit, cosy atmospheres in which charming dilettantes solve murder mysteries, or, whisper it, cat detectives. Noir does not do heroism, it does not do happy ends, and it does not do harmless, so it will not do as a collective term for a literature which often does all three at once. As for the qualifier that it is tartan – that this literature’s multi-colouredness is signalled by the adjective tartan although the noun is noir, the very negation of colour – that is all too patently a piece of nonsense to warrant further discussion. So, all that is left to say is that Tartan Noir will not do as a collective term. And yet it will *have* to do, for it is already in use, and due to its misleading but marketable evocation of Franco-Gaelic exoticism, it is unlikely to yield to the more exact but rather prosaic ‘dark contemporary Scottish crime fiction’. The pragmatic thing to do, then, is to accept this defeat of common sense and look beyond labels. Doing so, I hope to clarify what Tartan Noir really is and perhaps help refine the term’s future use. The best way to do so, I believe, is to show that none of the writers most associated with Tartan Noir – writers like Ian Rankin, Val McDermid, Stuart MacBride, Chris Brookmyre, and Denise Mina – write much, or any, noir, while most of those who do – writers like Alexander Trocchi, Hugh C. Rae, Gordon Williams, Iain Banks, and Barry Graham – are not commonly associated with Tartan Noir. Showing this will illustrate that the literature’s balance has indeed swung toward ‘quite dark fiction’, but that it has not swung all the way to noir because most Tartan Noirists, including the best known, have made their name at some distance from noir. Now, since most of them have done so in detective, police, and/or serial killer fiction, I will discuss these three sub-genres in chapters one, two, and three. And since most of them have left noir fiction to writers who are either hardly known at all or better known for their non-noir writing, I will discuss this dark literature of the margins in the final chapter. This chapter division does not, however, suggest the existence of solid boundaries between writers found in different chapters. Instead, it signals my intent to shed light on Tartan Noir’s main facets, and doing so will involve an examination of its many contrasts as well as crossovers.

Further, it will involve a clarification of the literature’s key concepts at the beginning of each chapter, for each of these sub-genres comes with its own conventions as well as its own special vocabulary. This will be followed by a discussion of ten novels which together delineate the respective sub-genre, a synopsis of the main features they have added or altered and which now distinguish that sub-genre, and finally an in-depth comparative reading that will focus on the most common of all these features. Of course, judging by ten examples delivers no final verdict. Another set of ten may invite objection, and another reader may well object to my in- or exclusion of particular writers. My final selections, however, are neither top-ten lists of my personal favourites nor are they influenced by official canons.

They are based on my belief that, along with the two writers I will discuss in the comparative section, these are the ten writers who have most affected how others have since written in their sub-genre, either because their literary merit has inspired writers to contribute to the sub-genre's diversification, or because their commercial success has incentivised other writers to conform to their way of writing. As for all the writers who, if not omitted, would add even more facets to each sub-genre's perception, I regret the necessary omissions and assure you I mean no disrespect. Alas, and this may be obvious, no overview is ever all-inclusive, but at this length it is long enough to take in each sub-genre's range, the context of each writer's work, and the proportion of each contribution to the literature at large. Just as importantly, however, it is not long enough to provide the kind of encyclopaedic detail which, by distracting from both context and proportion, might disguise the literature's immense diversity. And since this diversity is proof that no Tartan Noirist represents a definitive majority movement – proof which is indispensable given that Rankin's reputation as the reigning 'King of Tartan Noir' all too easily obscures this fact – it is important to avoid further obscuring the literature's diversity. Besides, this diversity also proves that there are too many multi-cultural tributaries and single-minded currents for a mainstream to take the form that foreign readers may expect: a fervent anti-Englishness. The popular prejudice against the Scots, after all, is that they stand for nothing but against the English. Yet as I will show, very few Tartan Noirists risk, let alone encourage, a nationalist reading. Indeed, there is a strong trend among them toward complicating definitions by nationalism, which, ironically, is a trend that unites most of Scotland's crime writers in a national literature. Yet as I will also show, the main difficulty in defining Tartan Noir is not that 'anti-English' is not the right attribute to do so, but that *any* one attribute would imply the existence of a common denominator, when in fact the many sub-genre crossovers of its most influential exponents show that there is no such thing.

The first case in point is the Scottish detective novel. So in this first chapter, I will briefly review the sub-genre's 180-year history so as to examine the influence of the literature's two founding fathers, Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, whose C. Auguste Dupin and Sherlock Holmes introduced such genre favourites as the brilliant and bohemian detective who turns his work into an exact science. This trend was reversed in the 1920s and '30s when the two founding fathers of the modern era, Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, dethroned the Nietzschean superior man in favour of the hard-boiled private eye, and I will look not only at this historic shift from the analytical certainties and stable social order of the classic model to the gritty realism and rough style of the hard-boiled school, but also at the often overlooked continuity with the idealistic quest for truth and justice. Furthermore, I will discuss in detail how William McIlvanney introduced America's hard-boiled PI to Scotland, where he naturalised him as a questioner in whose consciousness the meanings of other lives emerge; how Ian Rankin built on McIlvanney's towering success to show that the detective can be a prism through which the writer can portray the dynamics of urban change; how Philip Kerr re-focused the private eye on America's favourite topic, the junction at which family affairs turn into affairs of state;

how Chris Brookmyre radicalised the PI by making him the scourge of ruthless white-collar criminals, a funny avenger of entrepreneurial cock-ups and establishment cover-ups in a post-Thatcher Scotland; how Paul Johnston managed to make the PI straddle the divide between detective and science fiction in a dystopian meditation on the conflict between individual conscience and ideological compromise; how Louise Welsh sensitised the PI to reflect the sub-genre's rarely contested machismo by examining through a feminist filter the many ways in which people use those weaker than themselves; how Denise Mina used this feminist filter to reassert the romantic's original ideal of animated being, demonstrating that the modern private investigator can always practise the virtues of impulse, intuition, and insubordination, even when in conflict with conformity; how Ray Banks inverted the stereotype of the hard-boiled private eye by casting him as an impotent ex-convict who questions genre conventions and sees crime as a criticism of the causes which it is respectable not to question; how Tony Black extended this critique by putting the PI at the heart of modernity's decadence where he questioned the dirty affair between respectability and crime until the hard-boiled private investigator turned into a hard-up conscientious objector; how Peter May focused the private eye on the private 'I' at the centre of his investigation and thus showed how even hard-boiled individuals can become imprisoned in a shameful privacy; and – finally – how Craig Russell and Gordon Ferris, whom I will discuss comparatively, represent the diversity of contemporary Scottish detective fiction by making the PI cross over into sub-genres as different as pastiche noir and the Western.

In chapter two, I will investigate the Scottish police novel. Starting with a brief review of the police's history since the Statute of Winchester of 1285, I will discuss why it took until the late 1940s for the police to command its own literature. I will further discuss how the police novel came to dramatise, not only the details, but also the dilemmas of modern policing, and how its cast of bureaucrats split the sub-genre into its two main forms, one structured around the investigative efforts of individualists, the other around those of team players. Next, I will discuss the three most popular roles – the moralist, the pragmatist, and the rogue – that have come to define the majority of the literature's protagonists, not only to illustrate how Scotland's police novelists have shaped the corresponding ethical profiles, but also to discuss how this has allowed them to charge their narratives with moral controversy, address concerns about either absolute or restricted state power, and do so while pushing boundaries, be they moral, social, cultural, political, or purely generic. One by one, then, I will discuss in detail how M.C. Beaton used the parlour tricks of the Golden Age detective and the parochial mentality of Scotland's Kailyard tradition to dramatise the dangerous jealousies of communities divided by class; how William McIlvanney modernised the Scottish police novel when he gave it its original rogue cop, the quintessential individualist whose sense of morality and agency functioned so independently of the institutional matrix that he singlehandedly created a genre cliché: the bad ass with a good heart; how Val McDermid integrated the narrative strategies of the 'whodunit' and the 'howdhecatchem', not only to show that male and female bad asses with good hearts could be successfully teamed up,

but also to show the personal and professional dangers of incomplete gender integration in the police; how Stuart MacBride focused on the stress points of the social system which the police represents and showed that fragmented communities allow people as well as principles to fall through the cracks; how Craig Russell showed that the police novel can function like the fable has done for millennia, cautioning readers about the dangers of disobeying moral imperatives or reading them too literally; how Caro Ramsay prioritised a risk most police officers acknowledge but few police novelists do: human error; how Quintin Jardine found a rare arena for the common, ground-level cop point of view: soap opera; how Karen Campbell showed that police novels can deal with the controversy of police violence without either sensationalising or excusing it; how Alex Gray recast the bad ass as a domestic god who acts out the cardinal sentimental virtues that hard-boiled policemen pose against; how Denise Mina addressed the injustices of categorical judgment and power displacement by thematising the shaming connotations of the ‘they’ divide between cops and criminals; and – finally – how Ian Rankin’s ethics and aesthetics of reform, which I will discuss comparatively, epitomise the diversity of the Scottish police novel.

In chapter three, I will examine the Scottish serial killer novel. I will explain why there are far more serial killers in fiction than in fact, why their stories tend to be written as psychological case studies, and how this is related to the politics of mental health and the ‘psycho’ anxiety that spread across the world after President John F. Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Act into law in 1963. While briefly reviewing the serial killer’s popularisation in fiction throughout the following 50 years, I will show how another American, Thomas Harris, triggered the literature’s mass production in 1988, when he gave the world Hannibal Lecter, the cannibalistic serial killer of *The Silence of the Lambs*. And after discussing the sub-genre’s rather limited narrative strategies, I will discuss its confinement by examining the four psychopathological types of serial killer around which these strategies tend to be structured: the hedonistic, the visionary, the mission-oriented, and the power-oriented serial killer. Then, to show how these and other genre conventions have been dealt with in Scotland, I will discuss in detail how Frederic Lindsay defied history with a gendered, violent protest against a dominant theory and genre convention of the 1980s in accordance with which female serial killers were denied, or at least ignored, as something of a conceptual impossibility; how Philip Kerr defied genre conventions along with conventional morality by treating serial killing as a civil service and raising hard questions about the public’s hypothetical consent to protective assassins on government payrolls; how Ian Rankin broke one of the form’s implicit promises by fictionalising one of Scotland’s real life serial killers without offering an explanation, be it for his crimes or his ability to get away with them; how Douglas Lindsay defied the conventional seriousness of the serial killer novel and introduced Scotland to the Quentin Tarantino recipe of bad decisions, burlesque dialogue, and baroque violence, how Campbell Armstrong drew a rare distinction between anti-social personality disorder and psychopathy to show how perceptual schemas can funnel what we ‘see’ into pre-existing categories;

how Chris Brookmyre created a rare moral conflict by making his serial killer an infamous critic of all those who pruriently consume murder as a public spectacle; how Craig Robertson proved that it is possible to cross the line into the serial killer's sense of victimhood with one's identification intact; how Lin Anderson exemplified the genre's conventional assumption that the sadistic impulse makes serial killers inexplicable in human terms; how G.J. Moffat confirmed this gullibility yet criticised that people tend to think in stereotypes and so believe confident narratives over coherent narratives; how James Oswald introduced a rare supernatural element and showed that it ultimately makes no difference whether serial killers are demonically possessed or pathologically deluded; and – finally – how Val McDermid and Stuart MacBride, whom I will discuss comparatively, illustrate the diversity of the Scottish serial killer novel by finding opposite roles and resolutions for the abnormally normal actions and appearances of psychopathic serial killers.

After this in-depth discussion of Tartan Noir's three most popular sub-genres, I will turn my attention to what the term seems to denote yet what, ironically, is not commonly associated with Tartan Noir, the Scottish noir novel. I will briefly review noir's history since its origin in mid-20th century France, discuss the difficulty of defining it – be it as an art period, an aesthetic movement, or an iconic style – argue for its treatment as an ideological concept like 'romantic' or 'classic', and, in the process, hopefully clarify a perennial confusion about the way in which generic concepts are formed. However, rather than spend any longer on the decade old debate about noir's extensive nomenclature, I will concentrate on the noir protagonist's tendency to be alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating. And rather than deplore that we are unlikely ever to arrive at a 'right' definition, I will try to find the most interesting and informative use of the term 'noir' with regard to its variety in Scottish literature. I intend to do so by discussing in detail how Alexander Trocchi imported the noir ethos of Albert Camus into mid-20th century Scotland, where he demonstrated not only that noir can be a controversial revolt against repressive sexual mores but that, like sex, it is rarely simple let alone pure; how Hugh C. Rae broadened this focus on man's sex drive by examining a vast array of animal instincts that can turn a man into a predator and lead to a disturbing trivialisation of life and death; how Gordon Williams intellectualised this trend toward Europe's male fascination with the instinctive and illuminated some dark places to which instinct can take men when their masculinity is in crisis; how William McIlvanney became the 'Godfather of Tartan Noir' and why his brand of metaphysical noir has not defined subsequent Scottish noir; how Iain Banks returned to the literature's animalism and for decades popularised a spirit of malevolent machismo which survives its practical exertion; how Barry Graham nevertheless proved that it is not only possible for a noir novel to be a love story, but that the potential to be alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating is greater in love than in hate; how Duncan McLean showed that the failure to embrace vulnerability tends to result in *degeneration*, not *regeneration*, and that the typical moralist's stated love of virtue rarely denotes a wish to address, let alone amend, personal faults; how Irvine Welsh showed that this latter, more popular type of noir –

the hateful type – typically comes down to man’s defeat by the thing he most detests about himself; how Ray Banks made noir accommodate humanity’s potential for change through the renunciation of one’s dark nature; how Liam McIlvanney politicised noir and demonstrated that Devolution is partially determined by people as compromised and wanting as the nations they represent; and – finally – how Helen FitzGerald and Allan Guthrie, whom I will discuss comparatively, indicate that Scotland’s contemporary noirists uphold a long and schizophrenic literary tradition.

Chapter One – The Detective Novel

Typically, the detective novel tells the story of one man's quest for truth, if not justice. Stereotypically, the fictional detective tells his own story, that of a lone wolf who lays down the law of the jungle as he roams the mean streets of an urban waste land in search of redemption for our sins, a good man who all too often does the wrong thing, but always for the right reason. Through the lens of this 'private eye' the author of such a novel lets us look at what goes on when the lights go out. He, for he too is typically a man, lets an outsider do what the police can or will not do when he looks into private indecencies of public interest. Not only does this furnish him with a narrative strategy, it also lets us see our public's indifference to private indignity, and that soon forms our shared resolve to find a way through the thicket of clues and conspiracies. Of course, time and again the alpha male investigator loses said way among loose women and looser plots. He will even lose consciousness, repeatedly, and at times he will risk losing the powers of both consecutive thought and plot continuity. And yet he loses neither his courage nor our confidence. Instead, he gradually wins our trust as a professional with principles, the last of the good guys, so in the end this knight errant finds his grail, tarnished yet transformative, and typically in the first place we never looked.

So much for the stereotypical detective novel; polemic is for clearing the ground. That done, one way to approach this form of crime fiction, the first in history and foremost in parody, is to appreciate its founding fathers whose combined achievement is a set of generic conventions that is itself the literary heritage of arguably 180 years. A good starting point, then, is 1833 and "Théorie de la Démarche", "The Theory of the Walk". According to its author, Honoré de Balzac, this essay paved the way for a new science by expanding ground-level sociological observation with wide-angled metaphysical insight. Edgar Allan Poe, who elevated this science to near-clairvoyant inference, may or may not have read Balzac's essay by 1840, the year he published "The Man of the Crowd". What is certain is that his short story about a curious Londoner, a private man who watches people as he walks among them to theorise social typicality and criminal degeneracy, has since been seen as the X-ray of a detective story. Shadowed by the Gothic tales of the 1830s, it traces literary features that have been both canonised and caricaturised since Poe consolidated them in the shape of C. Auguste Dupin, Parisian amateur detective and serial protagonist of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841), "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" (1842), and "The Purloined Letter" (1844). The three short stories have since become known as the first tales of 'ratiocination', a term Poe introduced in the second of these tales, "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt", where he used it three times to trace his detective's

extraordinary detection skills to his 'ratio', the Latin word for reason and computation. Ever since, these tales of ratiocination have shown generations of imitators and innovators how to integrate the classical detective story's generic conventions by heightening the tension between such counter concepts as brains and brawn, the hunter and the hunted, the bohemian but brilliant detective and the bureaucratic but bumbling constabulary. Thus, they have made Poe, as Julian Symons states, "the undisputed father of the detective story, although he would have been disconcerted by many of his children and grandchildren" (Symons 1993: 29). Be that as it may – and be it mainly through such famed ancestors as Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot – Poe and Dupin changed literary history.

So no, Holmes is not the first of the fictional detectives. Poe's fact-finding flâneur, lone wanderer of an alienating metropolis and paradigmatic subject of an aggressive modernity, first found eminent proponents in Alexandre Dumas and Émile Gaboriau who brought him to their public's attention in person of Messrs Jackal and Lecoq of *Les Mohicans de Paris* (1854-59) and *L'Affaire Lerouge* (1866). He was then even further popularised by the poetry of Charles Baudelaire and the philosophy of Walter Benjamin, and yet it is Holmes who has prevailed as the most eloquent byword of the fictional detective. Contextualising this pre-eminence, John Hodgson says Doyle "created a new kind of protagonist, a detective who, going beyond the mental acuteness of Poe's Dupin and the dawning professionalism of Gaboriau's Lecoq, would 'reduce this fascinating but unorganized business to something nearer to an exact science'" (Hodgson 2010: 390). Quoted here on his inspiration for Holmes, Dr Joseph Bell of Edinburgh University, Doyle did more than echo Balzac's claim to fame. He related science to storytelling. Not only does this suggest why his stories, most of which are told in the first person by the assistant Dr Watson, read like descriptive accounts of experiments in detection in which the end of every adventure is followed by an explanation of every action. The Holmesian approximation of an exact science also signifies just how significant variables are in the formula of detective fiction, be it the work of a single writer or the genre as a whole. After all, much like the evolution of a science, the evolution of a story and, Lee Horsley adds, "the evolution of a genre depends on a combination of continuity and change, and Holmes is unquestionably the first key figure from whom other writers differentiated their protagonists, only rivalled by the composite hard-boiled protagonist created by Hammett and Chandler in the early twentieth century" (Horsley 2010: 29).

Before we get to Spade and Marlowe, however, it is worth noting the possible confusion of such a personality cult. Yes, Symons is right to conclude that "part of Holmes's attraction was that, far more than any of his later rivals, he was so evidently a Nietzschean superior man. It was comforting to have such a man on one's side," if only because, "when the law cannot dispense justice, Holmes does so himself. He is a final court of appeal and the idea that such a court might exist, personified by an individual, was permanently comforting to his readers" (Symons 1993: 68/9). Yet literary history is

full of incidents when his admirers, both in reading about his adventures and in writing about his ancestors, have been a little too comfortable with this conventional abstraction. At these times, the eccentric Holmes has either been conflated with the epic Hercules or converted into such camp clichés as Lord Peter Wimsey and Hercule Poirot, and so Martin Priestman is also right to caution that “the notion of Holmes as a unique or superbly characterised personality is arguably a myth: what is far more interesting about him is the way in which he encapsulates some of the qualities of the series form itself within a fairly loose envelope of potentially contradictory traits” (Priestman 1998: 14), such as his quest for the singular in spite or perhaps because of his dual nature.

Holmes, whose first appearance as the animalistic anti-intellectual of *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) was followed by that of the intellectual aesthete of *The Sign of Four* (1890), integrated the tension between these two Holmeses in his search of single causes throughout two more novels and 56 short stories. So, while Holmes has become a ‘Nietzschean superior man’, he has earned this epithet not only for comforting his readers as a court of appeal but for containing his contradictions, and while he has become ‘the first key figure from whom other writers differentiated their protagonists’, key to his difference is that his own writer differentiated him into several figures. Doyle’s infamous attraction to Holmes was, then, less the result of his uniqueness than his singularity, a difference Doyle addressed in his autobiography: “It had struck me that a single character running through a series, if it only engaged the attention of the reader, would bind that reader to that particular magazine” (Doyle 1924: 95). Doyle has indeed bound generations of readers to his series, but he has done so by giving us more than an engaging single character. He has also given closure to each story by giving explanations for everything that seemed outré, and he has given continuing life to Holmes by giving him a life outside each story. His legacy therefore reaches beyond his tales of suspense. Dramatising the dual nature of his protagonist, not least in his duels with Professor Moriarty, Doyle has demonstrated the tension of the series form and created such technical genre conventions as tying in introductory incidentals to tighten up the following story along with the overarching series. So while he is perhaps better known for creating such topical genre conventions as proselytising on behalf of the amateur investigator of middle class sentiment and sensation, prioritising intuition and inference, or popularising recreational drugs, his pioneering of the genre’s pattern – repetition with variation – has been similarly programmatic, which is why Priestman is right to remind us that “it was not until the 1890s, with Sherlock Holmes, that its endless re-enactment became a fully addictive event” (Priestman 1998:10). However, Doyle did not simply prove the series to be sustainable. He also provided a model to make it so.

In the history of detective fiction, one genre convention alone shares the significance of this model – the motto ‘We Never Sleep’ which forever changed the way we see the Private Investigator, or PI for short, by suggesting an iconic pun with its emblem of an open eye: the ‘private eye’. Dating back to

the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, founded by the emigrated Scotsman Allan Pinkerton in 1850, it was after World War One that this private eye became 'hard-boiled', again not literally. Having crossed first the Atlantic and then the line into fiction, he now distanced himself from the rationale of the classical detective story – that human affairs are ruled by reason which is represented by a detective who will right every wrong. The hard-boiled detective became an American sentimentalist who differs notoriously from his 'soft-boiled' ancestors. He does so, Peter Messent notes, "in the personal vulnerability that comes from an immersion within the violent world being investigated, in the recognition that corruption is not just confined to the criminal underclass but pervades the entire social fabric, and in the (romantic) sense of alienation and isolation from the social body that accompanies that recognition" (Messent 1997: 7). Doing his best work at such considerable distance from the amateurs of Poe and Doyle, he came to depend, as Ralph Willet concludes, on "professional skills, physical courage affirmed as masculine potency, fortitude, moral strength, a fierce desire for justice, social marginality and a degree of anti-intellectualism" (Willet 1992: 6). Yet it was a more subtle change that was to mark the generational gap and mature these frontier characteristics into genre conventions. The hard-boiled private eye came to rely on reason only in concert with emotion, and this departure from the cold rationalism of the puzzle-solving mentality culminated in his declaration of independence from its logical and ideological constraints. Demonstrating this emancipation, he dispensed with the consulting detective and decided to be his own narrator to define himself in his own voice from the first-person point of view. This let hard-boiled writers emphasise the 'private' identity of their private eye and so empower him to be identifiable with the private 'I' of the reader. It also let the detective emphasise his consistent centrality and complex sensibility, and this has become a popular genre convention known as the 'hard-boiled conceit'.

"In the history of detective fiction," Jasmine Yong Hall says to emphasise the significance of the private eye with regard to another genre convention, "Dashiell Hammett is seen as the founder of the hard-boiled school; he has been widely credited with establishing a style of writing... based on material from actual, lived experience" (Yong Hall 2010: 450). Hammett, who was himself a former operative of the Pinkerton Agency, indeed drew on lived experience, even when he channelled it through the third-person objective style, and so he defined the hard-boiled protagonist as a laconic loner, often but not always a private investigator, who lives by his own code of conduct to be tough yet true in a world that has become as confusing as it is corrupt. So while the honour of 'founder of the hard-boiled school' must go to Carroll John Daly whose Race Williams became the prototype for the hard-boiled man of violence when he first appeared in the 1923 short story "Knights of the Open Palm", it is Hammett who made history with his Continental Op and Sam Spade. And while both the nameless Operative and Spade have become world-famous for their genre-defining investigative and narrative style, particularly in such novels as *Red Harvest* (1929) and *The Maltese Falcon* (1930),

Horsley has a point: “It is Spade, of course, who has come to be seen as the archetypal hard-boiled private eye, a loner whose audacity and individualism are products of a thoroughgoing distrust of conventional social arrangements and familiar pieties” (Horsley 2010: 32-33). Hammett’s heritage, then, is not limited to his establishment of the hard-boiled style. It extends to his reshaping of the hard-boiled subject, the private eye, who pushed the potential of the detective story so hard that ever since it has accommodated attacks on the social and political establishment.

So, while the history of detective fiction has been full of subversive variation, from unreliable narrators in the ‘whodunit’ to uncomfortable denouements in the ‘whydunit’, “Hammett was the ace performer,” not just in Raymond Chandler’s book. After all, “Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-wrought dueling pistols, curare and tropical fish” (Chandler 1950: 14). Yet this achievement, momentous though it was, should not distract from the fact that the shaping of the murder mystery – even the realistic type that has since focused on the hard-boiled private eye – has been a team effort. Sure, until Chandler himself came along and changed the way the literature was written and read, Hammett was the only one to receive critical recognition, and this explains why he was picked out of a radical yet sizeable literary movement to represent the ‘hard-boiled school’, but as class-rep he could only do so much for the private eye. As T.J. Binyon points out, “if the era of Prohibition, with its lawlessness, gangsters, and corrupt police, provided the reality from which the private eye sprang, it was the pulp magazines which made him popular” (Binyon 1990: 38). According to Horsley, it was one magazine in particular that not only popularised the private eye but produced the tradition of hard-boiled writing, for “its development as a subgeneric form of crime fiction is indissolubly linked with the founding of *Black Mask* magazine in 1920... with its growing reputation for publishing fast-paced, colloquial stories, and promoting ‘economy of expression’ and ‘authenticity in character and action’” (Horsley 2010: 32). Hammett was first published in the magazine in the early 1920s, Chandler a decade later, and within no time the two were yoked together for having conceived the private eye tradition.

Another consequence of their protracted parentage has been the conventional disregard for their differences. As LeRoy Lad Panek points out, “for Chandler the concept of being hard-boiled grew to become more complex and nuanced than it had been in the hands of his predecessors... less to do with callous relationships with people and more to do with attitude. And it was decidedly more psychological than physical... their hardness comes from their ability to take punishment and bounce back, persist, and finish what they started” (Panek 2010: 407/408). It also makes them strangers, even to themselves. Chandler made this alienation a familiar genre convention by making his protagonists struggle through stories of exploitation, fragmentation, and marginalisation. More importantly, however, in the seven novels he wrote about Philip Marlowe, starting with *The Big Sleep* (1939) and

finishing with *Playback* (1958), Chandler established what for many, including Panek, have become the essentials of any hard-boiled prose style: “non-standard diction, short declarative sentences relying on active verbs, first person narration with asides to the listener/reader, and occasional wisecracks... Most importantly Chandler made the simile a standard feature of hard-boiled style... to characterize the narrator by his range of reference and his original, shocking, or at least novel juxtapositions” (Panek 2010: 410). What is so important about Chandler’s popularisation of this technical device is that it indicates the genre’s profound topical development. Much like the narrator picks the simile to make sense of an estranging world because it makes connections through likeness, so Marlowe perseveres with his investigations because he makes connections with the people involved. That is, the pre-war Marlowe typically tries to keep his distance from his case and its principals, even though he cares about both. The post-war Marlowe and the tough guys following in his footsteps typically try to keep their distance from themselves, even as they get close to others. Yet in both cases the drama heightens as their professional detachment collapses into personal entanglement, for both cases have the same emotional structure. As Leonard Cassuto puts it, “Chandler drew the modern blueprint for one of the ur-plots of hard-boiled crime fiction, in which the detective arrives to fix the broken family” (Cassuto 2009: 82), and he developed this sentimentalism in his narrative structure, in which the detective attempts to tie up the loose plot as he gets drawn into one tense scene after another.

Finally, it was also Chandler who defined this detective as a measure of men for generations to come when he demanded that “down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero; he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man... a man of honour... He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world... The story is this man’s adventure in search of a hidden truth” (Chandler 1950: 18)... Since these famed words have led countless believers down the cul-de-sac of cliché, John Harvey may be right to recommend that writers and readers alike “follow old Ray down those mean streets and sumptuous sub-clauses at your peril” (Harvey 1997: 150)! What is certain is that many have followed his lead, be it directly or through the influence of deputies in his legion of followers, and this historical fact has led to another genre convention. As John G. Cawelti puts it, “Inevitably there comes a point in the hard-boiled detective’s investigation when he can lament with Philip Marlowe: ‘I get it from the law, I get it from the hoodlum element, I get it from the carriage trade. The words change, but the meaning is the same. Lay off’” (Cawelti 1977: 143-4). Yet just as certain as this adversity is that, as John Scaggs confirms, “the shift from the analytical certainties and reassuringly stable social order of classical detective fiction to the gritty realism of the ‘mean streets’ of hard-boiled fiction disguised a certain continuity, in Chandler, at any rate, with the idealistic quest for truth and justice characteristic of romance” (Scaggs 2005: 58). Long after this genre convention came to the detective story via the Western, most hard-boiled private eyes still prove Philip Simpson right as they “embark upon quests through

nightmarish worlds to solve problems of archetypal significance – in a sense, knight-errants with only their own codes of justice to guide them through a fallen world... Their reactions to the stress of their quests form the psychological interest of the stories” (Simpson 2010: 190), and since it has become less common for machismo to gear the quest, many of them have even gained in interest.

The Scottish Detective Novel

In Scotland, the detective novel dates back to the 1860s, when Edinburgh's first ever detective, James McLevy, published some of his 2,220 cases in such collections as *The Disclosures of a Detective*, *Curiosities of Crime in Edinburgh*, and *Sliding Scale of Life*. Over 140 years later, David Ashton fictionalised the character and his colleagues in a series of historical novels featuring, in a minor role, a young man who is said to have been inspired by the old detective, Arthur Conan Doyle. Indeed, so inspired was he by both McLevy's famous clearance rate and their shared respect for the University of Edinburgh's medical faculty, where McLevy sought forensic advice and Doyle studied under Dr Joseph Bell, that the young man soon played a major role in the history of detective fiction. In 1887, Doyle not only wrote the first Scottish detective novel, *A Study in Scarlet*. He also blended McLevy and Bell into the quintessential amateur detective, Sherlock Holmes. That Holmes requires no description here, or almost anywhere more than a century later, is evidence enough of the detective's enduring appeal to generations of readers, especially since it has been extended by such celebrated successors as John Buchan's Richard Hannay. Featuring him in seven novels, most notably *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and *Greenmantle* (1916), Buchan found further inspiration for Hannay in Edinburgh's Lord Edmund Ironside, like Hannay a soldier and occasional spy. Yet he did more than mature the amateur investigator into a professional man of action and adventure. Buchan also promoted the subject of conflicting personal and political drama by means of first-person narration, which is to say he set the stage for the likes of Alistair MacLean who further popularised the style in four novels, from *Night Without End* (1959) to *Ice Station Zebra* (1963). Writing in this increasingly heterogeneous tradition, which had by then successfully integrated thriller and espionage elements, William McIlvanney redefined Scottish crime fiction and its professional detective with *Laidlaw* (1977) and its eponymous protagonist, Jack Laidlaw. Laidlaw, who has since returned in *The Papers of Tony Veitch* (1983) and *Strange Loyalties* (1991), works for the police and is therefore better read in the context of the police novel, yet he does his best work in the spirit of the hard-boiled private eye and as such his influence on contemporary Scottish crime fiction may well be second to none, not even that of Ian Rankin's John Rebus. After all, while Rebus has influenced most of his successors, and while few of their writers may even have read McIlvanney's crime fiction, it was Laidlaw who influenced Rankin's creation and characterisation of Rebus. What this circuitous route to Rebus suggests is that the best way to approach the contemporary Scottish detective novel is to answer a

series of questions: which writers have most affected which genre conventions? How have they done so? And how has that allowed them to enter social, cultural, and political discourse?

William McIlvanney – *Laidlaw*

Starting with *Laidlaw* in 1977, William McIlvanney has proven to be more than the pioneer of the contemporary Scottish PI. He has become living proof of Andrew Pepper's claim that "the variety and scope of what we might call hard-boiled writing has too often been overlooked in favor of the canonization of its chief practitioners" (Pepper 2010: 142). McIlvanney was and is better known for his writing outside the genre of crime fiction for the single and simple reason that versatility is deemed a division rather than an addition of assets, so his due fame, the routine repetition of praise, has been delayed by the variety of his writings even though he has given the Scottish crime novel a new lease of life. *Laidlaw* is not just another portrait of the detective as a cynic, although it bears evident traces of the American hard-boiled tradition. It is the Scottish precedent of a living original, a story about a distinct and dynamic personality suspended in "that careful balance between pessimism, the assumed defeat of contrived expectations, and hope, the discovery of unexpected possibilities" (McIlvanney 1977: 183)... It is the introduction of Chandler's 'unusual man' to Scotland, where his 'search of a hidden truth' leads Laidlaw through an investigation of his cultural Calvinism to the discovery that "we're all accessories. It's just that in specific cases some are more directly involved than others" (McIlvanney 1977: 230). In this case, Laidlaw learns that "the Court will keep only what matters, the way in which the person became an event" (McIlvanney 1977: 40), so he lets himself get more directly involved to keep that person in his heart's memory, refusing out of superior veracity to forget the victim, the bereaved, and the fact that murder, though the end of devastation for the dead, can lead to the undoing of lives that have yet to be lived. As George Grella comments, "No matter what it may cost him, the detective follows his moral code (which) often exacts severe personal sacrifice" (Grella 1988: 107/9), and so we see Laidlaw deal with the distance from his colleagues, the digs from his friends, and the divorce from his wife after she, too, disappoints him: "Somebody is fucking dead. That may be a nuisance to you. But it's a fucking sight worse for them" (McIlvanney 1977: 31). Laidlaw is a man of contradictions, an unfaithful believer in fidelity who finds faith in his desk drawer where he keeps his cache of Kierkegaard, Camus, and Unamuno. He is a tarnished humanist and frequently afraid to lose the courage of his doubts, yet he is 'the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world', and as such he has become an inspiration for Scotland's fictional PIs not to be a detective who happens to be a man but a man who happens to be a detective.

With *Laidlaw*, then, the hard-boiled detective hit the Scottish ground running, an image McIlvanney introduces as the novel's Leitmotiv even in its opening lines: "Running was a strange thing... Running was a dangerous thing. It was a billboard advertising panic, a neon sign spelling guilt"

(McIlvanney 1977: 1). Within the first few pages we learn that the running man is the murderer, running through the darkness of Glasgow to escape not his pursuers but his guilt. And as we learn that this man, Tommy Bryson, has murdered the woman who loved him, Jennifer Lawson, we learn that we are reading not a 'whodunit' but a 'whydunit'. We also learn just how much common ground there is between the admittedly guilty and the apparently innocent. As Laidlaw admits, "he remembered nights when the terror of darkness had driven him through to his parents' room. He must have run for miles on that bed" (McIlvanney 1977: 5). A little later we learn that Laidlaw now has a sidekick by name of Harkness, yet if this suggests that the child's fear has become the adult's friend, it also suggests that darkness is never far from his side, metaphorically or not, and this in turn suggest our proximity to the criminal, perhaps even our complicity in his crime. The ambivalence of this charge creates increasingly dramatic interference from the murderer's network of undesirables, and so we return to the central question once Laidlaw has finally tracked down the guilt-ridden murderer and talked the grieving father out of a revenge killing by convincing him that he, too, was complicit in making his daughter a victim of failed love. It is then that Harkness asks Laidlaw whether he really believes in so much complicity and Laidlaw 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" (McIlvanney 1977: 274)? 'The others' come from all classes, so when Laidlaw brings his charges he brings them against the city of Glasgow as a microcosm of humanity. His charges are that we abominate in others the faults and failures that are most manifestly our own and then allow ourselves, with mind-blowing lack of shame and shrewdness, to be astonished by them. In Laidlaw's book, calling these faults and failures monstrosities is "the tax we pay for the unreality we choose to live in. It's a fear of ourselves" (McIlvanney 1977: 84). Partially blinded by this fear, each of McIlvanney's protagonists sees the world, not as it is, but as he or she is, and eventually these personal perspectives form a kaleidoscopic discourse on individual hurt and structural violence. But what gives this cerebral discourse its unusually visceral impact is that McIlvanney reflects it in the structure of the story, where no single viewpoint gives unity to the violence as the many perspectives create a multi-faceted view of a dangerous city and its divided societies.

Ian Rankin – *Knots & Crosses*

Building on this design of the detective as a questioner in whose consciousness the meanings of other lives emerge, Ian Rankin based his detective in Edinburgh to document its social, cultural, and political lives in *Knots & Crosses*, published in 1987. John Rebus, ageing in real time, has since done so in a series of 18 novels which Rankin initially retired in 2007's *Exit Music* but resumed in 2012's *Standing in Another Man's Grave*. What Rankin has shown in these police novels is that he has been influenced in equal measure by McIlvanney and James Ellroy, for they all portray the dynamics of urban change through the prism of a city's police work. Thus they have shown that, as Josh Cohen

observes, the “shift of narrative perspective from the Chandlerian private eye to the waged cop constitutes a critique of the romanticised and historically inaccurate figuration of crime as existential conflict between alienated individual and urban modernity” (Cohen 1997: 169). And yet, Brian Diemert is right to add that “the Rebus novels are clearly tied to the traditions of American hard-boiled fiction and film-noir” (Diemert 2005: 172). Not only does Rankin present Rebus as a Scottish cousin of the American hard-boiled private eye when he gives him his wry introduction as “one of the old school... a one-hundred percent policeman’s policeman, that’s me” (Rankin 1987: 16/67). Rankin removes all doubt as to Rebus’s position on the family tree of hard-boiled literature. He places him on its Scottish branch, right beside McIlvanney’s Jack Laidlaw, when he identifies Rebus’s neighbour as one Jock Laidlaw, “an old man... with a stick... his bottom false-teeth had been lost or forgotten about... an old trooper” (Rankin 1987: 183). While this may be read as Rankin’s tongue-in-cheek attempt to besmirch McIlvanney’s legacy, it is perhaps better read as the harmless culmination of a young writer’s ambition to mark his territory. Not only is such a reading consistent with Rankin’s character development of Rebus as a man who “isn’t exactly friendly with anybody” (Rankin 1987: 21). It is also consistent with the novel’s premise that he “had trained for the SAS and come out top of his class” (Rankin 1987: 25). It is even consistent with the backstory that, when the disciplinarian ethos of the army pushed him into a mental breakdown, he joined the police, for what all of this demonstrates is that Rebus has worked hard on being an abrasive, competitive macho who is more extreme than Laidlaw, if only in his self-destruction. Otherwise, Gill Plain agrees, he is a lot like him. “He is a hard-drinking obsessive loner, who has difficulty sustaining relationships. He is distrustful of institutional structures and is inclined to privilege his private morality over public law – a tendency which inevitably sets him in conflict with authority” (Plain 2002: 26). So, unlike typical policemen, he perseveres with his investigations, even when a superior takes him off a case: “Well, sod him then. I’ll find the bastard anyway” (Rankin 1987: 177).

In *Knots & Crosses*, Rankin anchored this questioner and his series in the only intimate relationship he has been able and willing to sustain, his relationship with Edinburgh, “a schizophrenic city, the place of Jekyll & Hyde sure enough, the city of Deacon Brodie, of fur coats and no knickers” (Rankin 1987: 193)... Taking advantage of her genteel appearance, Rankin turned Edinburgh into both setting and symbol of his social, cultural, and political discourse. Rebus, who was born in Fife but moved to Edinburgh 15 years ago, never misses an opportunity to discuss the city’s duality, for as he walks through its old and new towns in the footsteps of Poe’s flâneur, he does more than observe its accommodation of contrasts. He sees reason to believe that two distinct personalities reside within people as well as places, and it is suggestive of the series to come that his debut is about his discovery of “the self that lurked behind his everyday consciousness” (Rankin 1987: 28). This becomes evident when Rebus finally realises that the anonymous letters he has been receiving were sent by the ‘Edinburgh Strangler’, a child-murderer who plays on the pun of noughts and crosses to fashion string

knots and match crosses into cryptic clues only Rebus can decipher. All along, Rankin has been presenting Rebus as a potential suspect and sender of said letters by framing his violent out-of-body experiences with references to Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, so when Rebus almost strangles a woman during intercourse, it is possible to suspect him of suffering Dr Jekyll's dissociative identity disorder. Yet when Rebus lets his brother hypnotise him to unlock repressed memories of his army training, he discovers that the ties between his identity and that of the Edinburgh Strangler are more superficial: "I stared into a face that seemed to be my own... Then I recognised Gordon Reeve" (Rankin 1987: 161). So although Rankin reinforces the personal nature of Rebus's relationship with his SAS 'blood-brother' when he gives them similar surnames, makes them both "slightly soiled" (Rankin 1987: 164), and narrates Rebus's flashback in the first person, it is obvious that Rankin wants us to look below the surface of his characters' apparent synthesis. Doing so, it is possible to see the strain of Rebus's fraternal relationships as symbolic of his struggle with the very concept of brotherhood, be it in the army or in the police. It is even possible to see how such sensitivity is related to his success, for, as Pepper points out, it "deconstructs the hard-boiled persona to reveal the... detective as anxious, wounded, and internally divided, and shows the violence of both the detective and killer to be projections of these insecurities" (Pepper 2010: 147). Rankin has, then, entered social, cultural, and political discourse by making it possible for millions to see what McIlvanney showed him – that the baddy is not the only one with two faces.

Philip Kerr – *March Violets*

After McIlvanney and Rankin brought the detective of Scottish literature up to date, Philip Kerr takes him back to 1936 and out of Scotland in *March Violets*, published in 1989. In this first of nine novels about Bernie Gunther, Kerr indicates which course the hard-boiled PI might have taken if Chandler, upon leaving London, had not gone west to Los Angeles but east to Berlin. Gunther, like Marlowe, typically gets hired when family members or their murderers go missing. "Trying to find them is a large part of my business" (Kerr 1989: 28). And like the American private eye, this German tough guy does well without looking for violence and better still because he knows not to look too closely at his client when he sees a hint thereof. "I hoped he wasn't planning some private little execution, because I didn't feel up to wrestling with my conscience, especially when there was a lot of money involved" (Kerr 1989: 19). Much like his transatlantic contemporary, then, Gunther is more than meets the eye. His talk of self-preservation is as loud as that of the period, yet his walk down the mean streets follows a quiet, less popular sense of purpose. "I am naturally disposed to be obstructive to authority" (Kerr 1989: 242), "I'm not a National Socialist" (Kerr 1989: 11), "I'm not on anyone's side, and the only thing I'm trying to get is the truth" (Kerr 1989: 174). Unlike Chandler's knight errant, however, Kerr's naysayer does not let professional ethics get in his way, loyal though he may seem to his paymaster. "It's not that I'm the honourable type, protecting my client's reputation, and all that crap.

It's just that I'm on a pretty substantial recovery fee" (Kerr 1989: 118). Gunther, unlike Marlowe, follows the money trail, not to end his investigation when he discovers that all along his clients have kept crime in the family, but to discover the junction at which family affairs turn into affairs of state. Both writers see the state as the family writ large, yet Chandler's indirect criticism does not go far enough for Kerr, so he enters social and political discourse on a more direct route when Gunther, unlike Marlowe, goes beyond the crimes of individuals to those of institutions.

Hired by Hermann Six, a rich industrialist, Gunther no sooner finds a link between the death of Six's daughter and the theft of her diamonds than he is hired by Hermann Goering, founder of the Gestapo, to find the thief. This leap from individual to institution is not, however, based on the compassion of an extended family. Though Gunther gets ever more involved in the private drama of the former Hermann on account of the latter's insistence that his investigation is of public interest, Gunther eventually learns that both have invested in him to gain political control. At the end of this double act, Kerr reveals that Gunther has not only been working two cases but doing the work of two critics, contextualising crimes of rapacity in the corruption of the regime. He thus demonstrates topically that "Corruption in one form or another is the most distinctive feature of life under National Socialism" (Kerr 1989: 59). In Kerr's Berlin, then, corruption is as endemic as it is in Chandler's LA, yet Kerr, unlike Chandler, also demonstrates the consequences of said corruption in technical terms. To put it in the words of Susan Rowland, "the *processes* of the detecting narrative are beset by failure, vulnerability, evidence of social unfairness and of the impermeability of modernity to reason" (Rowland 2010: 122). In short, Kerr's plot and prose both negate Chandler's notion that a PI can contain as well as criticise the world's moral disorder. Gunther, unlike Marlowe, fails to remain aloof. Not only does he fall in love, but when his lady friend disappears, he also falls foul of the Nazi Party, so rather than end corruption with a cute one-liner as he comes through a door with a gun in his hand, Gunther comes into conflict with the wrong criminals and ends up in Dachau's concentration camp. Ironically, he does so while trying to make sense of his strange world in the same way Marlowe does – with similes. Yet while Marlowe succeeds in clarifying his world by containing its contradictions, Gunther succeeds only in codifying his by comparing it to curiosities that are very much of the period, like the obscure fact that "Joey Goebbels has a problem finding his size in shoes" (Kerr 1989: 37). What makes this so ironic is that such obscurantism clarifies a related fact. Kerr's PI is stuck in his longing for a lost Germany, a time of "carefree philosophies" (Kerr 1989: 50) which ended when Hitler passed his Enabling Act in March 1933, so Gunther's odd way of relating to his country is a reflection of his refusal to be rehabilitated as one of its *March Violets*, latecomers to the Nazi Party. What is more, when Gunther escapes rehabilitation in the shape of Dachau, Kerr enters political discourse in the tradition of Chandler, for he ends *March Violets* in the discovery of a hidden truth – most failures of conformity, be they topical or technical, are sooner or later seen as triumphs of conscience.

Chris Brookmyre – *Quite Ugly One Morning*

Back in contemporary Scotland, Chris Brookmyre takes his lead from American crime writer and cult satirist Carl Hiaasen as he takes the Scottish detective novel to the charming side of aggression in *Quite Ugly One Morning*, published in 1996. This first of five novels about hard-boiled investigative journalist Jack Parlabane takes its title from a song off *Mr Bad Example*, a Warren Zevon album. What makes this so appropriate is that the novel's two cartoon villains seem to be in competition for the album's title; that, and the fact that both capture the metaphorical meaning of the novel's title. Not only do they make it clear that the morning in question is Britain's awakening from Thatcherism. They also make sure that it is quite an ugly one, indeed. As Horsley summarises, "the nauseating, xenophobic, frighteningly right-wing Stephen Lime has hatched a scheme to kill off long-stay geriatric patients to facilitate the closure of a hospital" (Horsley 2009: 226). Trying to take over the National Health Service from within one of its Trusts, he has delegated the assassination of a doctor to Darren Mortlake, a digitally challenged henchman who is so closely modelled on Hiaasen's 'Chemo' from *Skin Tight* that he has caught his bad luck along with his terminal stupidity. Both is evident in chapter one, where the earthy imagery of his lethal handiwork does more than set the novel's tone. Since this is the setting of our first encounter with Parlabane, it also gives us the measure of the man. Indeed, where others have evidently lost control of their bodily functions, Parlabane remains unfazed, so much so that he promptly turns PI and follows in the footsteps of Douglas Adams's Ford Prefect, cheerfully wandering into enormously dangerous situations and effortlessly making them far worse. As the novel's vicious plot winds itself around Brookmyre's vitriolic polemics, this anti-authoritarian one-man-army shows little faith in the powers that be. Instead, he pursues his own investigation into the country's post-Thatcher management failure, state-sanctioned manufacture of consent, and numbers-first mentality according to which financial profit trumps human life. What is more, Brookmyre makes Parlabane do all of this jetlagged, having only just returned to Glasgow from LA, home of the hard-boiled PI. In other words, Brookmyre uses Parlabane to radicalise the genre.

To avoid any confusion between the sardonic edge and the radical nature of *Quite Ugly One Morning*, it is worth clarifying that the latter is less the result of Parlabane's ranting than Brookmyre's writing. "Parlabane had raised the stakes" (Brookmyre 1996: 249) by targeting white-collar criminals with his tirades, but Brookmyre raises questions about our moral responsibility, indeed our mass-complicity, by making sure that even Parlabane's satirical antics are at all times a serious criticism of our times. Naturally, his subversive rants are often more memorable than his serious writing. Yet whether he ridicules the state-of-the-art commodities of heartless politicians or makes the state-sanctioned embezzlement of government funds responsible for the inadequate care available to helpless patients, as Horsley concludes, "consumer greed acts as a metaphor for moral bankruptcy... The parable of spectacularly greedy consumption sustained by large-scale human sacrifices is supported by satiric

vignettes of the massive Lime in his luxurious bath” (Horsley 2009: 193/226). It is there that S. Lime reveals just how telling his name is, when he “farted contentedly to himself. He was not, he was convinced, fat. Poor people were fat. Stupid people were fat. He was a man of imposing stature” (Brookmyre 1996: 25). Showing him in his full stature, Brookmyre makes it hard not to see that politicians like Lime contrive false narratives of respectability to hide their criminality, usually with what Parlabane calls “meaningless wank-language” (Brookmyre 1996: 157). Yet a novel does not radicalise a genre simply by exposing the obesity of naked self-interest, not even when that novel is a worst-case scenario of entrepreneurial ruthlessness and establishment cover-ups. What makes *Quite Ugly One Morning* radicalise detective fiction is that Brookmyre situates his dystopian novel in a period of optimism prior to New Labour, a zero hour which Chabon refers to as “that difficult fulcrum between innocence and experience, romance and disillusion, adventure and satire... between a time when outrage was a moral position and a time when it has become a way of life” (Chabon 2009: 93). In other words, what allows Brookmyre to enter social, cultural, and political discourse is that his outrage is a moral position in which he refuses to forgive the bourgeoisie’s outrageous way of life – its calculating selfishness.

Paul Johnston – *Body Politic*

Tracing this radicalism all the way back to Plato, Paul Johnston takes the contemporary Scottish detective novel back to the future in *Body Politic*, published in 1997. Set in the 2020s, it has been read as a dark projection of Greek and Scottish Enlightenment, a dystopian *Republic* with a body count. Yet as the first of five novels about private detective Quintilian Dalrymple it can also be read as a detective novel about the dangers of political idealism and the death of civil liberties. It can even be read as a physical metaphor on debilitated democracy in the contemporary context of Scottish devolution, for, as Pepper points out, “hard-boiled writing’s flexibility and elasticity allow for such appropriation – so long as its structuring tension is kept alive” (Pepper 2010: 151). Johnston keeps it alive by animating his body politic, an independent socialist Edinburgh run as an enlightened authoritarian state, with Quint’s actions and asides as the gumshoe chases the murderer of a guardswoman after her facial mutilation convinces the city guardians of an imminent threat to their council. Ironically, said council is unaware that its absent head of state is being disfigured by lupus. More ironically still, Quint’s prior demotion, which placed him outside the centre of power, now puts him in the unique position to investigate a crime that officially no longer exists, for he can step outside the law to apprehend the other lawbreaker. Yet Johnston does not sanctify subversion. Instead, he dramatises the differences between his two lawbreakers to enter our turn-of-the-century discourse on ‘civil disobedience’. Quint, who personifies its original meaning, acts in defiance of certain laws to demonstrate their injustice by accepting the consequences of breaking them. The murderer, who personifies the term’s much-maligned misinterpretation, acts in defiance of the law at large to

demonstrate that theirs is an unjust society, on which grounds this dissenter claims immunity. Yet both would agree with Slavoj Žižek, for “the sad fact that opposition to the system cannot articulate itself in the guise of a realistic alternative, or at least a meaningful utopian project, but only take the shape of a meaningless outburst, is a grave illustration of our predicament” (Žižek 2009: 64).

Though projected into the near future, this is indeed our predicament. As Quint is reminded in one of his many debates on political history, “when we founded the Edinburgh Enlightenment at the turn of the century, we were convinced that the only way out of the political and economic nightmare in the United Kingdom was by centralising power... regional government by bodies of experts” (Johnston 1997: 88). *Body Politic* is, then, an example of what Horsley calls “science fiction as extrapolation. The element of fantasy consists entirely of an extension of... counter-cultural aggression” (Horsley 2009: 250). So, when Quint walks down the mean streets of Enlightenment Edinburgh, he is merely a little further along the corridors of today’s corporate capitalism, and when he, too, subverts the system for which he stands, we see that “official irregularity and the abuse of authority almost wholly supplant any legitimate procedure” (Horsley 2009: 256). That this is often necessary raises philosophical questions about the conflict between individual conscience and ideological compromise, the most arresting of which arises from the afore-mentioned body metaphor. This starts with the title’s body politic, a metaphor for Edinburgh, and extends to a body’s mutilation in a crematorium run by Citizen Haigh, who is perhaps best read as an amalgamation of the Acid Bath murderer, John George Haigh, and the Butcher of the Somme, Field Marshal Douglas Haig. In this reading, the savagely mutilated body represents the death of Plato’s organisational principle according to which different parts of the body work in health and harmony as do different parts of society. Having investigated its symptoms of sickness, Quint finally identifies its chronic corruption when he asks, “quis custodiet ipsos custodes” (Johnston 1997: 172)? Who will guard the guards themselves? As Pepper points out, “civil society cannot sustain itself in the absence of a strong, functioning state and, in the final analysis, the hard-boiled operative must act in the interest of the state and the law” (Pepper 2010: 144). Quint does exactly that when he makes his arrest despite his discovery of the murderer’s political motive. Yet by seeing said motive – murder as a media-friendly attack on authoritarianism – he allows Johnston to enter social and political discourse. After all, he asks us to see his society as both the cause of crime and the punishment for ours.

Louise Welsh – *The Cutting Room*

Back in contemporary Scotland, Louise Welsh looks below the surface probity of Glasgow society as she pushes the hard-boiled operative out of his traditional comfort zone in *The Cutting Room*, published in 2002. Rilke, her gay ex-junkie and house clearer turned private eye, is hired by old Miss McKindless to dispose of her dead brother’s attic library where he discovers a rare erotica collection

of dirty books and dirtier eight-by-tens. These dated photographs depict the sexual torture and supposed murder of a young woman among the soft furnishings of a world Rilke begins to investigate. As we soon see, Welsh lets him investigate this sadistic world not to indulge the voyeurism often associated with the private eye but to indicate how dated detective fiction can be in its depiction of women as silenced objects of male desire. Thus the novel, unlike the pictures, is about tease not strip. Like Rilke, we are tantalised by the sense of things happening just out of sight, and soon we realise that, as Fredric Jameson puts it, “the detective’s journey is episodic because of the fragmentary, atomistic nature of the society he moves through” (Jameson 1983: 131). Rilke takes us deep into his social circle of corrupt coppers, tough trannies, and femmes fatales for a guided tour of underground Glasgow, observing that “if you like a bit of rough and have drowned your fear and your conscience, this is the place to come” (Welsh 2002: 27). Rilke takes us from one telling episode to another, questioning one taciturn source after another, until he runs out of questions in a crowded nightclub. Here, his glimpse of a transvestite gives us a glimpse of Welsh’s cleverness in making us question all her characters, though in a different sense, for the glamorous transvestite suddenly grins at a camera, exposing nicotine-stained teeth and receded gums, showing everybody who dares to look that nobody can be taken for what they seem to be. One by one, her characters reveal this to be the story’s hidden truth, yet since each revelation is partial, Welsh delays our discovery that, much like her Glasgow, *The Cutting Room* is all about “petty respectability up front, intricate cruelties behind closed doors” (Welsh 2002: 2). Indeed, Rilke gets shown door after door before he, much like Poe’s Auguste Dupin, sees that his suspect has been hiding in plain sight all along.

In plain English, Welsh draws us below Glasgow’s surface probity by outing her purloined pervert. Not only does she make us question what else we might have missed. She also makes us consider which other characters may be complicit in the cover-up of what turns out to be the tip of the iceberg, the cold and inexorable business of people trafficking. And what makes this suspicion even stronger is that she translates it into technical terms. Rilke, who at first is all over Glasgow to discover who procured the girl, who pointed the camera, and who paid for the pictures, suddenly finds his way when he stops listening to “people talk, talk, talking to a distant party while the world marched by” (Welsh 2002: 65) – when, instead, he starts looking at how each of them performs his or her part. Much like Rilke’s investigative method, then, Welsh’s narrative method suggests a world in which actions are more important than words. Yet it also suggests a world in which we are not suspicious by default because we see people’s actions through the eyes of a cynic. Instead, Welsh lets us look at the subject of *The Cutting Room* – the many ways in which people use those weaker than themselves – through a feminist filter. Increasingly, she lets our suspicion focus on the masks of male predators, and as her narrative view lets us become intimately familiar with Rilke we see that this sensitive man, too, is not free of masochism. Accordingly, his narrative voice, as James Naremore says, “isn’t quite the voice of Reason... because it has less to do with solving puzzles than with exposing various kinds

of falsehood or naïveté... It is more like the voice of Male Experience, and it usually speaks with brutal frankness after a period of reticence or silent knowingness” (Naremore 1983: 51), as when Rilke rolls off a one-night-stand and recites, “the after dream of the reveller on opium – the bitter lapse into every day life – the hideous dropping off of the veil” (Welsh 2002: 153). Brutally frank, Rilke lets us see that he is not a nice man, yet he is nonetheless trying to be the best man in his world, for although he is repeatedly encouraged to “drop the Philip Marlowe impersonation” (Welsh 2002: 104), Welsh instead develops the hard-boiled model to make sense of twenty-first-century Glasgow. This is perhaps best symbolised in another bar scene. Standing in a hostile crowd of alpha males, Rilke notices a bison’s head mounted on the wall above the men. Like the genre’s revered figurehead, it is evidently out of place in the twenty-first century, and even more so in a Glasgow bar, yet the crowd is jostling for the best place under its macho totem. Weary, Rilke leaves to be his own man, and so Welsh enters social, cultural, and political discourse by proving that Chandler’s hard-boiled original does not have to ossify, not if he moves out of the macho’s comfort zone.

Denise Mina – *The Field of Blood*

Like Welsh, Denise Mina succeeds in making detective fiction accommodate feminist individualism. And like Welsh, she pushes the hard-boiled operative out of the macho’s comfort zone in twenty-first-century Glasgow. Yet unlike Welsh, Mina sees sadism as a social rather than a cultural phenomenon, so she, too, furthers the flexibility of the form in *The Field of Blood*, published in 2004. Set in 1981, the novel features Paddy Meehan, a female journalist who has since become a success in two sequels. In this story about the hidden traumas of youth, however, she is still an eighteen-year-old copyboy. She is self-conscious in her girlishness, self-satisfied in her feminism, and self-loathing in her dieting. And yet it seems that she would not sit comfortably among ambitious girl sleuths like Nancy Drew, for Paddy’s amateur efforts at private investigation are not motivated by a lust for juvenile adventure. They are motivated by a loss of youthful innocence. Paddy has to act if she wants to see justice done, be it in her case or in her career, so her amateur efforts in and beyond the newsroom can be read as criticism of the professional pressures suffered by women as they make their way in a man’s world. What is more, as Paddy makes her way, her disregard for conventional pieties extends her criticism to the novel’s biblical title. Paddy is both an aggressive careerist and a closet atheist, so she is ostracised by both *The Scottish Daily News* and her Catholic community when they deem her guilty of betrayal. The former feels betrayed when she refuses to let them print her inside knowledge of a murder case, and the latter feels betrayed even though she refuses responsibility for the story that is printed instead, for that story identifies one of the suspects as her fiancé’s cousin. So, like most women of her time who refused their thirty pieces of silver, Paddy pays for her success and independence with isolation, the biblical ‘reward of iniquity’. What makes this even more poignant is that she was herself betrayed, and betrayed not by a man, but by one of her few female colleagues whose confidence she had sought.

Yet rather than join the ranks of the genre's many cynics, Paddy concludes, "We're all heartbroken idealists. That's what no-one gets about journalists: only true romantics get jaded" (Mina 2004: 340). Lest such remarks make Paddy sound like a typical eighteen-year-old, a sentimentalist stuck in eighteenth-century woman's fiction, it is worth noting that Mina's social realism rescues her from both gender and genre stereotypes. Mina, like Messent, appreciates that "the romantic individualism commonly associated with the private eye, and the related sense of alienation from her or his surrounding environment, is a falsification of the actual nature of her or his social role and position" (Messent 1997: 2). *The Field of Blood* is therefore best read as one woman's conflict with conformity.

In this reading, Paddy is a romantic in a different sense. Rather than get stuck in self-indulgent poses, she reasserts the romantic's ideal of animated being as she practises the virtues of impulse, intuition, and insubordination. Rather than pursue an investigation *because* it promises to lead her into isolation, she pursues her investigation *even when* it leads her into isolation, both because she hopes to redeem herself by way of self-sacrifice, and because she sees no other way to prevent a miscarriage of justice. This ambition, as Scaggs says, "makes explicit the sort of divided identity that often characterises the figure of the private eye, and which manifests itself in the figure of the *alter ego*" (Scaggs 2005: 82). Mina makes this even more explicit when Paddy's romantic ambitions bring her into contact with another Paddy Meehan. This second Paddy is a middle-aged man, who was wrongly convicted of criminal charges and only pardoned after a journalist's campaign brought attention to his innocence. Yet while all this seems so explicit that even the young Paddy sees her namesake's stigma on herself, it is implicit in the text that her alter ego is not the man with the ruined reputation but the journalist whose perseverance in restoring this reputation parallels her own. This journalist is Ludovic Kennedy, named after the real-life journalist famous for re-examining such cases as the Lindbergh kidnapping. Like him, Paddy is eventually able to inform public opinion and even influence the police investigation by re-examining the child's death and re-constructing an alternative version of events. But because this is still a story about one woman's conflict with conformity, Paddy, unlike Kennedy, cannot clear two ten-year-olds of a murder charge. All she can do is restore their ruined reputation, cast them as victims of paedophilia, and confront her suspect on her own. As Cawelti summarises, "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... to define his own concept of morality and justice, frequently in conflict with the social authority of the police" (Cawelti 1977: 142/3). Paddy defines her concept of morality and justice by demonstrating that she will suffer evil to find good. Doing so, she once again lets Mina enter social and political discourse by demonstrating that both her romantic pragmatism and her radical feminism are in conflict with social and political conformity. Finally emancipating herself from both, she takes action against the man who molested the two boys, and so her story can be read as a cautionary tale about sexual abuse and sentimentalising helplessness, demonstrating that both can create victims afraid and resentful of life.

Ray Banks – *Saturday's Child*

Sharing this social realism but drawing on American and English traditions of hard-boiled writing, Ray Banks pushes the contemporary Scottish detective novel to its noir frontier in *Saturday's Child*, published in 2007. This first of four novels about Cal Innes, reluctant private eye and mob enforcer, redefines male as well as metropolitan dysfunctionality. Thus it rescues from oblivion all that is worth remembering about Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade and Ted Lewis's Jack Carter. Like Hammett, Banks pits a morally ill-defined character against the corruption of a society split into decadence and depression. And like Lewis, he lets his tarnished anti-hero snoop around unofficial centres of power, slowly drawing out the chauvinism of class difference that festers at the heart of every social crisis. Yet what sets Banks apart from both Hammett and Lewis is that he lets Cal address the anachronism of a hard-boiled PI who drinks his way to the bottom of a case at a time of high-tech law enforcement: "The drink-shakes private dick, a walking, talking cliché. I should be shot for crimes against reality" (Banks 2007: 147). Instead of granting his wish, Banks takes the private eye's maladjustment to its miserable yet psychologically sound conclusion, and this gives his writing a rare degree of originality. Indeed, as Cal is painfully aware, it is this realism that sets him apart from most other fictional PIs: "Private investigators have steel in their pocket and iron in their spit. Me, I've got shit in my pants and blood in my mouth" (Banks 2007: 141). In other words, Cal is tarnished and afraid, and he knows it. Yet what is even more unusual for a hard-boiled *private* eye is that Cal makes sure we know it, too. Painting several images as darkly comical as the above, he reveals the source of his self-deprecation, the physical and psychological abuse he suffered before and even after he was released from prison. Banks thus enters social and cultural discourse, for "no matter how open-minded people say they are, you mention either mental illness or prison and they start looking for the nearest exit" (Banks 2007: 40). Yet by conceiving Cal as an impotent ex-convict who consistently questions genre conventions, implicitly as well as explicitly, Banks is concerned with more than his readers' outdated discomfort. Such hard-boiled realism, Messent concludes, "radically challenges the sense of individual autonomy, objectivity and authority on which the detective genre has tended traditionally to rely" (Messant 1997: 17).

What makes this challenge truly radical is that Banks does not stop at formal genre conventions. Instead, he gives his novel a dual structure by splitting its narrative perspective between two first-person points of view, which challenges what is left of individual autonomy, objectivity and authority. Cal, the private investigator, and Mo, the career criminal, take turns to tell two sides of the same story, which is to say they undermine the unity of a single voice on which the detective novel tends to rely. What is more, they also undermine the authority that is typically associated with that voice by using the present tense, for its sense of immediacy denies both them and their readers the distance that typically creates a secure position for judgment. Without this temporal distance to the stories they tell,

Cal and Mo are tied together in their increasingly reactive attempts to control whatever happens next. And when Cal calls Mo's father 'Uncle' Morris, the two are even tied together as fictive cousins, which not only makes their story a family saga but also makes it spin out of control until it is worthy of the Old Testament: having done time for Mo, Cal is hired by Morris to track down a casino dealer, yet Mo, who bristles against his father's order to steer clear of Cal, soon obstructs his investigation, ostensibly to beat his 'cousin' to his father's respect. Meanwhile, Cal is distracted by personal regrets, including his biological brother's drug problem, so he is slow to discover that Mo is not trying to locate the dealer for his father's sake but for the sake of the child he fathered with the dealer's partner, a lady who is actually a sixteen-year-old girl – and his sister. With so much bad blood between them, their rivalry is biblical even in its violence, so although *Saturday's Child*, as Pepper might put it, "focuses primarily on the investigation rather than perpetration of crime... this distinction is often blurred to the point where it is difficult to tell law enforcer and law breaker apart" (Pepper 2010: 142). And yet Banks makes it easy to tell Cal and Mo apart, for they tell their stories with distinct voices. Doing so, they both foreground demotic detail, and this diversifies the novel's socio-political agenda, as does the fact that Banks lets a delinquent from Scotland play detective in England. Having chased each other around Manchester and Newcastle, Cal and Mo end their drama against a background of general disinterest, indicating that it is less important than the depiction of "the great British public, otherwise known as It's None Of My Fucking Business" (Banks 2007: 226). *Saturday's child*, then, has to work hard just to keep living, but his struggle does not just demonstrate that crime is a disease. It demonstrates the many difficulties in discussing Britain's social, cultural, and political problems, for it demonstrates that every crime is a criticism of the causes which it is respectable not to discuss.

Tony Black – *Paying For It*

Like Banks, Tony Black dramatises how the world's false standards cause the warping of character. Yet in doing so, he distils the styles and subjects of Irvine Welsh and Ken Bruen into *Paying For It*, published in 2008. In this first of four novels about Gus Dury, he channels the PI's subversive energy against an age conformist by commercial tradition. Gus spends the best part of the story butting heads with Edinburgh in the shape of the new government's Minister of Immigration, Alisdair Cardownie, "slack-jowled, in-bred son of privilege" (Black 2008: 27). Given their backstory, this is rather ironic, for as we see in one of his many flashbacks, Gus has a famous history of butting heads with the MSP. At the height of his success as a journalist, Gus head-butted Cardownie live on national television, and he has paid a high price for the privilege, having lost his job, his purpose, his home, his wife, and, whenever possible, his sobriety. So when we meet him here, he is drinking his way around town as a "saloon bar Socrates" (Black 2008: 57). Between drinks, he is looking for ways to deal with a series of deaths, ranging from the murder of his friend's son and the passing of his own father to another death he is almost alone in mourning – the suicide of Scotland's culture. A stranger in his own land,

Gus starts focusing on foreigners and finds out about a deal between Cardownie and Benny Zalinskas, a Lithuanian people trafficker. This, however, is no imperialist critique, for the prostitution forced on Scotland is set in the context of what is perhaps best read as the country's willingness to sell herself – tourism: "Tartan shops blasted teuchter music at every turn" (Black 2008: 78). Given all this venality, there is, as Horsley might put it, "no secure position within the text constituting a moral high ground" (Horsley 2009: 40). Black further undermines the potential for any moral high ground by making his novel's narrator an alcoholic whose debauchery leaves us in doubt whether any two sentences are spoken by the same man or alternately by Gus Sober and Gus Drunk. It is this debauchery, after all, which lets us share Gus's disorientation and therefore Michael Chabon's belief that "a quest is often, among other things, an extended bout of inspired madness" (Chabon 2009: 76). True to form, then, the story careers along a narrative arc of loosely connected scenes while Gus's fitfully lucid mind fastens not on any moral high ground but something the hard-boiled PI considers an article of faith – that the femme fatale has a finger in every fly. Yet since Gus is not "fuckstruck" (Black: 2008: 137), he sees through Nadja and proves that she is involved in Zalinskas and Cardownie's criminal affairs. Thus emancipated from genre conventions, the PI uses the femme fatale to expose the criminals, demonstrating that at the heart of modernity's decadence is the dirty affair between respectability and crime.

In letting Gus do so, Black demonstrates that it is the ability to subvert expectations which gives the hard-boiled investigator his effective agency and enables him to survive in a hazardous environment. Yet since Black lets his investigator subvert expectations in the spirit of Welsh and Bruen's outsiders, Gus has his doubts that his environment is worth the effort. Given these doubts, his apparent failure to fit in can also be read as another form of subversion, another attack on his generation's definition of respectability and success: "I just didn't buy into this new lifestyle thing. I aimed for an anti-lifestyle" (Black 2008: 10). This 'anti-lifestyle' he achieves by taking all the good bad things life has to offer while rejecting the terms of our social contract. Like Welsh's Mark Renton and Bruen's Jack Taylor, Gus is an addict so tarnished he lives at a self-destructive distance even from his family and friends. And like them, he differs from the generic hard-boiled protagonist who says "the hell with it" and is yet able, as Cawelti observes, "to retain the world's most important benefits – self-esteem, popularity, and respect" (Cawelti 1977: 161). Gus enjoys no such benefits when he opposes the presumptions of his generation's careerists with the reality of himself, "a perfectly unreconstructed example of maledom... My career was washed up. I had a serious alcohol problem and, on top of everything else, I'd lost most of my top row of teeth" (Black 2008: 135/226). Yet if this example of his 'anti-lifestyle' and its damaging fallout makes the afore-mentioned distance sound like a reasonable safety measure, it is, ultimately, a measure of his alienation and thus his disinterest in communal identity: "I watched the pinstriped yuppies power walking towards fifty-grand-a-year, superannuation and medical benefits – would need to come with a crate load of Prozac to get me interested" (Black 2008: 31). Most days,

just leaving the house triggers similarly subversive rants, and most of them focus on social anxieties about addiction and unemployment, yet it is safe to say that Gus chafes against all things false. Accordingly, he is both in routine conflict with modern life and at pains to keep himself at a remove, yet as the filthy crimes proliferate his conscience forces him to work in the sewers of his society where his Socialist rawness festers in the novel's air of realism. After all, his raw "urge for justice and revenge" (Black 2008: 210) feeds on what Horsley calls "the tendency of others to sell out to a plausible but corrupt system and to put the demands of tame conformity above truth and justice" (Horsley 2009: 105). In the end, Gus makes the foreign people trafficker pay for his part in the plausible but corrupt system of prostitution. Black recasts the hard-boiled private investigator as a hard-up conscientious objector to Scotland's social, cultural, and political tendency to put the demands of tame conformity above truth and justice. And *Paying For It* keeps the promise of its title.

Peter May – *The Blackhouse*

Similarly subversive, Peter May combines genre conventions of the eighteenth-century Gothic, the nineteenth-century sentimental, and the twentieth-century coming-of-age novel in *The Blackhouse*, published in 2011. May does so, however, to recast the private investigator as the subject of his own investigation into his most arresting theme, the imprisonment of the individual in a shameful privacy. In this first of three novels about Fin Macleod, the Edinburgh police detective is sent to investigate a hanging in his fictional home town of Crobost on the Isle of Lewis, yet as he escapes the trappings of bureaucracy, he gets caught in the trap of his childhood. In long descriptive passages, May fuses place and character to dramatise how the frontier mentality of the Outer Hebrides turns Fin into a private eye and his focus on the private 'I' at the centre of his investigation. Thus he soon returns to the events of eighteen years ago which lead to his departure from this "sad existence... strangled by a society still in the grips of a joyless religion. An economy on the slide, unemployment high. Alcoholism rife, a suicide rate well above the national average" (May 2011: 47). Perhaps symbolising this self-annihilation, *The Blackhouse* is far from genre typical in both a topical and a technical sense. What makes it topically untypical is the fact that the murder which initiated proceedings soon proves to be incidental as Fin's homecoming confronts him with both the resentment of his friends and the sins of their fathers. And what makes it technically untypical is the fact that the narrative mirrors Fin's double distraction from the murder mystery as it radically changes course, from here on in skipping between two strands: one, the third-person account of Fin's adult struggle to make sense of Lewis and two, Fin's first-person flashbacks to his youthful struggle which ended during a fatal gannet-culling ritual on the fictional island of An Sgeir, a barren basalt stack in the Atlantic to which he returns when his narratives collide and he learns that he has a son. At this point the plot, long held up by repressed memories, finally gives way to the story's sentimentalism as the prose, energised by Fin's powerful force of feeling, moves from the ribald mood of childhood and the raw emotion of adolescence to the

rage and regret of a father whose son is about to relive his fate. Fin braves these elemental forces only to end up on his own, out at sea in the middle of a dark night while a thunderstorm rages around him, yet this does more than symbolise the man's emotional journey to the realisation that child abuse lies at the heart of both his trauma and the murder mystery. It signals the denouement's turn to the Gothic, which in turn reveals that *The Blackhouse* is a family drama riding on the engine of detective fiction.

In short, the investigative journey to the cause of repression extends the family drama's ethical range. It throws questions of communal responsibility into sharp relief as it dramatises Fin's journey towards acceptance of the traumatising fact that he suffered "abuse the like of which no child should ever have to suffer" (May 2011: 458). This not only makes him a vehicle of compassion but also creates a contrast between him and those who are beyond any sympathetic understanding, for while Fin takes action to save his son from similar abuse, those who could and should have intervened on Fin's behalf again remain passive. Now as then they are either too busy genuflecting in front of a higher truth or too battered by the dogma of those whose religious pedantry rules island life. Seeing this, Fin also sees that those who may not freely discuss one topic are timid upon all topics, so he joins May in his cultural discourse by questioning every single local authority. In doing so, he proves Jameson's point that "the honesty of the detective can be understood as an organ of perception, a membrane which, irritated, serves to indicate in its sensitivity the nature of the world around it" (Jameson 1983: 131). Yet Fin also proves a more important point, namely that even this sensitive man's organ of perception is subject to the human frailty of those he would judge on their ignorance, for he has to ask himself, "How could he not have remembered" (May 2011: 459-460)? Of course, his amnesia is also a convenient plot device, creating suspense by keeping the dark secret even from its bearer, but that does not negate its partial effect of character development. It is because he has to face questions about himself to find answers about others that it is fair to say of Fin what Ross Macdonald says of his PI Lew Archer: "While he is a man of action, his actions are largely directed to putting together the stories of other people's lives and discovering their significance. He is less a doer than a questioner, a consciousness in which the meanings of other lives emerge" (Macdonald 1988: 185-186). May thus demonstrates that the hard-boiled investigator can both repress and represent the genre's two topics – the loss of the abused and the lonesomeness of the disabused. He also demonstrates that the Scottish hard-boiled investigator tends to raise questions about the terms of social, cultural, and political community by turning to the self for answers.

Synopsis

Now, if reading about this selection of contemporary Scottish detective novels has not created a sense of a homogenous national literature, let alone a single uniform sub-genre, then I have done my job. An honest overview of the author's subjects, styles, and sensibilities cannot but create a sense of fragmentation, for reading the novels themselves creates neither a panoramic view of some Scottish genre building project nor the sense that any literary tradition has been co-opted from abroad. Instead, it creates a mosaic of genre conventions, variously appropriated from American, British, and other European literatures to paint pictures of social, cultural, and political significance on regional, national, and global canvasses. To be clear, it is not this fact of literary heterogeneity that makes a sense of fragmentation inevitable. What makes it inevitable is the lack of a cogent design in the country's mosaic, for this lack shows that contemporary Scottish detective fiction is not the coordinated effort of any one school of art, working on a shared syllabus or drawing on shared influences. This, of course, is not to say that contemporary writers of detective fiction do not engage with one another in Scotland. Every time they engage with their country's social, cultural, and political situation, they indirectly also engage with one another, even when their writing is a response to a selection of foreign influences. And as we have seen in the previous pages, they also engage directly with one another, as do the countless writers of divorced detectives with drinking problems who ably demonstrate beyond these pages that contemporary Scottish detective fiction is written by imitators and innovators alike. However, whether or not their detectives are derivatives of Ian Rankin's John Rebus, who is himself a development of William McIlvanney's Jack Laidlaw, they tend to avoid collaborating, be it on a common agenda or a common aesthetic. Like their detectives, they tend to pick and mix both their topics and their techniques, at times co-opting and at others counterpointing them. Almost always, however, they do so by looking beyond Scottish borders. As a result, there is in this literature no obvious mainstream, for there is among its writers neither a widespread negative identification with any unifying anti-foreign sentiment nor a widespread positive identification with any one literary tradition.

Ironically, there are Scottish writers whose very obvious success can create the first impression of an obvious mainstream. Yet as the diversity of writing in this chapter demonstrates, not even Rankin's successful Rebus series represents a majority movement in Scottish writing. As for the country's revered cult writers, neither has Chris Brookmyre's success with Jack Parlabane led to a wave of investigative journalists pursuing socialist vendettas against white-collar criminals, nor has Louise

Welsh's success with Rilke led to a counter-cultural surge of gay Philip Marlowes pushing feminist agendas on upper-class misogynists. What majority movement there is in contemporary Scottish detective fiction is a strong trend toward the left, yet even in this there are too many multi-cultural tributaries and single-minded currents for any mainstream to take the form one might expect to find – a fervent anti-Englishness. The popular prejudice against the Scots, after all, is that they stand for nothing but against the English. If founded in fact, even such knee-jerk anti-Englishness would certainly destabilise my argument of there being in Scotland no widespread negative identification with any unifying anti-foreign sentiment. However, when Tony Black externalises his Scottish PI's existential crisis in the composite image of foreign criminals, one of whom is the epitome of English imperialism, Black is one of only two writers in this chapter who risk a potentially nationalist reading – and even in this, by Scottish standards exceptional case, two plot twists complicate any such reading: one, Gus Dury's discovery of police corruption moves the novel's focus from foreign criminals to Scottish cover-ups, and two, the novel's prolicide conclusion proves further complicity of Scottish characters. The other seemingly anti-English author is Ray Banks, who sends his Scottish PI after English criminals, but he too complicates any nationalist interpretation. Not only does he cast his PI as an inverted chauvinist in Cal Innes. He also celebrates a host of English and American literary influences in his writing. Indeed, its English setting makes him the most obvious example of the fact that contemporaries of Scottish detective fiction can be as distant from one another as they are diverse – which is to say that there is among them no widespread positive identification with any one literary tradition, no consensus on any one canon which might gather them into a Scottish mainstream.

Ironically, it is this disinterest in national definition that connects these writers in an identifiably Scottish literature, even as it disconnects them from one another. Even as they go their separate ways, they tend to look inward and make their private investigators' go on a shared journey, a journey of restoration from a crime on the social, cultural, or political periphery that takes them through the fall of a self-destructive society to its collapsing centre, the family. So, while theirs is not a typical community of writers, for there is no shared frame of reference that could make them move in unison, there is nonetheless a topical commonality in their writing. The difficulty in defining it is that, as we have seen, the literature's diversity acts as a disguise. It cannot, however, act as disproof, for in the final analysis its diversity is a symptom of its commonality. Admittedly, this seems counter-intuitive, yet despite all their diversity, the novels in this chapter have not demonstrated irreconcilable differences between any of their writers. On the contrary, they have demonstrated that all of them look back to the domestic ideology of an earlier time, whether or not they let their protagonists return to this time. Indeed, even Paul Johnston has at least one eye on past notions of private autonomy and family values when he lets his private eye Quint Dalrymple look into future affairs of state. It is, then, this generation's commitment to the domestic ideology of an earlier time which has caused its literature's diversity. After all, its detectives' commitment to restoring their society to a former sanity,

focusing on one family at a time, lets them demonstrate that the notion of the individual agent has become an ever more vital fantasy in our age of dehumanising bureaucracy. To demonstrate this, however, these operatives have to be successful opposites of their societies, and in order to be seen as such they have to develop the same diversity as the societies they oppose. That is why this generation has witnessed the development of archetypes both foreign and domestic, everything from the philosopher of the mean streets to the feminist with a mean streak – and often within one character.

Of course, writers of contemporary detective fiction also look back to the domestic ideology of an earlier time because it allows them to preserve the private investigator as a plausible protagonist of crime fiction and dispel the suspicion that the last time a real PI solved a murder mystery was never. As the fictional PIs in this chapter have shown by being retrospective without being anachronistic, their flair can make us forget the fact that this generation has had rather few occasions to witness in the pages of detective fiction what we know to be relevant developments in actual detection. After all, while other crime fiction has foregrounded facts about the process and progress of policing to make sure that its many well-connected agents work more or less realistically within the justice system, contemporary detective fiction has foregrounded its lone investigator's flair – the individual manner which lets him or her act radically with extra-systemic freedom. Perhaps the writers in this chapter have been so convincing in foregrounding this flair because they, too, do their best work *sui generis*. Fact is they have made it possible, even popular, to disregard that the private eye's limited perspective and marginal position ought to reduce his or her power to detect and contain serious criminal activity, the kind that draws the largest audience in literature as well as life. At the same time, they have refined this power by focusing on the family, making it evident that crimes committed by, in, or against families create circumstances in which most private investigators are likelier than most public servants to find access and answers. In due course, this makes them seem like plausible protagonists. Yet what makes this especially remarkable is that the writers in this chapter have done all this at a time when information technologies and crime dramas such as *CSI* have seen to it that most readers of crime fiction are either well educated or badly deluded about the reality of crime fighting, a time when we may be forgiven for suspecting that we are more familiar with procedures of investigation and problems of jurisdiction than are most fictional PIs. So, what is most remarkable about these contemporary writers of Scottish detective fiction is that even in our suspicious times they have all found ways to dispel the suspicion that PIs are past their sell-by date.

Admittedly, the most successful among them have done so by sending their PIs back in history, typically to times when they had neither our information technologies nor crime dramas such as *CSI*, and perhaps they have done so because, looking back, we expect neither Philip Kerr's Bernie Gunther nor Denise Mina's Paddy Meehan to be up to date with today's investigative protocols. Looking back, we let them sidestep such modern obstacles to plausibility as they follow their intuition down less

circuitous routes than today's protectors of the family must travel before we take them seriously. Today, after all, fictional PIs cannot simply wander into any crime scene they fancy. Their access, unrestricted though it may seem to be in family affairs, is often restricted to those same family affairs, so we expect them either to exemplify or at the very least explain their right to any further access. Contemporary exceptions to this rule of readerly expectation are, as Peter May has demonstrated, merely further evidence thereof. His Fin Macleod only has the historical PI's licence to ignore present-day protocols because his posting to the Outer Hebrides is essentially a journey back in time. Then again, perhaps contemporary writers of historical detective fiction send their PIs on this journey, not to escape any of our expectations, but to embrace our long-distance relationship with the past, now that a general interest in history has been rekindled. Consider only how fascinated this generation is with the mounds of historical rubble all over Europe that buried its sense of self in the war-torn, death-ridden tragedies of the twentieth century. Reflecting this fascination, perhaps even a fear that we are condemned by the crimes of our ancestors and thus not wholly masters of our own destiny, some of the continent's most popular writers of detective fiction are setting their investigations in and around the wars of the last century. Yet whichever reasons these writers may have for looking back, they do so from a Scottish vantage point from which their retrospection tends to blend an American ideological orientation with a European historical setting. As we shall see in the following section, even on the rare occasion that they lament a loss of self in stories about the loss of Empire, their stories are still best read as family dramas in which the hard-boiled investigator seeks to rebuild the world, one case and community at a time. To subsume this transatlantic hard-boiled humanism in American or English literary traditions would thus be misleading. Self-effacing introspection, after all, is more in fashion with Scottish writers than square-jawed idealism or stiff-upper-lip imperialism, whether they investigate the country's past or present crises.

A Comparative Reading of Two Scottish Detective Novels: Craig Russell's *Lennox* and Gordon Ferris's *The Hanging Shed*

Scottish detective fiction is not a homogenous genre. It is part proto-American, part retro-European. Much like the prototypical PI of American detective fiction – Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe – the protagonist of Scottish detective fiction is less of a 'free agent' than he or she would like to think, and there are two reasons for this: one, while they pledge their loyalty to the job rather than the client, they let their personal involvement with other people's problems get in the way of their personal gain. Thus, these private detectives are committed less to free agency than to family-centred community – to bringing people together whenever they can. In other words, much like the American prototype, Scottish PIs let their actions contradict the stereotypes of hard-boiled free agency and self-sufficiency. Yet unlike Marlowe, they do so as they walk among the mean mounds of Europe's historical rubble, the countless disasters of the war-torn, death-ridden twentieth century which buried their sense of self. It is this meditation on individual dysfunctionality that provides their measure of the world's disorder, and so their retrospection brings us to reason number two for their limited free agency: the sense that they are condemned by the crimes of their ancestors and thus not wholly masters of their own destiny. Hence, Scottish detective fiction is proto-American in its embrace of the literature's first principles, yet in its deeply entrenched self-analysis it is retro-European.

The two authors who best represent this transatlantic blend are Craig Russell and Gordon Ferris. Starting with *Lennox* (2009) and *The Hanging Shed* (2010), both have written series about veterans, men who walked out of the trenches of World War II and straight down the mean streets of Glasgow. In doing so, they have proven Horsley's point that "In series such as these the honourable ghost of Marlowe is often near at hand, encouraging the nobler possibilities within the hard-boiled tradition, bringing to the fore the moral integrity, the compassion and the tough-sentimental view of life that infuse the investigative narrative with a redemptive potential" (Horsley 2009: 188)... Indeed, Russell's *Lennox* and Ferris's *Brodie* are more than just contemporaries of the iconic private eye. They, too, are men of action whose hard-shelled masculinity defies the era's spectacle of broken men and fragmented families. Yet while the American PI cultivated his tough sentimentality in LA, *Lennox* and *Brodie* fought in Europe, where they became tough to camouflage a European sentiment.

In other words, while they may sound alike in their anti-bourgeois tough talk, that of the Scottish PIs implies more than a battle cry to rescue the proletariat from the crimes and corruption of the powerful. It also implies a quiet guilt for having managed to win a world war yet failed to build a better world. Thus tarnished, neither of them feels like ‘the best man in his world’ nor good enough to return home, be that home in Canada or Kilmarnock, so they settle in a city that offers space for self-improvement. That both should do so in Glasgow has two reasons: one, Glasgow was the second city of the Empire, a place where it was possible to think big. Two, the war released millions of men into unemployment, which suspended more than the hierarchies in the home. It also suspended the British class system. Thus, Glasgow became a space in which Scottish PIs could suspend disbelief in an American myth, the myth of the self-made man who beats insurmountable odds while taking life’s blows on the chin. In today’s Scotland, of course, such success seems as odd as the implication that ‘the sky is the limit’, but before the end of Empire demonstrated that history is determined by complex interdependencies, Scots had a decade to see self-improvement by force of willpower as more than a voluntaristic cliché. Lennox and Brodie can, then, deploy Marlowe’s tough treatment of the powerful as a tool of the trade, even in Scotland, for they do so in what Simpson calls “the service of a strong individual code of ethics rooted in frontier mythology and owing little to the liberal dictions of modern culture” (Simpson 2010: 191). Indeed, their post-war Glasgow is best read as the Wild West of Scotland, where men of tarnished conscience set forth to rebuild the world amid the chaos of social, cultural, and political restructuring, not to restore the order of the Empire, but to redeem themselves.

The basic difference between these agents of redemption is that Lennox seeks only to redeem himself, while Brodie further seeks to redeem a man who has lost his humanity in the court of public opinion, a woman who has lost her confidence in the court of law, and thus a time that has lost its innocence. So, while Macdonald is justified in saying that “The detective-as-redeemer is a backward step in the direction of sentimental romance, and an over-simplified world of good guys and bad guys” (Macdonald 1988: 183), his generalisation is itself over-simplified, for while the label fits Ferris’s PI, the overt moral bias of the sentimental romanticist would limit Russell’s broader ideological agenda. In other words, while Brodie is perfectly at ease in his role as “avenging angel” (Ferris 2010: 327), Lennox is never at ease, for he knows that “no one is who you think they are” (Russell 2009: 354). And while this basic difference indicates what unexpected diversity there is even among two PIs who, at first glance, could hardly seem more alike, it also indicates that the best way to show the literature’s heterogeneity is to look at some of their other differences which may at first seem like similarities. Doing so will make it obvious that while we are looking at two examples of Scottish detective fiction, we are also looking at one example of pastiche noir alongside one example of the western novel – proof that *Lennox* and *The Hanging Shed* are in fact marking the sub-genre’s contrasts whenever they seem to be making contact with one another.

First off, both Russell and Ferris make direct reference to their seemingly shared literary tradition, turning their PIs into cowboys around the same stage of their stories, indeed almost on the same page. Thus when Brodie is asked to help a woman without “turning Glasgow into the Scottish Wild West” (Ferris 2010: 176), he bothers neither with an answer nor with a pause as he locks and loads his guns. Just as pragmatic when asked why he is helping, Lennox answers, “You’re my client, Mr Andrews. Or maybe it’s just that I’ve watched too many Westerns. It’s my turn to be the good guy” (Russell 2009: 175). Yet while both seem prepared, perhaps even impatient, to strike out as a one-man-army, they could hardly be less alike in their attitudes as they once again follow an unexpected call to arms. Brodie selflessly starts work on a pro bono case to save a confessed murderer from death by hanging, although that man ended their friendship when he left Brodie hanging by cuckolding him. In contrast, Lennox does not get sentimental. He gets paid, in this case by a man who fears he is being cuckolded. Then he gets paid again by Glasgow’s three gang lords who fear they are being cuckolded by a fourth. Next, Brodie seriously takes the fight to “a stronghold of nationalism and the Irish Republican Army,” even though “the British Army were given a hard enough time of it over the last three hundred years.” Then he is just as serious in answering the question most readers will by now be asking themselves: “Why would one man fare any better? ... This was what I was trained for. It’s what I’m good at” (Ferris 2010: 292-293/308). And he remains serious when he puts this frontier philosophy into action, first by going “off to find the OK Corral,” then by getting the better of the baddies, “guns blazing” (Ferris 2010: 314/316). In contrast, Lennox does not draw straight lines between goodies and baddies. In his book, everyone is a bit of both, so after telling Mr Andrews that it is his turn to be the good guy, he tells his readers that “I laughed bitterly at my own joke” (Russell 2009: 175). Then he parodies the doom and gloom of the noir narrative in case after case of missing persons and mistaken identities. And he remains on the pastiche side of noir, for after he gets battered and left to die, guts bleeding, Lennox first makes a full recovery, then takes foul revenge, and still sees the funny side of noir: “Funny thing is, I always considered myself too cynical to go in for revenge” (Russell 2009: 391). So, while both PIs may seem to bring the mentality of the Wild West to the frontier of the peace process, only Brodie sees organised crime as a deadly serious business. Lennox sees it as a dark joke.

Yet before we take a closer look at the two private eyes, their contrasting views raise a prior question: how does each make us look at the post-war period? At first glance, both seem to focus on its fears, not only because they both suffer battle fatigue, but because the unifying force of any age is its fears. Yet while Brodie indicts organised crime as the period’s source of general anxiety, Lennox interprets it as a sign of specific anxieties. Brodie discovers organised crime in bed with organised religion, which makes us look at the post-war period as a time when neither law nor life was holy. Disgusted, Brodie contains this institutionalised corruption with the moral certainty of the typical western hero. After confronting a priest about his sins and convincing him to confess that he “colluded in rape, torture, murder, perjury and perverting the course of justice,” he controls “an almost uncontrollable

impulse to give him his wish. To tarnish the white with his own tainted blood” (Ferris 2010: 350). Then he kills every male member of the crime syndicate that committed the above crimes. In contrast, Lennox discovers that three shady entrepreneurs are not only gangsters but in bed with one another, which makes us look at the post-war period as a time when ‘big business’ became too big for the law, a time when unofficial and thus unregulated economies created anxiety about turf and gang wars, which in turn created anxiety about the old checks and balances no longer being operational. Disoriented, Lennox plays the new system with the moral uncertainty of the typical noir anti-hero. Thus, unlike Brodie, he is soon “uncomfortable about how things had gone. After all of this was over, I would need to operate in this town” (Russell 2009: 313). Yet before Lennox gets a chance to do so, he gets a lot of innocent people killed. Unlike Brodie, then, he makes us look at the post-war period as a time when a single man could only do so much to contain organised crime and its collateral damage. What he can do is embrace the equally noir fact that he is not “the only casualty. As I lay in the dark feeling sorry for myself I heard the soft, muffled sound of a woman sobbing. From Mrs White’s flat” (Russell 2009: 97). Mrs White is his landlady, and she is sobbing because the war took her husband, not just from her, but from their two daughters. Symbolically taking his place, Lennox rents his room, and so the family story told in the background not only casts a noir shadow on the noir detective story. It also gestures back to a time before the war destroyed families and denied them closure. In contrast, and in true western fashion, Brodie wears the clothes of his landlady’s dead father, and although she misses her father and the clothes are too big for the little Oedipus, the two find happiness by “pretending to be lovers” (Ferris 2010: 249).

This, then, brings us to a more personal question: how do these two PIs differ in their personalities? At first glance, they could be brothers. Both have chosen lodgings which prove Horsley’s observation that “What we see in novels of this kind is a softening of the protagonist by allying him with others, often with a larger surrogate family that represents those marginalised by the dominant society” (Horsley 2009: 188). Being as close in their responses to the dominant society as they are in age, Brodie is a man-child at 34. “I don’t respond well to other folk yanking my strings, especially vermin” (Ferris 2010: 215). And Lennox hardly seems to be any more mature at 35: “I’m contrary that way, but when someone tries to warn me off with a beating, I tend to get stubborn” (Russell 2009: 37). Having said that, however, Brodie brags, “It’s a failing of mine, but not something I’m working on” (Ferris 2010: 215), while Lennox quips, “It’s what makes me an interesting and complex person” (Russell 2009: 100). The main difference, then, is that while Brodie has a cowboy’s sense of self, Lennox has a noir sense of self-deprecating humour. Indeed, while both lust after unavailable women, women who both happen to be called Fiona, Brodie is given to self-righteous reminiscences about her “great betrayal that gnawed at me still,” and by focusing on this “girl who’d speared my open heart” (Ferris 2010: 12/206), he adapts a pre-war sentimental ideology to his post-war frontier narrative. Then he beds Sam, a woman with a man’s name, as if to reassure us all of his hyper-masculinity.

After all, by “pounding in sweet assault and battery” (Ferris 2010: 249), he proves Cassuto’s point: “This new sentimental man is no woman in drag. Instead, his aggression protects sentimental virtues. His violence defends the home and makes sentimental domesticity possible” (Cassuto 2009: 112). True to type, then, Brodie is all about protection and procreation. In contrast to this sentimentalist, Lennox is “a cynical fuck” (Russell 2009: 192). Though sympathetic, he goes about his business with “the direct, no-nonsense disregard for finesse that has made Scotsmen the envy of every Latin lover” (Russell 2009: 4). And although he does so with a dark sense of humour, his business is a serious one. Born in Scotland but reared in Canada, Lennox becomes the favourite freelancer of “the Three Kings: the triumvirate of Glasgow crime bosses who controlled almost everything that went on in the city” (Russell 2009: 4). So, while Brodie chooses to be a homemaker, Lennox is chosen as a peacekeeper, and although his progress is often held up by the very people who hired him, he prevents a gang war. In contrast, Brodie starts one, which suggests we read him as the Scottish cousin of the lone ranger, and Lennox as the son of Lester B. Pearson, Canadian father of modern peacekeeping. In this reading, the two PIs differ in both intellectual maturity and moral outlook.

What is more, in this reading their stories differ in moral outcome. Both seem to have happy endings, but the two PIs are not successful in the same sense. Brodie is successful in the sense that he came to Glasgow when he could face neither his family nor his friends – “how could I face them in this state? A wreck. A drunk. Just a liability to my mother” (Ferris 2010: 52). Yet by the end of his killing spree, he feels cleansed, both because his initial failure to suspect moral authorities restores his moral purity, and because his late success in exorcising them reinforces his stance as a righteous man in a false age. In contrast, Lennox is unsuccessful in the sense that he came to Glasgow when he “came out of the war dirty and I didn’t want to go back to Canada until I felt clean about myself... the truth was as time went on and I mixed with the people I mixed with I just got dirtier” (Russell 2009: 167-168). So, while Brodie leaves Glasgow “to take off into the westering sun in a fine yacht” (Ferris 2010: 382), Lennox stays “to prove that I could still do the right thing even after all the shit I’d been through” (Russell 2009: 123). To Lennox, then, ‘the right thing’ is keeping the peace, not killing for revenge, so he is successful in the sense that he resolves a conflict that could have sent ‘the three kings’ to war, yet his is not a happy ending, for said conflict reveals an impulsive violence that makes him feel bad. “Bad for me. And not because of the trouble it could bring. I felt bad because I had enjoyed it. Because that was who I had become. Post-war me” (Russell 2009: 14). Thus he learns a noir lesson: when wrongs are righted with ever greater brutality, the gap between what people do and what they claim to believe eventually grows wide enough to put redemption beyond reach. In Lennox’s case, this gap grows as wide as the Atlantic, so despite his success, his prospect of going home fades away. Unlike Brodie, whose detachment from the bad guys places him so close to the frontier morality of the western hero that he considers setting off to America as he looks “out into the wide open Atlantic” (Ferris 2010: 382), Lennox fails to make his journey of redemption. He ends up where he started out,

with no choice but to stay in Scotland. And while Brodie illustrates his control with linear storytelling, Lennox illustrates his noir lack thereof by telling his story in the form of a novel-length flashback. Thus whatever prospect of escape he occasionally enjoys, we know he is bound for the opening scene, where he starts his story “with a hole in my side” (Russell 2009: 2). And by narrating 30 of 31 chapters with a fatal wound, he pushes noir’s penchant for pre-determination to the point of pastiche.

This brings us to perhaps the most surprising point of difference between the two hard-boiled PIs. While *Lennox* and *The Hanging Shed* both pay tribute to Raymond Chandler’s *The Long Goodbye*, Lennox and Brodie are cut from different cloth, for only one of them is modelled on Philip Marlowe. Yet before we identify each PI’s model, it is worth noting why both can be associated with Marlowe. Brodie starts his story with an epigraph from *The Long Goodbye* in which Marlowe famously says, “I’ll take the big sordid dirty crowded city” (Ferris 2010: 6). Seven years later Lennox does the same, not in word but in deed. He, too, takes a big sordid dirty crowded city, but since he does so in 1953, he draws attention to the year in which *The Long Goodbye* was published, the year in which Marlowe, the long-time cynic, became a sentimentalist, the year in which Marlowe took a case not to get paid, but to help a friend accused of murder. Yet as we have seen, this character profile does not fit Lennox. It fits Brodie, for it is Brodie who takes a case not to get paid, but to help a friend accused of murder, and it is Brodie who forgives his friend for his betrayal, again like the sentimental post-war Marlowe. In contrast, Lennox seems more like the cynical pre-war Marlowe, for he neither forgets nor forgives. Yet since his story is set in the publication year of *The Long Goodbye*, it seems far more likely that Lennox is modelled on Paul Marston, Marlowe’s friend who reinvents himself as one Terry Lennox. Like Chandler’s Lennox, Russell’s Lennox is a veteran of WWII who goes abroad to reinvent himself. Like Chandler’s Lennox, Russell’s Lennox is visibly changed because he undergoes plastic surgery. And like Chandler’s Lennox, Russell’s Lennox wears his facial scars as signs of an inescapable past. Wherever he goes, they remind him of the man he is desperate to leave behind, yet at the same time, they reward him for becoming a man of violence with the favour of women and the respect of men, both of which he welcomes, so perhaps his scars are best read as symbols of noir’s existential crisis. In this reading, they symbolise the part of him he cannot kill for it is the part that keeps him alive. And what makes this crisis darker still is that the face in which he lives is frozen half-way to recovery, for this forces him to realise that the place in which he lives is forever half-way to redemption. This, then, brings us to the basic difference between Brodie and Lennox: Brodie is the western hero he is because of the dark life he has lived. He now has a shot at redemption if he leaves his life behind. Lennox has lived his dark life because of the noir anti-hero he is. He never had a shot at redemption, for he could never leave himself behind.

A final point is to be made about this contrast. Lennox and Brodie are the closest Scottish PIs come, not only to one another, but to any one traditional definition of the private investigator. At first glance,

then, we might disregard their differences, for they both appear to be based on Chandler's Marlowe, yet as we have seen, they defy even that basic appearance of generic homogeneity. They do so, ironically enough, because both of them do what Liahna K. Babener says Chandler's characters do, that is, "discard their old selves, and invent new ones" (Babener 1995: 128). Yet while each of them is like one or another of those American prototypes in that he picks reinvention as a path to redemption, they are unlike any of them in that they walk among the mean mounds of Europe's historical rubble, the countless disasters of the war-torn, death-ridden forties and fifties which buried their sense of self. And while they both may seem like American PIs in their commitment to family-centred community, not even their hard-shelled masculinity can hide the fact that they are thoroughly European at heart, for it does more than defy the epoch's international spectacle of broken men and fragmented families. It also harnesses their European frustration that they are not wholly masters of their own destiny. Hence, both Russell and Ferris are proto-American in their embrace of the literature's first principles, yet in their self-analysis they are retro-European, and it is in their markedly contrasting versions of this transatlantic blend that they represent the diversity of contemporary Scottish detective fiction.

Chapter Two – The Police Novel

Typically, the police novel tells us how cops work on the job, which in turn tells us how the job works on cops. Stereotypically, it is about a police force forced to push the boundaries of law enforcement. First, a cop is called to the scene of a crime where he or she is confronted with the makings of trauma. Starting a collaborative process of investigation, gathering of evidence, and interrogation of suspects, the cop proves to be more than a seasoned professional. He or she also proves to be a civil servant – first by taking advantage of a civil servant’s access to state authority and official support networks, and then by taking offence at the bothersome bureaucratic protocols that underpin these privileges. Meanwhile, the cop fails to catch the criminal, and this failure takes centre stage for two reasons: one, since we usually know at the outset ‘whodunit’, the police novel is best read as a ‘howdhecachem’, and every time the cop fails, our attention is further focused on how he or she succeeds in the end. Two, it is in the failure to catch the criminal that we get to know the cop, for every time the cop fails, he or she is forced to face another negative progress or news report, not to mention regrets and rivals. Worse still are the frustrating performances of inferiors and the unyielding policies of superiors, which is why the cop, who is often working multiple cases, is soon tempted to meet force with force, and so grows the tension in the narrative arc, in the chain of command, and in the cop’s moral fibre. All along, we read in anticipation of the moment and manner in which at least one of them snaps – only to be reassured by the resolution that police work never ends.

This is why I prefer the term ‘police novel’ to such alternatives as ‘cop novel’ and ‘police procedural’. The term ‘cop novel’ suggests that the sub-genre under investigation is all about the police officer, singular, when in fact it is an ensemble piece about police *work*, involving as it does a squad of cops whose interactions with one another and the public foreground the institutional dynamics of policing, even when the story focuses on a single cop. Similarly misleading, the term ‘police procedural’ suggests that the fiction pays close attention to all the mundane procedures that are part of policing, the ways in which police officers perform routine jobs like going from door to door and filing reports, when in fact the literature would be unreadable if it did not take poetic license with such procedures. So what restricts the usefulness of both these common terms is that they are themselves too restrictive. Indeed, ‘cop novel’ suggests an old school approach to policing and thus leaves no room for the literature’s ever more frequent excursions into such modern sciences as profiling and forensics. Similarly restrictive, ‘police procedural’ suggests a narrative structure which, according to Messent, organises “criminal act, detection, and solution in orderly sequence” (Messent 2013: 41). In contrast,

the term ‘police novel’ restricts the sub-genre neither in its subject nor in its structure – but in its staff. It suggests only that a novel thus named is about the police, and while they usually investigate crime, the term even leaves room for those who perpetrate it. To put it in Messent’s words, the police novel accommodates “many types – novels of detection, thrillers, psychological and/or sociological novels, narratives reliant on gothic effects, and so on – but all focus on crime and police work” (Messent 2013: 43). The question, then, is how the police novel has become such a diverse sub-genre.

Answer: police work is the most visible performance of state power and by far the most dramatic. Hence, its perception is more diverse than that of private crime fighting, and so is its dramatisation. However, before this big diversity of perception could lead to an equally big diversity of production, it led to centuries of no production. In continental Europe the earliest precedents of the modern police were the ‘Hermandades’ of Spain and the ‘Maréchaussée’ of France. Both formed in the 13th century, the Hermandades were brotherhoods, municipal defence leagues that functioned as civil police forces, while the Maréchaussée was the Marshalcy, an army outfit that functioned as a military police force. Meanwhile, in England the Statute of Winchester of 1285 regulated policing until Sir Robert Peel introduced the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 which established the Metropolitan Police of London. Yet although this first modern police force could look back on a European history of six centuries, and although the English were certainly familiar with their police officers, whom they called ‘bobbies’ in honour of Sir Robert, it took another century for the police to command its own literature. The reason for this delay is that it took all this time to change people’s perception of police work – from the use of force that serves a private agenda to law enforcement that serves the public interest, via the plodding bureaucracy that serves as a foil to the investigative brilliance of a private detective. Thus “the policeman,” Binyon concludes, “did not become an important figure in the detective story until the 1920s” (Binyon 1990: 133), and it was not until “the late 1940s,” Panek adds, that “radio shows like *Broadway Is My Beat*, *The Man from Homicide*, and *The Line Up* introduced radio audiences to dramas that combined sordid crime, petty criminals, real surroundings, police procedure, and hard-boiled cops, the principal ingredients of the police procedural novel” (Panek 2007: 343).

Around the same time, so-called ‘semi-documentaries’ did much the same for television audiences. Typically filmed on location and with the co-operation of the investigating law enforcement agency, films like *T-Men* (1947), *The Naked City* (1948), and *Border Incident* (1949) fictionalised real cases, thus depicting police work more realistically than contemporary detective stories in fiction and film. Seeing police stories become more popular than detective stories as a result of this gritty realism, writers like Ed McBain, John Creasy, and Elizabeth Linington not only found a use for it in literature, but also gave the police novel the final push it needed to become a distinct and diverse sub-genre. Granted, Horsley admits, “The private eye is by no means out of a job, but narratives focusing on one man’s isolated, stubborn assertion of individualistic masculine agency have receded in importance in

comparison to narratives involving the teamwork of official detection” (Horsley 2010: 34). Indeed, Priestman agrees, “In the more-than half-century since the Second World War, a growing demand for a semblance of realism has been met by giving the main detective roles to the only people actually empowered to investigate serious crime: the police” (Priestman 2008: 5). The question this raises is why this realism has not reduced the sub-genre’s readership to the only people actually empowered to find a narcissistic pleasure in reading about those who get to spend most of their time filing reports: bureaucrats. One reason this has not happened is that hard-boiled writers like Joseph Wambaugh, James Ellroy, and Michael Connelly have shown that literary realism can be something else entirely. These writers have defined the police novel by treating corruption and violence as a social disease, and whether or not they cure it as a personal defect, they often show that even the police are infected. With such realism they have shown that the police novel can reflect more than the details of policing. It can also reflect its dilemmas.

More often than not, the police novel does so by looking at crime through the eyes of police officers, plural. It lets us see things from multiple vantage points which take in more than the best private eye, not only because there are more of them, but also because they are central to the official investigation. Thus the shift in narrative perspective constitutes a critique of the private eye whose marginal position and limited perspective have reduced him or her to a figure of ineffectuality bordering on irrelevance, at least with regard to the contemporary representation of criminal activity and its containment. Beyond that, it is worth adding that the police novel’s shift in narrative perspective goes even further, from one private investigator to several police officers and from the first to the third person. Hence, says Cohen, it also “constitutes a critique of the romanticised and historically inaccurate figuration of crime as existential conflict between alienated individual and urban modernity” (Cohen 1997: 169)... Yet though the conflict is romanticised, its dramatic potential is real, and so as not to put that at risk, the narrative focus remains on individual detectives who navigate through an alienating modernity or, as Simpson calls it, “the hazards of a fallen, corrupt environment, guided only by an inner compass of besieged idealism and an individual code of ethics” (Simpson 2010: 192). Not that much has changed, then. What *has* changed is that these police detectives are often less alienated than the self-employed, and the fact that they enjoy more public respect than private detectives is only one reason. After all, police novels, as Panek points out, “drag into public view that the police must deal with the sickest, stupidest, most perverse and depraved parts of modern life” (Panek 2007: 349). The other reason, then, is that police officers do not have to do so by themselves. Each of them is part of a bigger story, and the literature’s shift in narrative perspective is a constant reminder of this.

Another reminder, though by no means constant, is the literature’s institutional and systemic context. At times when the story requires a change of pace, when we need or have had enough time to think, the police novel switches between two settings, showing its protagonists either at home or at work.

While this narrative strategy – which is also useful for character development, overarching themes, and potential subplots – is hardly unique to the police novel, it is only in the police novel that the switch from private to professional sphere reminds us that the protagonist is part of a state apparatus. Whether or not a police officer is defined by the job, he or she has to deal with its dehumanisation, both because it subjects people to inhumanity and because it subordinates them to its own institution. Not only does a police officer have to deal with soul-destroying crime. He or she also has to do so in a system that often gets in the way of effective crime solving, a system that, as Panek puts it, “does not reward merit because it does not understand it. Upper echelon officers are, almost universally, anti-professional political brown nosers, boot-licking junior executives, or bird-brained efficiency experts” (Panek 2007: 347). And though police novels are almost universally about lower echelon officers, they are all set in this system, so no matter how conscientious or corrupt any of these officers may be, by closing their cases they all contribute to the system’s functioning and so become tools of the state. What is more, they implicitly ask to be associated with its collective agency and identity. Thus, Messent concludes, the contemporary police novel places “an emphasis on the corporate symptomatic of its surrounding late-capitalist context... The strength and importance of modern police fiction, then, lie in its institutional and systemic context – its representation of policing as a central part of a larger state apparatus” (Messant 2013: 45/43).

Herein, finally, lies the reason most police novelists write in one of the sub-genre’s two main forms – the reason they focus either on the investigative efforts of a single officer, typically an individualist, or on those of several officers, typically operating as a team. Fact is: all police novelists try to shift our attention from policing as an abstract idea that works best in the background of a PI story to specific police officers who personify law enforcement and foreground the workings of state power. Yet while some do so by focusing on police officers who try to stand apart from these workings, others do so by focusing on those who try to be a part of them. As Messent clarifies, “the focus within the genre on individual policemen or women, whether represented singly or in a team, is inevitable, since it is through such agents that the law operates. But at the same time, we are thus immediately drawn into a fictional world in which ‘the human face of state power’ appears” (Messant 2010: 180). And as we discover whether this human face of state power belongs to an individualist or a teamster, we are drawn into a discourse that defines the police novel in the same way it defines police work – the discourse on individual rights and communal responsibilities. This, of course, is not to say that all individualists disregard communal responsibilities, nor that all teamsters disregard individual rights, but that in dealing with rights and responsibilities they have reasons to do so individually or in a team, and as we evaluate their reasons we enter their discourse. Having done so we typically discover that, since individualists typically focus on individual rights and teamsters on communal responsibilities, police novelists typically focus on one or the other depending on whether they believe rights or responsibilities to be more at risk of being overlooked by the law.

In short, when they focus on individualists they tend to assuage concerns about absolute state power. Individualists, after all, emphasise their alternative sense of justice even when they enforce the law, for they are sure to either articulate or act on their assumption that the system they represent is flawed. Every time they follow their own sense of right and wrong they map this system's moral fault-lines, and with every line they add to this map they illustrate that their individualism is unlike that of a PI: police officers who decide to go their own way cannot do so with a PI's extra-systemic freedom. First, they have to decide whether their fealty is to their official superior or to some other superior veracity, whether or not their conscience trumps their agency's code of conduct and its collective wisdom. Then, they have to find a way to follow through on that decision while remaining within the system, and so the PI's straightforward individualism gives way to what Messent calls "a more problematic vision of individual detectives operating through systemic procedures" (Messent 1997: 12). Thus, rather than recreate the detective novel's one-way focus on a private eye's independent investigation, individualists in uniform take account of their institutional context and so create "a three-way focus: first, on individual law enforcers and the policing communities to which they belong; second, on the exercise of state power and bureaucracy (the way society is policed); and third, on the general health, or lack of it, of the social system thus represented" (Messent 2013: 44). So, when police novelists focus on individualists, they hold in check the romantic individualism commonly associated with PIs, and yet they tend to show that police officers, too, can assuage concerns about absolute state power, not by setting themselves up in opposition to its executive force, but by setting examples of restraint.

In contrast, when they focus on teamsters they tend to assuage concerns about restricted state power. Teamsters, after all, emphasise their righteous subordination even when they do not enforce the law, for they are sure to either articulate or act on their assumption that the police must be above doubt, that its cause must be larger than anyone's ego, and that its sphere of influence must have no bounds. Often these officers believe that the police are their family, a family of shared purpose and respect, and more often still they behave as if even the law had no right to impose a limit on their loyalty. Thus, the ensemble police novel can usually be read as a more or less realistic study in police culture, a study that tends to ride on what Rzepka calls "a complex and dependable engine of suspense." He is, of course, referring to the interplay of "hierarchical authority, individual agency, trust, and teamwork" (Rzepka 2010: 7). In other words, teamsters not only challenge the individualist's claim to autonomy. They also hold in check the romantic alienation commonly associated with PIs, for, as Messent says, "the relationship between the detective's role and the agency of the state is necessarily foregrounded" (Messent 1997: 12). Indeed, the ensemble police novel lets us look at life through an institutional lens, which focuses our attention on the relations we as private citizens enjoy with our social networks and, ultimately, the state. It tends to show that teamsters can assuage concerns about restricted state power, concerns that its executive force may not always be powerful enough to look after all of its citizens.

And it does so, not by setting them up in opposition to the state's administrative and legislative forces, but by setting examples of their absolute dedication to the team, the job, and the public – in that order.

In conclusion, the police novel typically tells the story of how a bureaucrat, individually or in a team, fights crime, yet it cannot focus on the procedures without foregrounding the problems of the police, for as the story is bound to show, the choices a bureaucrat makes are charged with moral controversy. Finding him or herself at odds with official policy, the officer faces a menu of official options – loyalty, voice, and exit – yet were this officer to exit the agency, the story would become that of a PI, and were he or she to voice complaints rather than investigate crimes, it would soon become a tract, so the protagonist of a police novel typically chooses between loyalty and the appearance of loyalty. Sooner or later, however, the officer will find him or herself confronted with our demand for drama, at which point he or she faces a menu of unofficial options – lawlessness, violence, and extortion – and it is the stress of making and living with this choice that forms the story's psychological interest. In the end, we tend to discover that the officer's many choices correspond to one of three ethics, which proves Gormley's point that the police novelist typically chooses from a menu of "three roles: the moralist, the pragmatist, and the rogue. Each role corresponds to a distinctive ethical profile. Rogues, for example, disobey orders, lie, break the law, ignore lesser crimes, and use excessive force. Moralists obey orders, tell the truth, uphold the law, and exercise restraint in difficult situations. Pragmatists fall somewhere in between; reluctant to disobey orders or to lie, they nevertheless do so under certain circumstances" (Gormley 2001: 191). So, whatever the circumstances of a story may be, perhaps the best way to read it is to look for an answer to the question that every police novel asks: can this crime make us welcome a world in which individual bureaucrats habitually break the law, righteously enforce it without exception, or conveniently interpret it as a set of suggestions?

The Scottish Police Novel

In Scotland, the police novel has for several decades been the main source of television crime dramas, so much so that there is now a risk of distorting discussions of a novel with images from a TV show – or indeed *the* image of the police as portrayed on TV. For instance, readers who come to Ian Rankin's Rebus series after seeing *Rebus* on TV are likely to picture the detective as one of two actors, depending on whom they saw in the TV show: John Hannah played John Rebus from 2000 to 2001, and Ken Stott played him from 2006 to 2007. What is more, these readers' views of the novels' settings and subjects are likely to be somewhat predetermined, if not by the depiction of the host city, Edinburgh, then perhaps by a host of scriptwriters and directors who, over the course of four seasons, distorted Rankin's vision to fit a novel's worth of storytelling into an episode's runtime of 90 minutes. Likewise, those who have seen *Wire in the Blood*, a TV show about CID officers led by Dr Tony Hill, are likely to read Val McDermid's books about said clinical psychologist with Robson Green in mind, the actor who played him from 2002 to 2008. And after seeing his police team at work for six seasons, we are as likely to discuss McDermid's depiction of police work while picturing that of the TV show as we are likely to discuss her depiction of West Yorkshire while picturing the place shown on TV. So, even beyond Scotland there is a risk of talking about a Scottish police novelist's writing while thinking about its television adaptation. Indeed, in the German-speaking world, where the ARD has broadcast two adaptations of Craig Russell's Hamburg-set series featuring Hauptkommissar Jan Fabel – *Wolfsfährte* in 2010 and *Blutadler* in 2012 – there are bound to be those who talk about the books without even having read them, and when they go on to talk about the Scottish police novel at large, their understanding is at least in part defined by a foreign televisual distortion. Yet this is just as likely to happen in the English-speaking world, where people who have never seen any of the above will still be discussing the Scottish police novel with a TV show in mind, a show that is not even based on a book: *Taggart*. Written for television by Glenn Chandler, the Glasgow-set show has been on air since 1983, making it not only the UK's longest-running police drama but also a byword in most discussions of the Scottish police novel. It is, then, with a view beyond the literature's reputation and representation on TV that I will here focus on the writers who have most affected the police novel's literary genre conventions, and I will do so by looking at how their achievements have allowed them to enter social, cultural, and political discourse.

M.C. Beaton – *Death of a Gossip*

Perhaps the best example of how a police drama on TV has given a false reputation to its source text, and indeed the Scottish police novel at large, is *Hamish Macbeth*. Starring Robert Carlyle in the role of the titular constable, the TV series is loosely based on M.C. Beaton's series of murder mysteries, yet so loosely is it based on the books that it bears relation only to Hamish and his Highland precinct, and to those only in name. In its 20 episodes, broadcast by BBC Scotland between 1995 and 1997, *Hamish Macbeth* gave its eponymous policeman the reputation of solving mysteries with the help of the clairvoyant and otherwise superstitious, and this surrealism was enhanced by the soft Gaelic music of John Lunn and soft focus shots of misty Plockton and Kyle of Lochalsh. In taking these liberties, the TV show made Hamish's hometown of Lochdubh, a fictional village in the Scottish Highlands, seem more like an ad campaign for a kitschy Caledonia dreamt up by the Scottish tourist board than an adaptation of what Marion Chesney, writing as M.C. Beaton, has depicted in 29 novels to date. Starting with *Death of a Gossip*, published in 1985, Beaton has merely coquetted with the Kailyard tradition of Scottish literature. The novel, much like most of its sequels, opens with a domestic scene, a sentimental representation of life in rural Scotland untroubled by the realities of place and people. John and Heather Cartwright, joint owners of the local fishing school, try to abate John's routine anxiety about meeting this week's class, each member of which is soon introduced by full name, social type, and telling detail. Among the likes of a sheltered secretary called Alice Wilson, a "Pretty, wholesome-looking girl; slight Liverpool accent, wrong clothes," and a retired army major called Peter Frame, a hothead with a "Small grey moustache in a thin, lined face; weak petulant mouth; brand-new fishing clothes," we meet the village constable, Hamish Macbeth, patiently studying the "crossword and whistling through his teeth in an irritating way" (Beaton 1985: 7). So far so familiar, yet amid the diverting fishing high jinks in the lochs of the bonny Highlands, a violent death occurs. Lady Jane Winters, the title's gossip, is found swimming with the fishes. As Hamish soon discovers, she was a gossip columnist travelling incognito, dead set on writing about the trip "to prove that the sort of people who went on these holidays were social climbers who deserved to be cut down to size" (Beaton 1985: 117). To make matters worse she had let them all know that she had found her proof, thus giving every one of them a motive for murder, and this is when Beaton cunningly undermines the Kailyard form. Continuing where the late Lady Jane left off, Hamish investigates each bit of gossip, mimicking the form's parochialism yet also letting us look at the secrets that lie beneath the surface, the dangerous jealousies of a community divided by class.

That said, *Death of a Gossip* can also be read as a country house mystery, tongue-in-cheek yet cosy. The country house in this case is the Lochdubh Hotel, where Hamish will stage the grand finale, reinvent himself as Hercule Poirot, assemble his suspects in the lounge, and solve the murder mystery. True to form he hardly gets any police work done in the seven days prior to this pastiche denouement, so much time does he spend playing the bumbling village bobby in order to placate the "big brass" (Beaton 1985: 96), three homicide detectives who want him out of sight as they make the big catch.

Fortunately, Hamish is far more concerned with keeping the peace than he is with enforcing the law, so he is happy to do his work behind the scenes, all the more so when his anxious survivors turned suspects start seeking his private counsel and making their confessions about their lost innocence. Some tell the truth about their past to convince the constable that they were not sufficiently worried about being found out to kill anyone, others tell lies about this case to clear a loved one of suspicion, but they all appeal to the pragmatist and family man in Hamish, and, as we discover in due course, they are all right to do so. As a bachelor with aged parents and six younger siblings to support, Hamish takes his responsibilities in this regard very seriously, so much so that he lets off a small-time poacher because the man can be trusted to take care of his family: “Yes, you see Angus has the wife and three children and it would not be right to take their useless father away from them to prison” (Beaton 1985: 147). Of course, it would be just as wrong to think of Hamish as a useless policeman, for Beaton soon balances this sentimental scene with one in which he is stricter than the law itself, forcing a boy’s mother to give up her son because she has failed to take care of her family: “Now, here’s what you are going to do. You are going to leave Charlie here to stay with his aunt and I suggest you go back home and see one o’ thae head doctors. You’ll drive the bairn mad with all your hysterics. If you don’t do what I say... I’ll bring mair scandal down on your head than you ever could hae imagined” (Beaton 1985: 166-167). Always prioritising the pastoral duties of his profession, Hamish is reluctant to break its rules, but he will do so resourcefully to take care of his community, and this not only lets him catch the fisher killer when the big brass are up shit creek without a paddle. It also lets him get a confession like a true Golden Age detective, proving once and for all that the Scottish police novel can be read in more ways than TV audiences are led to believe.

William McIlvanney – *Strange Loyalties*

As for the police novel that most of us have come to associate with Scotland, the type that Ian Rankin has turned into an international bestseller, the type that is best read as a detective novel in uniform, that type may never have been written were it not for William McIlvanney and his *Strange Loyalties*, published in 1991. This may come as a surprise given that the novel’s central protagonist had already made a name for himself and his sub-genres in *Laidlaw* (1977) and *The Papers of Tony Veitch* (1983), two novels that had somewhat redefined both the Scottish detective novel and the Scottish noir novel, but proof of this third novel’s impact on the Scottish police novel comes as early as in its first chapter: “It was a death I had to investigate, not for police reasons, though perhaps with police methods. Investigator, investigate thyself” (McIlvanney 1991: 8). Investigating himself here is Jack Laidlaw, who thus defines the now all too common self-centredness of the police novel’s main investigator when his brother, seemingly of sound mind, steps in front of a car. So, as early as in the first chapter, McIlvanney defies genre conventions, be it by opting for Laidlaw’s first person narrative perspective, or by opening with a suicide, rather than a murder. And as each of the following chapters confirms,

such defiance is as definitive of Laidlaw as it is of McIlvanney, both of whom Messent might call “romantic in their emphasis on an individual conscience, a sense of morality and agency functioning independently of the institutional matrix” (Messent 2010: 185). The quintessential individualist, Laidlaw is Scottish crime fiction’s original rogue detective, its first official bad ass with a good heart. Like so many of today’s fictional detectives, he is a divorced drinker who often seems down-and-out, yet unlike most of them, he seems unique when he plays the urban maverick of the factotum one-liner, for he speaks a poetic truth whether he talks about himself or others. Talking about divorce, he says, “Sunday: the day of the child, the new agnostic sabbath when all over the western world diffident fathers turned up to catch a glimpse of the only things they still believed in from their marriage” (McIlvanney 1991: 18). Talking about drinking, he says, “I headed for the drink, even though that was a defensive reflex that clicked on an empty cartridge” (McIlvanney 1991: 89). And talking about his life as a down-and-out, he says, “I was a middle-aged detective who liked to try and read philosophy, like someone studying holiday brochures in the poorhouse” (McIlvanney 1991: 181). All along, McIlvanney makes sure that no English irony or American wryness distances us from such truths by letting Laidlaw tell them in a manner that is as Scottish as the man himself, a manner that is perhaps best described as the confidence of doubt, the manner that makes the difference between a morality play and a police novel.

Strange Loyalties is about two hit-and-run accidents: in the first, which happened many years ago, Scott Laidlaw and three university friends killed a stranger, and so begins one story. In the second, which happened only weeks ago, Scott Laidlaw is killed by a stranger, and so begins another story. The first story is about the strange loyalties of the four estranged friends whose shared crime has turned Sandy Blake into a moral idiot who feels justified simply because he has never been found out, Dave Lyons into a hypocrite who feels empowered because he has made a career of avoiding the law, Michael Preston into a man of charity who gives because he feels guilty, and Scott Laidlaw into a suicide who takes his life because he cannot kill his idealism. The second story is about the strange loyalties of Jack Laidlaw who investigates these men as well as himself as he retraces the path that led to Scott’s death. Along the way he realises that “In our haste to get to the places to which our personal and pragmatic loyalties lead us, we often trample to death the deeper loyalties that define us all – loyalty to the truth and loyalty to the ideals our nature professes” (McIlvanney 1991: 238). Jack learns to live with this because he has come to understand “the power of guilt” (McIlvanney 1991: 201). Guilt infected all of these men with self-contempt, leaving them ill-equipped to challenge immorality in others. It even infected Scott, the man whose moral constitution is by far the strongest in the novel and whose name is an invitation to read his personal debilitation as a symptom of a national disease. So when his brother finally gets a confession from one of the four men whose hit-and-run crime sent Scott down the road to perdition, it is as dramatically powerful as it is politically poignant that Jack decides not to go after the driver. In the end, both Laidlaws understand that “We were all driving”

(McIlvanney 1991: 351) and their actions in the spirit of shared responsibility turn the two stories – one a ‘whodunit’, the other a ‘howdhecatchem’ – into moving meditations on the limits of the law. After all, the brothers do more than defy one of the genre’s most established conventions when they decide not to seek formal resolution by bringing their case to court. They turn their case over to us. Speaking on Scott’s behalf – and thus on his country’s – Jack challenges: “What would we achieve? The resurrected pain of an unknown man’s family, the damaged lives of a lot of innocent relatives who didn’t even know the perpetrators when it happened... This guilt was not absolvable. All I could do was take my share of it. I took the secret into myself. But I would live with it on my own terms... It gave me a proper fear of who I was” (McIlvanney 1991: 359/360). *Strange Loyalties* could have been titled *Scotland, Beware Thyself*.

Val McDermid – *The Wire in the Blood*

Defying such a national reading, Val McDermid’s crime writing is Scottish in its author’s name only. She, too, writes about the horrors that hide behind public personas, but the result is reminiscent of Thomas Harris, in the crass descriptions of violence no less than in the cast of psychotic villains. Published in 1997, *The Wire in the Blood* is the second instalment of her series featuring Detective Chief Inspector Carol Jordan and “Dr Tony Hill, BSc (London), DPhil (Oxon), the profiler’s profiler, author of the definitive British textbook on serial offenders” (McDermid 1997: 16). Dr Hill is now in charge of the new National Offender Profiling Task Force in Leeds, and were it not for DCI Jordan, whose unconnected investigation of serial arson in Seaford puts her firmly in charge of the subplot, the novel might have been a ‘psycho thriller’. Its main plot is about the team’s pursuit of Jacko Vance, a man of such superlative deviance he seems to be based on both Hannibal Lecter and Jimmy Savile. Following the identification of Vance as the savage torturer and serial killer of seven teenaged girls, the case hinges on psycho-analysis which – in line with Simpson’s definition of the psycho thriller – “is harnessed to the relentless forward momentum of a narrative designed to generate suspense” (Simpson 2010: 187). Yet McDermid alternates between two narrative strategies to achieve this end. In her main plot she goes back and forth between the interiorised voices of the serial killer, victims, and profilers, letting us know who does what why so as to create the suspense of a ‘howdhecatchem’. Meanwhile, in her sub-plot she merely gives us clues to the identity and motive of the serial arsonist, so as she makes us work backwards from clues to culprit, she creates the suspense of a ‘whodunit’. Using these two narrative strategies in concert, she creates dissonances between the two plots and, indirectly, the two investigative strategies, for as the suspense gradually builds in each investigation, the interruption of one by the other becomes increasingly irritating, and the more irritated we become, the more sensitive we are to the competing investigative strategies and their implicit gender politics. Indeed, as the relentless forward momentum of Tony’s chase is slowed down by Carol’s stakeouts, our initial irritation with her comparative slowness is followed by a new, ever-increasing irritation –

the woman is only slow to make progress because she is neglecting her work to assist the man in his. Yet in fairness to Tony, he, too, takes time off his case to work on a profile for Carol's serial arsonist, and it is this profile which lets Carol close her case. In short, she gets her man with the help of a man, while Tony has to wait for *The Retribution* (2011) to get his man and so equal the woman's success. Thus, the increasingly irritating integration of psycho and police novel reinforces both protagonists' irritation that men and women are not equally integrated into the civil service.

McDermid further reinforces this feminist critique of institutionalised gender inequalities by making the most significant progress of each investigation depend on the subversive actions of act-utilitarians, people who act in disregard of convention when this allows them to solve a case or help others do so. One such convention, albeit officially condemned, is "traditional Yorkshire male chauvinism" (McDermid 1997: 481), and Carol's investigation benefits significantly when she suspends Tommy Taylor whose chauvinism got Di Earnshaw killed; he was her only backup on a fatal stakeout until he went to the pub without telling her because she was "Not one of the lads" (McDermid 1997: 481). Disgusted by both his prejudice and lack of professionalism, Carol sees to it that this chauvinist amateur is no longer 'one of the lads', whereupon the arsonist is caught in the next team stakeout. Another such convention, albeit officially condemned, is homophobia, and Tony's investigation benefits significantly from Shaz Bowman, his most capable officer who alone identifies Jacko Vance as the serial killer and then corners him with the help of Sergeant Chris Devine, her former girlfriend. So, not only do both Carol and Tony appreciate that the best investigative work is done in defiance of institutionalised gender inequalities. Both teams are institutional systems that flourish on integration, and McDermid furthers this feminist agenda by dramatising the dangers of incomplete integration. Before either one of these two teams does its best work by collaborating as a fully integrated unit, they both lose the member that is least integrated. Unsurprisingly, both of these casualties are women, each of whom feels increasingly ignored and isolated by her team, so she goes after her suspect alone, and when she gets close to capturing him – the criminal in each case being a man – he kills her. Thus, while McDermid slowly closes in on her criminals' consciousness with the above narrative strategies, she is also capturing the simultaneously increasing self-consciousness of her feminists and lesbians – a popular feminist strategy. Indeed, as Gavin puts it, "The central concern of feminist crime fiction remains violence against women. Women are victims: captured, raped, murdered, butchered and in the hands of forensic detectives dissected into evidence. In emphasizing violence against women, feminist detective fiction makes a gendered protest. It also implies a gendered question: if even the detective figure is violated and attacked, is justice possible" (Gavin 2010: 268)? In these two cases, the answer is yes. For all its focus on violent crime, *The Wire in the Blood* represents a centred world, a world in which the odd man does abuse and/or kill women in house fires or hermetically sealed jails, but the investigators' moral high ground does not erode. What is more, since even Jacko Vance is

convinced that “People like him were so rare it was almost an argument for the existence of God” (McDermid 1997: 79), McDermid’s world remains morally clear-cut.

Stuart MacBride – *Cold Granite*

In contrast, Stuart MacBride’s world does not even start out morally clear-cut. *Cold Granite*, published in 2005 as the first in an on-going series of novels about Detective Sergeant Logan McRae, is not only crowded with the criminally insane, the criminally irresponsible, and the criminal full stop. It is also less moralistic in its portrayal of the police, showing what Messent calls “a greater awareness of the pressures, stress points and failings of the social system it represents” (Messent 2010: 185). Perhaps surprisingly, MacBride achieves this mainly by making Logan the quintessential moralist. Back on the job with Grampian Police in Aberdeen after getting stabbed in the line of duty a year ago, Logan is back obeying orders, telling the truth, upholding the law, and exercising restraint at all times. In other words, he is serving as a loyal foil for his fellow officers who break these rules of conduct, never more so than when their department is over-worked, under-staffed, and under media scrutiny. On Logan’s first day back, all of this is the case: the corpse of a murdered three year old boy is found, the “BBC and ITV, with their cameras and serious faced-presenters,” start channelling public outrage, and Logan finds himself in charge of the investigation as “the rest of Aberdeen’s CID were either off on a training course or off getting pissed at someone’s retirement bash,” and the detective inspector, “who was supposed to be easing Logan back into the swing of things, was busy getting his head stitched back together after someone had tried to take it off with a kitchen knife” (MacBride 2005: 9). To make matters worse, another young boy soon goes missing, another body is found in a council tip, and the police are as convinced as the press are that a paedophile serial killer is at large in Aberdeen. Then investigative detail known only to the police and said serial killer is reported by a local paper, and when public opinion turns against the police, most of them turn on Logan as the suspected leak. This is when Logan proves himself as both a moralist and a team player. Not only is he more put out by the suspicion that he should be lacking in loyalty than he is by either the relief of his command or the reproof of his superiors, but his feelings do not change long after one of those superiors keeps his promise to “have a word with the troops. Let them know you’re not a rat” (MacBride 2005: 309). Logan is motivated neither by the promise of official endorsement nor by the payment of lip service. He is motivated by his duty – the duty to stick to the side he picked when he signed up for the job – and while this lets him solve the case, it also lets MacBride calculate the cost of such total moralism: “Another case solved. Another life ruined” (MacBride 2005: 575).

Another reason *Cold Granite* cannot be called morally clear-cut is that MacBride leaves it to the reader to decide whether the life ruined is that of the criminal Logan arrests or that of Logan himself. The fact that said criminal comes to Logan to confess may well suggest that his life is the one ruined,

yet since Logan has made far greater sacrifices than self-indictment, the same could be said of his. MacBride makes police work in general, and Logan's in particular, seem like something Panek calls "an unrewarding, soul-destroying alternation of boredom, coping with the ludicrous and trivial, coming to terms with the morbid and depraved, and facing rare moments of absolutely terrifying physical danger" (Panek 2007: 346). And as the above example of two readings in six words shows, he does so with writing that hides the cunning of its craft. Perhaps this is why, on second reading, *Cold Granite* seems reminiscent of *Grey Granite* in more than its title. Like Lewis Grassie Gibbon, MacBride writes in a knowing and often mocking tone about those who live in and around Aberdeen, as when he first describes them en masse: "Everyone looked murderous and inbred. When the sun shone they would cast off their thick woollens, unscrew their faces, and smile. But in winter the whole city looked like a casting call for *Deliverance* (MacBride 2005: 42)." The previous lines, however, suggest a second reading: "A minority trudged along, wrapped up in waterproof jackets, hoods up, umbrellas clutched tight against the icy wind. The rest just stomped along getting soaked to the skin" (MacBride 2005: 42). Not only do these lines create a strong sense of place, people, and precipitation. They also create a strong sense of the defiance that MacBride respects in east coast Scots and that he, just like Gibbon, succeeds in conveying as the communal sentiment at the heart of their shared topic: the ill-effects of urban life when we allow our communities to become so fragmented that we neither notice nor care when people and principles fall through the cracks. I say 'we' because both Logan – *Cold Granite*'s team playing policeman – and Ewan – *Grey Granite*'s left-wing political activist – personify our communal responsibility for such fragmentation. What is more, both novels represent a large range of social groups and indicate their debilitating lack of cohesion by juxtaposing multiple disconnected plotlines, effectively implying that we as a society are as fragmented as their narratives. The result is a sense of disorientation, and for one simple reason this sense is greater in *Cold Granite*. MacBride uses a lot less exposition, a lot less than Gibbon and a lot less than most crime writers. Indeed, so tantalisingly little does he write by way of introduction and backstory that *Cold Granite*, despite being the first novel of a series, makes us wonder how much of the backstory we have missed, and this niggling uncertainty, more than anything else, rules out any clear cut moral judgment.

Craig Russell – *Blood Eagle*

Perhaps surprisingly, a similarly open mind is rewarded when reading Craig Russell's *Blood Eagle*, published in 2006. This first in an on-going series of novels about Kriminalhauptkommissar Jan Fabel seems to tell that familiar, age-old story about the dark forces of evil, the eventual triumph of good, and the immense value of clear cut definitions. The only remarkable thing about it seems to be that it was first published in Britain despite being set in Germany – not Nazi-Germany which would explain the interest of a British publisher. *Blood Eagle* is set in present-day Germany, Hamburg to be exact. Then again, this British interest in a new approach to the old enemy may not be all that remarkable.

An open mind can read the novel as a cautionary tale about the dangers of outdated stereotypes and fixed opinions, both national and moral. The novel opens with the transcript of a cryptic email sent to Fabel by one 'Son of Sven', a self-confessed murderer who is writing to say that he will keep killing, thus continuing his "sacred act" in the name of some "sacred duty" on their shared "sacred soil" (Russell 2006: 2). Soon, we learn that the sender is serious, that he is supported by a secret society, and that he believes his duty to be sacred because he is an instrument of divine ethnic cleansing. So, what seems to start out as a serial killer novel soon turns out to be a police novel about Fabel's team effort to stop the outbreak of ethnic genocide by the ancient Nordic ritual known as the 'blood eagle': victims have their backs cut open, their ribs broken at the spine, and their lungs pulled out through the wounds to resemble blood-stained wings. After all, the megalomaniac über-Viking predicts, "in time, we will take our places next to Odin... but first sacrifices have to be made" (Russell 2006: 451). These sacrifices seem to be what *Blood Eagle* is all about. Not only do they give the novel its title. They also take on the entire genre in the competition for the most heinous crime committed to paper. Yet Russell never writes about such surface violence without revealing the false reasoning behind it, as when he has a historian reveal why the murderer has developed this modus operandi: "Every time he kills in this manner he is making a reference... he has reached into the darkness of the past to pull out a fragment that makes sense of his present. It would be remarkable if it weren't so obscene" (Russell 2006: 126/127). *Blood Eagle*, however, is remarkable precisely because it is so obscene, because it tells a cautionary tale about the dangers of T.S. Eliot's historical sense: "History is shaped by our present, not the other way around. We have spent the last two centuries reinventing our past... The fact is there is no German race" (Russell 2006: 126). Yet history is full of those who invent it to kill for it.

In this case, John MacSwain, an impressionable man of mixed heritage, falls prey to Vasyl Vitrenko, a testosterone fuelled killing machine of mythic heritage. Formerly a colonel in the Ukrainian army, Vitrenko is now the cultish leader of a paramilitary death squad which he has formed by propagating his "philosophy of the 'eternal soldier'," thus brainwashing his followers into believing that, regardless of their nationalities, their shared bloodline flows all the way back to "The Kievan Rus. The founders of Kiev and Novgorod and who gave their name to Russia." This genealogy, of course, makes no sense of their determination to restore the supremacy of some Nordic-Germanic super race, not until Fabel learns that the Kievan Rus "weren't Slavs... They were Swedes. Swedish Vikings..." (Russell 2006: 346/347). Eradicating racial weakness on the strength of this sketchy historiography, MacSwain is convinced that he is enforcing a higher law, and as if to prove the point he creates the next 'blood eagle' while impersonating a police officer. Then he starts killing actual police officers, one of whom he feels compelled to lecture on the merits of Vitrenko's most far-fetched kinship study, the one that explains why he keeps sending Fabel emails. Apparently Vitrenko used this study to show him "that Herr Fabel and I share the same mix of blood. That we are both half German, half Scottish.

That we have both chosen our place. That is why Herr Fabel has been chosen for me as an opponent” (Russell 2006: 450). And that, finally, is why Herr Fabel was chosen as the story’s central protagonist. Not only does his mixed heritage allow him to understand a European Union that is entering puberty, a union that in 2003 is ten years old and cannot seem to decide what it wants to be when it grows up. Fabel’s degree in history also allows him to discuss the differences between Europe past and present. And his name tells its own cautionary tale about the dangers of being too literal in our reading of the stories that seem to tell us who and what we are, stories such as those told by writers of crime fiction. Today, Russell seems to imply, crime stories can function much like fables have done for millennia, cautioning us about the dangers of disobeying moral imperatives. Yet as *Blood Eagle* demonstrates, there are also dangers in obeying them without differentiating between imperatives and narratives. One of these dangers is that moralists like the aptly named MacSwain butcher narratives for swinish moral imperatives without asking why, when, where, and by whom these narratives were created. Another danger is that moralists like Fabel get distracted by attempts to answer all those questions, attempts to read the narratives right, attempts to decode the letter of the law before acting in its spirit. Yet to Russell, a former cop, moralism is nonetheless indispensable, just as long as it is informed. Fabel only closes the case because he is a stickler for rules *and* research.

Caro Ramsay – *Dark Water*

The same cannot be said of Caro Ramsay’s two cops – DI Colin Anderson and DS Freddie Costello – not on the evidence of *Dark Water*, published in 2010. In fact, if they had shown just a little more respect for the rules and done just a little more research, this third story in their on-going series might have been over a lot sooner. This, after all, is a story about a none-too-subtle revenge killer who is not only granted open access to both case officers and progress reports, both of which is against the rules, but also given a background check that cannot honestly be called research. Yet this tells its own story, a story about a risk most police officers acknowledge but few police novelists address: human error. Working out of Glasgow’s soon to be demolished Partickhill police station, Anderson and Costello are only too aware that their station and careers’ survival depends on this high profile murder inquiry. Ten years ago, an alleged rapist was acquitted, now his case is reopened because his corpse is found with the very injuries he was accused of giving his rape victim, and then the injuries are found again, this time on the mentally disabled sister of an ageing Glaswegian beauty queen. As the investigation rapidly turns into a media spectacle, we see police politics come into conflict with police procedures. We see policy makers and press spokesmen try to placate the press by calling for progress at all costs, and we see Anderson and Costello respond by working overtime, until said costs become incalculable. Suffering from stress and sleep deprivation, they are soon distracted enough to start making mistakes, wasting time by suspecting the innocent and risking lives by trusting the guilty, while all along sensing that the media are scrutinising their every step and, more distressingly, their every misstep.

Their paranoia is personified by a photographer who follows them around for a publicity project, symbolically capturing the stagnation of their investigation in the immobility of his photographs, making it impossible to ignore that it is the development of their inquiry that is arrested, not the killer. The killer is called 'Mr Click', and thus the symbolism continues. Police and press are calling him Mr Click because all they know about him from his blindfolded victims is that he makes a clicking sound, and as they search for him by sound rather than sight, the fog around wintry Glasgow slowly thickens. Now the plot, too, thickens. As we already know from the killer, who talks to himself in little asides, he has been trying in vain to kill Costello but finally gets his chance when she gets lost in the fog – just like an elusive albatross Ramsay keeps mentioning. It is by way of such overt symbolism that we are invited to see Costello as a bird that may pay with its life for having been blown off course, that is, for having disregarded the rules and done too little research.

Without spoiling the ending, it is safe to say that all this symbolism means it will certainly be Gothic. *Dark Water* has dark family secrets and it has a cast of characters that are haunted by sins of the past. It has a labyrinthine plot and it has an atmosphere of foreboding in the face of an indomitable nature. It has a naïve heroine and it has a pathologically narcissistic villain. It has Innocence and it has Guilt. All that is missing from the Gothic novel formula is an incestuous relationship that leads to the Fall, and then it has that, too. As we see in hindsight, it has a budding sexual relationship between a brother and a sister which finally leads to the biblical fall from grace, symbolised by a literal fall through ice. Yet the fallen saw neither coming because they were not looking at themselves as possible candidates. As Anderson freely admits on behalf of his fatally distracted colleagues: "it was much easier being here and dealing with someone else's nightmares than having to face your own" (Ramsay 2010: 141). Remaining true to the Gothic tradition, Ramsay makes these nightmares as daemonic as they are distracting by making them the work of a villain with a dangerous birth defect, a rare freak of nature, a man so inhuman Costello can blame one thing only: "millions of people have younger siblings... And lots of people have birth defects... But millions of people aren't born pathological narcissists, and that's the big issue" (Ramsay 2010: 453). As far as she is concerned, the killer's history of killing for pleasure makes it all very simple. The big issue is not that this man was born into a broken family which finally broke him, nor is the big issue that he was born with a manageable medical condition. The big issue is that he was born bad. His cruelty trumps all social and medical causes of his crimes, and the fact that both Anderson and Costello are comfortable with this conservative conclusion suggests that they see no need to understand criminality because there is nothing much to understand. They are simple moralists and as such they see the killer's cruelty as the result of his innate depravity, something to be condemned, contained, and consigned to what Messent calls "the realm of pure evil and individual moral monstrosity." Doing so, he continues, "is a way of isolating it from all social, political or economic causes, and 'explaining' it as freakish and psychopathic exception to all that we know to be normal" (Messant 1997: 16). In short, it is a way of chastising individual acts of violence,

a way of calling them 'bad', and that, according to Žižek, "is an ideological operation par excellence, a mystification which collaborates in rendering invisible the fundamental forms of social violence" (Žižek 2009: 174). So without spoiling the ending, it is safe to say that *Dark Water* offers a dark resting place for all criminals.

Quintin Jardine – *A Rush of Blood*

In contrast, the criminal underworld policed by Quintin Jardine's Bob Skinner is downright camp. Skinner is a highflyer who had already flown by the time Jardine landed his debut – *Skinner's Rules* – in 1993. To date, he has starred in 23 police novels, all of which are better read as camp soap operas. Published in 2010, *A Rush of Blood* is book 20 in the series, and Skinner has finally arrived at the top. He is now the chief constable of what Jardine so coyly avoids calling Lothian and Borders Police that it is clearly just that, and despite his coyness about turning 50 now that his hair is turning "steel-grey," he is clearly presented as the man in charge, the man of action, the man about town, in short, the Man: "I've got a team around me that's pretty much hand-picked, and I can do the job the way I want to, spreading myself around without getting tied down by paperwork and meetings" (Jardine 2010: 6/10). In this case, as in every prior case, doing the job the way he wants to means name-checking his team, then proving that he cannot delegate, and finally putting the criminal away by sheer force of character. Skinner is an individualist who fancies himself a rogue, and Jardine seems to fancy him a superman, for when the suicide of Tomas Zaliukas, a successful Lithuanian businessman known as Tommy Zale, coincides with the quiet closing of a ring of similarly successful massage parlours around Edinburgh, his subordinates are looking to close the case because they cannot see how these events are connected, and it is only Skinner's intuitive sense of direction that keeps their investigation on the right track. Following his confident lead, they eventually trace it all back to the infamous McCullough clan, whereupon Skinner calls an exclusive meeting of clan chiefs and cautions Grandpa McCullough that, like him, he is at the top, but he is not above acting the hard man when the job calls for it. Fortunately, another cop is soon on hand to reassure us that Skinner's act made this hardened criminal toe the line, and although 'Big Bob' may have seemed ruthless when doing so, he is on the side of the righteous: "I watched the two of you in there and I thought, thank God one of them's on our side of the fence, otherwise we'd all be fucked" (Jardine 2010: 433). Since the eye witness delivering this verdict is a senior policeman, there seems to be no need for us to worry about the morality of what just happened. That said, since this verdict is delivered in chapter 88 of 90, Jardine seems to worry that without this late reminder of Skinner's righteousness we may look at his roguishness and fail to see his goodness. Now, for this last worry there really is no need. Moral certainty runs through the entire story like a sky high fence separating the goodies from the baddies.

This, then, is why *A Rush of Blood* is better read as a soap opera. So sensitive is it to the fact that subtlety is scorned by readers eager for spectacle that it combines strong, simple emotions with large, unmistakable manifestations. It even provides us with explanatory notes in its expository dialogue, thus ensuring that we are never in doubt about the place of each protagonist in this ensemble piece and always up to date in the many relationship dramas that have given this series its enduring appeal. Skinner, we soon learn, works in Edinburgh but lives in Gullane, East Lothian, with his wife Aileen, the former First Minister of Scotland. She has recently been demoted to lead the Scottish opposition, whereas Skinner has recently been promoted to chief constable. “Brian Mackie’s the perfect deputy... and Maggie Rose is settling in as well as I knew she would as assistant chief” (Jardine 2010: 10). Back stories told, they all get to work as if the police were their very own start-up family business. Skinner even gets to work with his daughter, Alexis, who has recently been promoted to partner in some big Edinburgh law firm and already gets to represent as big a client as Tommy Zale’s widow. Given all this family feeling, it may not be surprising that Big Bob is not in the mood to comment on the social context of this case, neither when he is putting a ring of human traffickers out of business, nor when he is once again at peace with the world of Greater Edinburgh. Yet regardless of his mood, his avoidance of social commentary is arguably par for the course in Jardine’s type of police novel. After all, Messent says, “the type of police novel focusing on the team, an ‘extended family’ who follow a set of day-by-day procedural routines, is less likely to question the dominant social system than those novels featuring one or two individual protagonists... The only real subject of critique here has to do with the institutional arrangements governing police life.” What this implies is not only a vote of confidence in the efficacy of the law but also complete approval of the social order it protects, and this implication, Messent rightly concludes, “suggests the dangers inherent in such an approach – in too close a commitment to the ground-level cop point of view” (Messant 2010: 180-181). As ever, Jardine provides no critical angle that could put his ground-level cop point of view into perspective. One and all, his cops look up to Big Bob in hero worship, for whether they are sycophants or sceptics, they all admire that he gets the job done, every time. Thus, Skinner is soap opera’s acme of fulfilment, a man whose unerring rightness allows him to act like a cowboy even though he is the chief constable, but his universal admiration is an argument for a police system in which bullies get results without getting tied down by paperwork and meetings.

Karen Campbell – *Proof of Life*

In stark contrast, Karen Campbell’s policewoman, Anna Cameron, is the acme of fulfilment for the realistic police novel and an argument for what the author believes is best about any police service, accountability. Perhaps realism is not surprising in her case, considering that this crime writer worked as a police officer before she started writing about others. What is surprising is that, as a crime writer, she does not make her case for accountability by making her police officer a paragon of due process.

On the contrary, she made Anna the kind of cop who puts her own advancement above accountability, both in her professional and in her private life. Yet by the time Anna makes it to *Proof of Life*, published in 2011 as the final novel in her quartet, her life story has become a cautionary tale about the risks of getting results without getting tied down by paperwork and meetings. Indeed, a cold case, dating back to her debut in *The Twilight Time*, throws her long-sought, quiet domesticity into disarray, yet she is too much of an individualist and a rogue to ask for the support and sympathy of her team. Instead, she abuses the power and trust that have come with her recent promotion to chief inspector, seemingly helping while secretly hindering her subordinates to ensure that no sins of the past end up spoiling her newfound bliss, yet as a result of her obfuscation that is exactly what they end up doing. Symbolising this inescapability of the past, Anna is going through pregnancy and hardly able to walk, never mind outrun the murderer who is coming after her and her family for what she once did to him. By the time he has followed her home, framed her for a revenge murder, and nearly killed both her partner and his daughter, she is a danger to herself and others, desperate to get him off her back, for, as Panek says, “The mental or moral fervour of criminal investigation can follow an officer home, but, more insidiously, the aftershocks of physical terror creep into the individual’s whole consciousness” (Panek 2007: 349). So what happens next will come as no surprise to CID officers, but to readers it may do just that. Neither does Anna make a violent felon toe the line simply by acting the hard man, nor does she make him toe the line by due process of law. She does not make him toe the line at all, because this is not the Wild West where cowboys and criminals risk their lives to restore their honour. This is the West of Scotland where Anna’s hard man act is more than a laughable error of judgment – it is a negative example of zero accountability, it is a worst case scenario of a panic-driven solo effort, and it is the end of the line for a rogue officer.

The scene for this explosive combination of loud vigilantism and quiet heroism is set by a terrorist attack on Glasgow airport in June 2007. A fire breaks out when a burning car crashes through the main doors, a conveniently placed camera crew records Anna’s attempt at containing the bomb threat, and the policeman who pulled the driver out of the still burning wreck of his car “catches Anna’s eye, half smiles, ashamed at all the fuss. His hands are red and burned, and that is his job. Damping fire with his hands and saving the life of a man who would kill thousands, that is his job, the one he’s paid to do every day. It is a reflex not to recoil” (Campbell 2011: 2-3). Soon, we see this same reflex at work in a case of civil discontent, when a peaceful protest suddenly erupts into panic and protesters suffer the unintended consequences of human error among the peace keepers, “the men and women who were equally panicked, who were sheepdogs herding sheep. They did not mean to bite” (Campbell 2011: 246). Between these two reflexes, both of which are seen from a cop’s point of view, we see the full spectrum of Campbell’s perspective on policing. In the quiet heroism of that first reflex we see that she does not want to glorify police work but show that it does not need glorifying. And in the loud vigilantism of that second reflex we see that she does not want to excuse police

violence but show that it needs to be seen in context and proportion. Both times there is a difference, morally. Both times Campbell creates a balanced view of the high pressure under which police officers discharge their duty, the short time in which they have to make far-reaching judgment calls, and the success rate by which the police as a whole ought to be judged. And both times she creates this balanced view by flaunting a genre convention. She is prepared to take account of a rare and dangerous breed of police officer, but she is not prepared to take advantage of its dramatic potential – the renegade who gets a little too excited about the riot gear. Such individuals are reprehensible, Campbell suggests in passing, but they are not representative of the typical man or woman in uniform, not in Glasgow anyway, so she gives them minor roles and reveals them to be pseudo-militants who lead from the rear, “all bluster and so much front it made you wonder what they were suppressing” (Campbell 2011: 242). In the tradition of the humanist police novel, *Proof of Life* then swiftly moves, as Gavin might put it, “away from hard-boiled, streetwise toughness and places the detective’s psychology and human and social issues at its core” (Gavin 2010: 267). Around this it layers sub-plot upon sub-plot, slowly but steadily bringing together three stories about mental stress, peer pressure, and lonely immiseration that finally collide in an explosive conclusion.

Alex Gray – *A Pound of Flesh*

Avoiding social realism, Alex Gray has relied on genre conventions of both mystery and romance fiction in her on-going series about Glasgow heartthrob, William Lorimer. As a result, each instalment reads like a sentimental novel from the 19th century, though none more so than the ninth in the series, *A Pound of Flesh*, published in 2012. Lorimer, now in his late thirties, has just been promoted to detective superintendent, and well he deserves it. As his many female admirers hasten to remind us, he has long been “an intellectual whose honesty, loyalty and deep desire to right society’s wrongs were his greatest strengths.” Better still, “the strength of his physique was more than matched by a different sort of power; those unsmiling eyes and that granite jaw came from a man whose experience of life had hardened him into a formidable opponent of the worst sort of criminal.” And yet “he cared, he really cared about the victims of crime,” so much so that every woman he meets seems to ask herself: “Who wouldn’t be charmed by a big, bonny lad like Lorimer” (Gray 2012: 160/195/126/238)? This, of course, is a rhetorical question, which implies that Lorimer is every mother-in-law’s dream, and so it is fair to say that this generation has now witnessed what Cassuto calls “the flowering of the male domestic detective, and he now acts out versions of all of the cardinal sentimental virtues that the early hard-boiled writers originally posed against... family loyalty, temperance, religious faith, community ties, and hard work” (Cassuto 2009: 19/112). Indeed, Lorimer has eyes only for his wife, never swears or loses his temper, quotes scripture as though he had not just read but written the Bible, and always acts like the guardian of the family writ large, even “getting up in the middle of a bleak January night.” After all, “Hadn’t the shepherd left all his flock to go and rescue one lost sheep”

(Gray 2012: 279/317)? This question, of course, is also rhetorical, but this one has two implications: one, Lorimer the team player feels duty-bound to play the role of the policeman-father who protects a Christian ideal of family with emotional sensitivity and personal sacrifice, as did the Father in heaven, according to St Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 18, verses 12 to 14. Two, there is a call for his role in 21st century Glasgow, a role last played by the house-bound mother of the 19th century sentimental novel. Whatever the chances of that may be in the real Glasgow, Gray is not concerned with social realism, and in her Glasgow, a sentimental projection of bucolic community values onto the city's topography, there is most certainly a call for this role. Lorimer has answered it by rescuing a few black sheep, returning them to his all-white, middle-class flock, and reminding us of the good old social ties that keep flocks together, albeit by binding those in need to their missionary benefactors.

The black sheep, in this case, are prostitutes, and they are black only in the sense of being tarnished. Ethnic diversity is reserved for the criminal, an Eastern European who is not only responsible for the killing of several white prostitutes. As Gray implies, he is also responsible for the killing of several white men, including Scotland's deputy first minister, for while the ethnic foreigner did not kill them, he corrupted the white Scot who did. See, all that is known about the foreign prostitute killer is that he is a male driver of a white Mercedes who picks up his female victims in Glasgow's red light district, but the police investigation goes nowhere, so a law-abiding Scot is led astray. Hoping to find justice, the Scot kills every white Mercedes driver who dares to pick up a prostitute in said red light district. Fortunately, Lorimer clarifies that picking up prostitutes and paying for sex are "nefarious activities" (Gray 2012: 158), so we can rest assured that the Scottish killer is morally superior to the foreign one, all the more so when we learn that the vigilante only kills those nefarious men because the police are unable to stop the killing of other prostitutes, so busy are they investigating that of the politician. Correction: *most* of them are too busy going after the politician's killer to stop the prostitutes' killer; Lorimer is not. Moralistic that he is, he objects when the latter investigation has to take a back seat. After all, "Lorimer was a man capable of feeling great pity for murder victims... and would treat these poor, vulnerable women with as much compassion as any other girl who had been brutalised" (Gray 2012: 63). This character reference comes with the professional authority of his psychologist, Dr Solomon Brightman, so it comes as no surprise when Lorimer starts pulling secret night shifts, moonlighting as a private investigator in the belief that he can rescue these poor, vulnerable women – the afore-mentioned black sheep – from the type of evil man who tarnished them in the first place: "early abuse at the hands of a father or father figure, then a decision to go on the game and earn money for the sexual favours that had already been stolen from them for nothing." So far, so specious, but this pop psychology becomes even more controversial when he says that "It was hardly surprising, given the way that so many of Glasgow's prostitutes had been treated, that they had become lesbians" (Gray 2012: 239). According to this arch-conservative, nature does not determine sexual orientation. Women are attracted to other women for the same reason they sell sex. They were abused by men.

That said, and in defiance of this logic, nature does determine the prostitute killer's sexual deviance, yet a discussion of its social causes is, as Messent might say, "largely stifled here by its consignment to the category of the monstrous moral exception to the general rule" (Messant 1997: 15).

Denise Mina – *Gods and Beasts*

Refusing to duck the hard social, cultural, and political questions by reducing them to the personal, Denise Mina does what only she and William McIlvanney have managed to do with a police novel – she captures the complexity of Glasgow. As McIlvanney has done in his Laidlaw trilogy, Mina has created a multi-faceted view of the city and its societies in her three novels about DS Alex Morrow, each of which reflects Glasgow's many faces by telling several stories from multiple viewpoints. *Gods and Beasts*, published in 2012, is the latest and most complex instalment of this series to date. Starting with the title reference to Aristotle's *Politics* (Book I, 1253.a27), the novel tells three stories, all of which are about people who are either unable to live in any sort of society or self-sufficient enough to live outside them all. According to Aristotle, this means that they are either gods or beasts, but in Mina's book their stories raise three hard questions about the nature of human community: one, what determines our social obligations? Two, how do we deal with the antisocial in an alienating city? And three, how do we best defy the dangerously antisocial when they determine our community life? After a man is murdered in the local post office, his death symbolising the death of communication in his community, all three of Mina's main protagonists strike out on their own to find possible answers. Martin Pavel, a rich philanthropist who witnesses the crime and wants to help the victim's family, decides not to throw money at social problems, for "if you hand it over to a fund you learn nothing... it's the practice, the effort that teaches you courage and honesty and humility" (Mina 2012: 211). Kenny Gallagher, a reputed philanderer who is found out but wants to remain the "potential future leader of the Labour Party," files defamation charges to fight for the political life of the little guy who gets bullied by the big wigs, "self-interest masquerading as something noble" (Mina 2012: 118/177). And Alex Morrow, a rebarbative cop who returns from maternity leave to lead the murder inquiry, realises that "You have to participate in your community," not just police it, if you want it to benefit from "an ethically healthy environment as much as a physically healthy one" (Mina 2012: 162). Initially, their stories are barely related, yet gradually the connections between them become stronger, as does the sense that connection itself is the novel's main subject. Hence, even though charity, infidelity, and maternity – things that typically belong in the private rather than in the public sphere – initially seem like they might divert attention from Mina's discourse on Glasgow's political system, the subtle connections between her characters soon draw us irresistibly toward that very discourse. And as Martin, Kenny, and Morrow sink deeper and deeper into the underworld of organised crime, they raise uncomfortable questions about its parallels in the overworld of political affairs.

Morrow interrogates a career politician in Kenny as well as a career criminal in Danny McGrath – “one on each side of the ‘they’ divide” (Mina 2012: 128) – and while both say a lot about the rewards of secretly crossing that divide, her inverted commas say even more about its shaming connotations. Is it surprising that a policewoman should possess such sensitivity, a woman who has chosen the very profession in which people are paid to enforce this ‘they’ divide? Initially, perhaps, it *is* surprising, but Mina soon reminds us of three things that police novelists often let us forget in order to sustain the comforting illusion of a clear-cut divide between cops and criminals: first, she reminds us that her cop cannot sit comfortably on the side of the ‘goodies’ because she is far more than her rank and surname. DS Morrow is a woman who happens to be a cop, as opposed to a cop who happens to be a woman, and like any real person she has personal connections that happen to span this impersonal divide, connections she cannot cut despite wanting to dissociate herself from ‘baddies’ like Danny McGrath, who happens to be her half-brother. She can deny the risk of contagion, but not the fact that suspicion “was serious enough to prompt an investigation into her entire career.” To her relief, “the depth of the inquiry had left her the most trusted, vetted DS in Glasgow and put the shame of her past behind her” (Mina 2012: 127). But it has also left her highly sensitive to the shaming connotations of this divide, this moralistic notion that ‘they’ are all categorically different from ‘us’. Knowing this to be nonsense, as she herself moves between these categories, she reminds us of the second reason for her sensitivity. Because of Scotland’s high degree of social mobility, there is no shortage of Kennys and Dannys – people who are regarded by some as criminals by choice and by others as victims of circumstance. But there is also no shortage of Morrows – people who are sensitive to the injustice of categorical judgment because they see that ‘they’ are all individuals whose crimes have to be judged in context, not in contempt of the other. This brings us to the third reason for her sensitivity. Morrow is a woman, and like most women she knows all about the shaming connotations of being referred to as ‘they’. So, although the realist in her can appreciate that anonymity is an incalculable advantage for any cop – just like it is for any criminal – the moralist in her cannot appreciate the implied sexist cultural values. It is in defiance of these values, then, that Mina makes her cop more than just successful at her job. She makes her central to the narrative. And it is by thus anchoring her feminist critique of patriarchal divides that she raises a hard question about power displacement between genders as well as classes: who really runs Glasgow?

Synopsis

Someone like Denise Mina's DS Alex Morrow – a woman who is in the police but not of the police – is a good example to illustrate a crucial point: the Scottish police novel is not all about men who have a hard time identifying with institutional authority. Furthermore, while Morrow, too, has a hard time finding her place in the police, she deliberately buys into its moral clarity and disciplinarian ethos. Coming from a family of law breakers, she is making a massive effort not only to be a law enforcer but also to become a team player, so her example also illustrates that the Scottish police novel is not all about rogues who embrace their individualism in the manner of the genre's most famous maverick, Ian Rankin's DI John Rebus. I say *someone* like Morrow is a good example of this diversity because, while these ten police detectives prove that Rebus is no exception in acting like a private detective, they also prove that Morrow is not the only example of a Scottish police officer who respects policy, protocol, and professionalism. In fact, if we take Ian Rankin out of the picture, as I have done above, it becomes evident that the Scottish police novel is less about rogues than it is about moralists. Contrary to the national stereotype, then, the Scottish police novel is rarely ever about rebels. Indeed, only three out of these ten popular police novelists write about rogue officers who routinely lie, disobey orders, break the law, ignore lesser crimes, or use excessive force. And out of these three, only McIlvanney writes about a cop who gets results by doing so. Jardine's cop may pose as a rogue, but he only gets results because his law- and authority-abiding subordinates solve the case for him, and Campbell's cop, who only turns rogue when she is blackmailed, does not get results by doing so. This is hardly a ringing endorsement of anti-authoritarianism, the less so since only two out of the remaining seven authors write about pragmatists who will break at least a small rule for a big reward, and out of these two, only Beaton's cop is not reluctant to do so. Then again, he shows restraint, merely disobeys an order to let his superiors take his case, and then lets those superiors take his credit, so he is barely even reprimanded, never mind mistaken for an anti-authoritarian. On the other hand, McDermid's cops are so reluctant to defy authority that they only do so when the consequences of complying with the rules are morally reprehensible, and such act-utilitarianism is a form of moralism, not anti-authoritarianism. As for the remaining five out of these ten police novelists, MacBride, Russell, Ramsay, Gray, and Mina all write about cops who obey orders, tell the truth, uphold the law, and exercise restraint in difficult situations – classic moralists. Judging by these ten examples, then, the Scottish police novel is more concerned with moralism than it is with anti-authoritarianism.

Of course, judging by ten examples delivers no final verdict. Another sample might invite objection, and another reader may well object to my in- or exclusion of particular writers. The above selection, however, neither reflects my personal favourites, nor does it conceal any dreams of future royalties. These ten writers have made the list and countless others have not simply because, Ian Rankin aside, these are the ten police novelists who have most defined the development of the Scottish police novel, either because their literary merit has inspired others to contribute to the police novel's diversification, or because their commercial success has incentivised others to conform to their type of police novel. Ian Rankin is not included in this list because, when a man is synonymous with an entire sub-genre, his reputation either distorts perception of his colleagues' contributions or hides them like a disguise, so I will look at his work separately at the end of this chapter. As for my countless other omissions, every list has to end somewhere, and a list of ten is long enough to offer an overview of the sub-genre, the context of each writer's work, and the proportion of each contribution to the literature at large. Just as significantly, however, a list of ten is not long enough to provide encyclopaedic detail which, by distracting from both context and proportion, might obscure the Scottish police novel's diversity. Thus, the above sample has shown that only a very small minority of Scottish police novelists honour the historical reputation of the ever-rebellious Scot by writing about anti-authoritarian rogue cops. The vast majority write about police officers who not only enforce the law but respect its morality, and it is the variety of ways in which these cops manage to do both that leads to the genre's diversity. But this sample also shows that not all Scottish police novelists make their cops manage on their own. Contrary to the quaint image of the anarchic Scot, an image that Rankin has given a new lease of life, a surprisingly small number of his many peers keeps this image alive by writing about anarchic cops. In fact, McIlvanney is alone in doing so, and he remains in a minority even when the definition of anarchist is stretched so far as to cover any individualist who would rather not be restrained by others, even those who do not have to fight for their autonomy, like Beaton and Jardine's armchair anarchists. Campbell's cop certainly fights for her autonomy – making it four out of ten for the individualists – but she loses that fight precisely because she cuts herself out of her institutional command structure, so her example would seem to be as feeble an endorsement of individualists as their overall minority. Accordingly, the final blow to individualism would not be that six out of these ten novels are about team players but that nine out of ten are about cops who are deeply concerned about their place in the police.

Indeed, McIlvanney is the only one of Scotland's most influential police novelists, Rankin included, who writes about a successful police officer who is not at all concerned about his place in the police. Laidlaw could not care less about his relations with his colleagues, never mind his career prospects, and while the same is true of at least Rankin's Rebus, Laidlaw alone is untroubled by the prospect of jeopardising his belonging to the police. In contrast, even the country's most infamous rogue cop,

John Rebus, is well-nigh obsessively concerned about his continued belonging to this state apparatus, the more so the more anarchic he seems, as I believe my reading of *Resurrection Men* will show. Similarly, nine out of ten writers investigated here write about cops who are concerned about status – not necessarily their social status, but certainly their status of employment – and it is this self-concern, rather than any joint commitment to shaping policy, that leads to their involvement in office politics. However, while the majority of these police officers at first appear to be the familiar teamster type, the type that thrives on collaboration, they are only successful once they act on their own initiative, and the implied championing of individualism says as much about them as it does about their authors. All of the authors discussed above, whether they write about classic or compromised individualists, champion their characters' relative independence of thought and action by doing their own thing. Most of them are likely to have read McIlvanney, who remains Scotland's most original crime writer, but no one writes like him. And contrary to the claim of so many publishers that they have found an heir to the country's most famous crime writer – 'the new Ian Rankin' – no one writes like him either. Of course, there are similarities between individual writers but not enough to create a sense of unity, for they seem negligible when set against their many differences in subject and style. For instance, McIlvanney and Rankin have pushed the genre boundaries of the police novel in similar directions, yet so different are their subjects and styles that while both have written documents of social history, McIlvanney's can also be read as novels of ideas, Rankin's on the other hand as political novels. Mina's social and political novels of ideas certainly go a long way toward closing this generic gap, but since they can also be read as feminist novels, they are rare literary hybrids, and so a gap remains. Indeed, so rare are these hybrids that another gap separates Mina even from Campbell and McDermid, both of whom have similarly channelled their respective gender and class politics into feminist novels. Yet in doing so, Campbell has moved toward straight literature, McDermid toward the psycho thriller, so all three are separated by generic gaps. Finally, on opposite sides of yet another such gap, MacBride and Russell have written about social and historical fragmentation, MacBride in a fragment, Russell in a fable.

So much for the many gaps between Scotland's police novelists whose writing can be called gritty – gritty being the buzzword in discussions of the entire genre ever since Rankin defined its reputation – but the widest gap is to be found between these realists and writers who really cannot be called gritty. Yet what can they be called instead? Judging by the above evidence of Beaton's Kailyard country house mystery, Jardine's cowboy soap opera, Gray's conservative sentimental novel, and Ramsay's symbolist Gothic novel, Scotland's 'non-gritty' police novelists are just as heterogynous as the gritty, their spectrum ranging from the cosy to the camp. So, whatever collective term may fit them best, 'gritty' obviously does not do justice to any of them, never mind the Scottish police novel at large. Yet as these four examples have also shown, the problem of definition is bigger than just one word. The problem is that *any one word* would imply that there is a common denominator in this sub-genre,

when in fact the generic gaps between its most influential exponents show that there is no such thing. The reason for this is that there is no widespread positive identification with any one literary tradition, just like there is no widespread negative identification with any one unifying anti-foreign sentiment. Like their cops, these writers are not interested in collaborating on any joint nation building project, instead picking and mixing their topics and techniques. So, while there are police novelists whose significant critical or commercial success can create the first impression of a significant mainstream, the diversity on offer in this chapter demonstrates that no single writer or style of writing represents a significant majority movement in the Scottish police novel, not even the grittiness discussed above. Far from it, the only significant majority movement in this sub-genre has nothing to do with style and everything to do with a strong trend toward Scottish settings and casts: local crimes for local cops. Yet even in this self-consciousness there are too many multi-cultural tributaries and single-minded currents for a mainstream to take the form that foreign readers may expect: a fervent anti-Englishness. The popular prejudice against the Scots, after all, is that they stand for nothing but against the English. However, when Beaton casts a bully from south of the border as an oddly loathsome murder victim, she is one of only three writers in this entire chapter who risk a nationalist reading – and even in this, by Scottish standards exceptional case, two other casting decisions invalidate any such reading: one, the murderer is no nationalist whose crime is excused as a defensive expression of anti-colonialism. Two, it is her village bobby who catches said murderer, while her three senior detectives make every mistake in the book, and their institutional incompetence ultimately invalidates a nationalist reading. Similarly, Russell casts two bullies from abroad as murderers, not to advocate a nationalist reading, but to complicate it by mapping the route from wilfully defined nationality to violent nationalism.

In contrast, Gray casts a foreign psychopath as both a loathsome murderer and the monstrous other, which twice puts her into a minority of one. Alone in reducing a foreigner to a beast of inhuman evil, she is also alone in deifying a Scot who is so righteous he won't even complicate a nationalist reading, let alone invalidate it. No other writer in this chapter simply blames a foreigner for domestic violence. Indeed, so self-conscious are nine out of ten Scottish police novelists that Russell perhaps represents the spirit of this sub-genre best when he not only charges a Scot with investigating foreign violence but also blames another Scot for committing it. And by taking these two Scots far beyond the borders of Scotland he gives his readers a measure of the distance between the country's police novelists – their geographic and generic diversity. Of course, his work is an extreme example of internationalism, but it indicates a strong trend among his compatriots toward complicating definition by nationalism, which, ironically, is one trend that unites most of Scotland's police novelists in a national literature. The other is a trend toward writing in detail about the powers, the politics, the philosophies, the ethics, the professional hazards, and especially the personal sacrifices of policing – just not its procedures. Every one of the police novels in this chapter is sketchy at best when it comes to police procedures, not only because their authors knew that books about bureaucrats would otherwise hardly be readable,

but because every one of these writers would rather foreground the individual than the institutional. Doing so, they have made it possible and indeed popular to disregard that their fictional cops rarely bother with the bureaucratic stuff that actual cops cannot avoid in fighting serious criminal activity, the kind that draws the largest audience, in literature as in life. And they have done so in the heyday of whistleblowing, information technology, and television crime drama, i.e. at a time when most readers of crime fiction are either well educated or badly deluded about the reality of crime fighting. Yet even in our suspicious times, every writer in this chapter has found a way to dispel the suspicion that their police officers ought to show a little more concern, not just for the procedures of policing, but also for its rules and regulations. As I hope to have shown in my reading of ten of their novels, surprisingly few of them have done so by writing about notorious mavericks like Rankin's Rebus, whose charisma alone stops other cops and readers from questioning his extra-systemic methods. Indeed, most of them have done so by making their cops find different ways of accommodating independent action within the justice system, which is to say that their writing is far more diverse than the reputation Rankin has given the Scottish police novel. And as I hope to show in the following, final section of this chapter, even Rankin's writing is more diverse than Rankin's reputation.

A Comparative Reading of Two Scottish Police Novels: Ian Rankin's *Resurrection Men* and *The Complaints*

Ian Rankin deserves special attention, neither because he has been appointed to the rank of Deputy Lieutenant of Edinburgh, nor because he has been named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire for services to literature, but because he has come to be known as 'the King of Tartan Noir'. Rankin deserves special attention because the latter, unofficial title would have readers believe that – even if his is the only Scottish crime fiction they have read – they know something about Tartan Noir. The problem with this flattering implication is that Rankin does not write noir, not tartan, not any. Rankin writes police novels based on the premise that the system not only works but that it is good, for though his cops have to bend the odd rule, at times even break one to preserve order in Edinburgh, preserve it they do, and though they have the odd minor flaw, they manage it like the heroes they are. If Rankin wrote noir novels, his cops would not be bending or breaking any rules to preserve order, because there would be no order. If Rankin wrote noir novels, his heroes would not have any flaws, because he would have no heroes, just protagonists. But, as I hope to show in my reading of *Resurrection Men* (2001) and *The Complaints* (2009), Rankin relies on both the ethics and the aesthetics of reform, even in the two novels that have shown his two serial cops in the darkest light. Even when John Rebus and Malcolm Fox go a little too far in their quests to right the world's wrongs, they are still far from noir, for the worst thing these tarnished lawmen do to the lawless is arrest them, the farthest-reaching consequence for pursuing an arrest all too ardently is suspension with full pay, and the closest they come to the social abyss is when somebody leaps into it – and they arrest them. At times, they do seek out the disenfranchised and desperate, but usually to interrogate an informant, and the personal lives of these people are of interest to Rankin only in so far as they shed light on the progress of his inspectors' investigation. So, while these novels offer the occasional glimpse of the third world that lives in the shadow of the first, they never linger for long enough to be seen as noir. And while they stand out from more conservative police novels by showing that not all cops are good, they are not subversive enough to suggest that criminals are only as bad as the societies they live in. In short, not even at its darkest is Rankin's writing noir, so he can hardly be the King of Tartan Noir. This raises two questions: what are the risks of flattering a writer with such a false literary reputation, and what do they know of Scottish literature who only Rankin know?

One risk is that readers falsely infer that Rankin's writing is the darkest that Scotland has to offer. Another risk is that Rankin's title falsely implies a literary conformity among the country's noirists. Yet even if *Resurrection Men* and *The Complaints* are the only Scottish crime novels they have read, they will know not to generalise, not about Rankin's writing and not about any Scottish crime writing, for as these two novels exemplify, the literature's falsely homogeneous reputation does not even do justice to the writing of the man responsible for it, so it is unlikely to do justice to everybody else's. Indeed, not only are these two novels not definitive of Tartan Noir, they are not even definitive of the Scottish police novel, for they are neither about rogues and individualists, as one may expect of Tartan Noir, nor are they about moralists and team players, as are most other Scottish police novels. They are about both. That is to say that *Resurrection Men* is about a would-be rogue and individualist, *The Complaints* about a would-be moralist and team player. I say 'would-be' because, in both cases, Rankin's cops are not what they would have themselves and others believe. So it is possible to agree with Anderson when he likens Rankin to Michael Connelly. "I think of Rankin's Inspector John Rebus as Harry Bosch's dissolute Scottish cousin: middle-aged, overweight, alcoholic, gruff, a loner, a chain smoker, an enemy of all authority" (Anderson 2007: 223). Upon reading *Resurrection Men*, however, Anderson ought to have added that Rebus alone has the Scottish fear of being 'found out'. After all, the only reason for Rebus to willingly go undercover and investigate cops with reputations like his is that he wants to impress upon his superiors that he warrants no such investigation himself. Calling his bluff, Anderson might also have added that Rebus only seems to be an enemy of authority, for as he finds out how corrupt these cops really are, he also finds out that he is unlike real rogues – indeed unlike Bosch – in that his drive to get the job done is checked by his desire to stay in the job. Similarly, Inspector Malcolm Fox finds out that he is not quite the classic moralist he may seem to be. Starting out as the opposite of Rebus – a polite, sociable, teetotal non-smoker and friend of authority – Fox, too, has a transformative experience while investigating corrupt cops. Insulted by their impunity, he rejects their rationalisation that getting the job done is more important than any rule or regulation, yet he learns the hard way that he himself is willing to cross a moral fault line to get the job done. When he comes to doubt the integrity of a surveillance operation, he breaks cover with the suspect, thus putting his own sense of right and wrong above an official directive. From opposite sides, then, Rebus and Fox both measure the gap between legality and morality, pragmatism and idealism.

This shared role of the metaphysical surveyor is foregrounded by the very setup of these two series. As Messent points out in his reading of *The Naming of the Dead*, "Despite his professional role, Rebus remains clearly distanced from the official system that supposedly contains him... It is clear from both the structure and particular content of the novel and from the emphasis on Rebus's marginality that the reader is expected to question the ways in which official authority systems work" (Messent 2010: 183). The same is true of *Resurrection Men*, a novel structured around two inquiries – one into the suspicious death of an art dealer, and the other into the suspicious dealings of three cops –

for Rankin keeps interrupting one inquiry to let readers catch up with yet another setback in the other. This lets them share the investigating officers' growing frustration with sell-outs in their own ranks, and as sensitive information keeps leaking to suspects that keep evading arrest, readers soon know that they are expected to question the ways in which official authority systems become dysfunctional. And should this narrative structure not signal the need for reform, the fact that even roguish Rebus is willing to become a whistle-blower indicates the enormity of the problem that is endemic corruption. Meanwhile, similar questions are raised in *The Complaints* when Fox is advised by his father: "Machinery... it's not to be trusted." Soon, Fox is advised that he himself is not to be trusted. Marginalised as a suspected murderer of his sister's partner, he learns that he was set up by a superior, and it is only when he trusts another discredited cop that he solves the case and finally understands his father's analogy: "The police force consisted of a series of connected mechanisms, any one of which could be tampered with, or become misaligned, or need patching up" (Rankin 2009: 10/375-376). Despite their professional role, then, both Rebus and Fox step outside the official system that supposedly contains them to modify some of that system's uses and abuses. In doing so, however, they raise further questions, such as: Should we praise civil servants who fail to pass muster with a professional standards unit for their extra-systemic efforts to fix a structurally flawed justice system? Should we credit them with trust and concern ourselves more with their motives than their methods? Should our answers depend on their success? Should we be in favour of safeguards in order to empower conscientious objectors if that means also empowering rogue officers, and should we always trust ourselves to tell the difference? After all, even the strictest adherence to a personal moral code cannot ensure that others will be aware of its subtleties or make allowances for failures in good faith, so, as Gormley asks, "At what point does the appearance of corruption become indistinguishable from corruption itself? These cases force us to confront the limits of honesty and the dangers of deception" (Gormley 2001: 187).

More specifically, the two cases in question are only closed once Rebus and Fox resort to force. Rebus marks his territory, first by beating a criminal in a fistfight, and then by threatening him that "this town ain't big enough for the both of us. I see you here again after tonight, you're dead meat. Understood" (Rankin 2001: 304)? In fairness to Rebus, acting the big man may not be his true calling, but having got into character to convince the rogues under investigation that he, too, has gone rogue, the role takes over. So when their leader dares him "to shut that door... sort things out here and now," he no longer seems to be in control: "Rebus's fingers were around the door-handle. He didn't know what was about to happen, but started pushing the door closed anyway" (Rankin 2001: 395)... Similarly, Fox marks his territory, first by flooring one of the liaising Complaints and Conduct officers who are investigating him, and then by adding insult to injury: "I'm not sorry for what I did... I just didn't expect him to go down like a sack of spuds" (Rankin 2009: 227). As in Rebus's case, such bravado is hard to reign in. Once Fox picks up the scent, he is no longer the cop who thought of

himself as “A bear of a man... Slow but steady, and only occasionally to be feared” (Rankin 2009: 3). Instead, he proves himself to be as sly as the predator after which he is named as he traps his prey, talks one into killing another, and still escapes punishment. Thus, both cases raise a specific question: do these circumstances excuse or at the very least extenuate the threat and use of physical violence? Rankin’s answer seems to be yes, but then his DI Gray, “the Glasgow Rebus” (Rankin 2001: 94), threatens the criminal whom Rebus had earlier kicked out of town, telling him that “we’re the lowest of the low, the absolute fucking zero as far as the Scottish police force goes... We could kick your teeth down your throat, and when they came to tell us off, we’d be laughing and slapping our thighs... See what I’m saying” (Rankin 2001: 326)? What he is saying is that some cops get away with murder, not because they are so subtle, but because they are so successful at doing the system’s dirty work. And what Rebus’s disapproval of Gray’s dirty work says is that Rankin considers a person’s character to be the critical circumstance that does or does not extenuate the threat and use of physical violence. Yet even a pure character cannot excuse them, for, as Rebus learns, the price is “a tainted conscience, guilty deals, and complicity... grubby motives and a spirit grown corrupt” (Rankin 2001: 470). Admittedly, Fox is less vocal in his self-flagellation, but he, too, is conflicted about resorting to force, so they raise the same question: is theirs a quest for justice or for personal vindication?

It is in their answers to this question that Rebus and Fox most differ, even though their phrasing of the question implies a shared despondency: Rebus “wondered whether it really mattered one way or the other. A few grand... even a few hundred grand... pocketed with no comebacks, no harm done” (Rankin 2001: 140). Similarly, Fox “wondered: did it bother him that the world wasn’t entirely fair? That justice was seldom sufficient? There would always be people ready to pocket a wad of banknotes in exchange for a favour.” However, while Rebus does not say how he differs from such rogue cops, Fox goes on to tell himself: “But you’re not one of them” (Rankin 2009: 262). And while Rebus spends the remainder of *Resurrection Men* seeking ways to justify his stubborn belief that his moral compromises are all somehow redeemable – even as he comes to condemn them in cops like Gray – Fox spends the remainder of *The Complaints* seeking ways to bring cops like Rebus to justice. So, while Rebus is on a quest for personal vindication, Fox is on a quest for justice, and while Rebus fails, Fox succeeds. However, lest such obvious contrasts obscure the defining difference between the two, it is worth noting that Rebus would disagree with Fox’s definition of failure and success. For Rebus, failure to deny one’s human fallibility is the only true success. As his disciple Siobhan Clarke says: “he relished the idea of his own fallibility. He was only human, and if proving it meant enduring pain and defeat, he would welcome both. Did that mean he had a martyr complex” (Rankin 2001: 392)? Assuming that what she means by martyr is not a man of god, called to witness for his religious belief, but a man so committed to his secular cause that he will risk his life, the answer is yes. After all, Rebus has ample opportunity to convince himself of how ruthless Gray and his rogue sidekicks are, yet to build a solid case against them he must either extract confessions or catch them break the law,

both of which depends on gaining their confidence, so he cajoles them, provokes them, divides them, and then invites them into his home. By the end of the novel, his survival is nothing short of a miracle. Meanwhile, Fox makes sure that he is never in need of such a miracle, and his reason for doing so is what sets him so far apart from Rebus: “Crucifixion’s not high on my wish list” (Rankin 2009: 359). Their defining difference, then, is perhaps best encapsulated in a passing reference to Scottish history. When asked whether he believes that Knox is “everything that makes us what we are,” Rebus asks, “Which Knox” (Rankin 2001: 135)? John Knox, the clergyman who led the Protestant Reformation, or Robert Knox, the lecturer in anatomy who illegally purchased corpses from ‘resurrection men’? Given their moral positions, Fox stands with the former, Rebus with the latter.

Perhaps the clearest manifestation of this is where each of them stands on the subject of Edinburgh. Rebus may be ambivalent in the above scene when Gray defines his adoptive city as “Knoxland... That’s what Edinburgh is” (Rankin 2001: 135), but having moved there from his native Cardenden, Fife, he has lived in the city centre for decades, and having studied the place with the outsider’s keen attention to detail, he has seen enough of its dark underbelly to agree with Gray that, “When it comes to Edinburgh, sir, John knows where the bodies are buried” (Rankin 2001: 287). In other words, Rebus regards present-day Edinburgh as a grave monument to its past, and he relates to it because, like him, the city cannot escape its horrible history. In contrast, Fox was born and raised in Edinburgh, and like most people who grow up on a tourist site, he is not interested in the past on which it is built. He is interested in what gives shape to its present distress, such as speculative property development, so when a high-profile developer disappears, leaving behind debts higher than his many tower blocks, Fox is happy to agree with Ernie Wishaw’s criticism: “Buy a parcel of land, sit on it for a year and then sell at a profit. Or a house or a bunch of flats... Money from thin air, that’s what it seems like. And nobody asks any questions because that might break the spell” (Rankin 2009: 276). Ironically, this indignant businessman has himself been making money from thin air by sitting on the city council and taking bribes from the missing developer, until Fox starts asking questions and breaks the spell. But more ironically still, Fox only gets to the councillor because he outsmarts his naïve, second wife, a woman who is so much younger than the councillor that she does not have enough legal experience to counter the inspector’s request for access to her husband with her own request for an arrest warrant. Thus, Fox only gets to the businessman who would have the council spend public money on a vanity regeneration project because that businessman sees marriage as just that, a vanity regeneration project. Moreover, Rankin’s keen eye for Edinburgh past and present lets us see large parts of the city’s transformation by the socially respectable. But it also lets us see how his cops see this transformation, and it is in those personal views that we clearly see where either of them stands on moral compromise. Rebus sees Edinburgh’s past as a guide to moral compromise, Fox sees its present as the destination. And since Rankin also manages to reflect his criminals’ grand designs in their views of the city, Cohen might agree that, “underpinned by a confluence of explosive political and economic interests...

crisis-ridden masculine identities... are intricately bound up with this destabilising experience of urban transformation” (Cohen 1997: 168).

On two levels, then, Rankin proves Horsley right. “The broadly based investigations that characterize the police procedural make it an obvious platform for assaults on various kinds of official corruption” (Horsley 2010: 35). Rebus investigates men whose corruption ruins public trust in the police service, while Fox investigates those in the service of an informal coalition of corrupt police detectives, political dignitaries, and property developers. Thus, in both cases Rankin’s two chief concerns are: one, the far-reaching connections between organised criminality and official respectability, and two, the false cover stories which corrupt police officers and public officials tell in order to conceal the fact that they are no more than gangsters in legitimised positions of power. Beyond this political agenda, however, Rankin keeps returning to the moral imperative that the police must themselves be policed, and so he goes further than the majority of police novelists whose street-level view focuses on how police officers try to deliver the best possible service in spite of ever-increasing pressure from above. Rankin extends his view to that of undercover agents and supervisory agencies like the Complaints, thus letting his readers see that even senior officers can regard the police as a self-service industry, and that many others would do so if they were not being monitored. So, even though both Rebus and Fox initially divert attention from a meaningful moral discourse by making a big fuss about a few commonplace bribes and jibes, Rankin enters that very discourse when he lets their fussing escalate. Soon, those accused of corruption go for one another in desperate attempts at self-preservation, heeding not Scotland’s official laws but the moral laws that make the Old Testament such a fun read. And as the cops try to control the chaos they created with their provocation and their insubordination, Rankin reveals the essential difference between his two heroes. Given the choice to let a rogue cop off when the man’s ‘small’ transgression achieves a higher goal, Fox remains resolute: “I can’t do this... No favours” (Rankin 2009: 372). So in the end he demands the man’s resignation and restores order. In contrast, Rebus chooses to frame a rogue cop for someone else’s crime in case he gets away with his own. To do so, he realises, “I need a favour,” so he unofficially recruits “Morris Gerald Cafferty... the east coast’s biggest gangster,” even though he resents that “*I’ve made a pact with the devil*” (Rankin 2001: 468/17/470). As Plain puts it, “Rebus’s willingness to overlook ‘small’ transgressions in order to achieve a higher goal renders him an unstable custodian of the law” (Plain 2002: 46). Thus, Rankin has created two cops who stubbornly discharge their duties as they themselves define them. Yet while one reconciles himself to the limits of institutional self-reform, the other remains rebellious, unable to accept the law’s inability to root out systemic corruption, both in its own ranks and beyond. In short, Rankin’s writing is a lot more diverse than Rankin’s reputation.

Chapter Three – The Serial Killer Novel

Typically, the serial killer novel is about a large-scale, last-ditch attempt at apprehending a man who, deeply shamed and/or highly abused as a child, has escaped police detectives, psychological profilers, and forensic scientists even though he has committed multiple homicide and courted media attention. Stereotypically, the serial killer novel is structured into three parts. In part one, the lead investigator discovers the serial killer's crimes to date. Soon, he or she has reconnoitred the latest crime scene, researched the post-mortem examinations of all known victims, and recognised the killer's pattern. Thus, the investigator – and with him or her the reader – realises early in the narrative that the killer is fiendishly crafty and sadistically cruel. Then, in part two, the writer reveals the killer's background, gradually letting the reader see how the man came to be the monster. At the same time, incidentally, the reader comes to see that the investigator is also troubled, if not tortured, by some combination of a lonely personal life and the related stress of thinking like a serial killer so as to catch this serial killer. Finally, in part three, the killer strikes again. Having both taunted the police and terrified the public – typically by inflicting signature injuries on his victims and/or by signalling his intention to kill again – he kidnaps a young woman. This snatch creates a tension that stretches almost to the end of the story, as the investigator, too impatient or involved to wait for backup, runs the risk of becoming yet another victim in the race to rescue the young woman before the killer can start his torture and murder ritual. The story climaxes when the investigator catches up with the killer – just in time to save the woman – yet in most cases the killer dies before he can be successfully questioned about his many crimes. Alas, the knowledge of having stopped him at least gives the investigator a compensatory measure of relief, and this relief – rather than any reflection on the victims or survivors – provides the story's resolution.

So popular has this pattern become that just about every crime writer who has tried to break into the bestseller lists has written at least one serial killer novel. Few, however, have written more than one, for it is a confining sub-genre. Yet before we concern ourselves with the specifics of this confinement, it is worth noting what makes this sub-genre so popular. As Sara Waller and William E. Deal observe, “Serial killers hold a fascination in the popular imagination far disproportionate to their actual social significance” (Waller and Deal 2010: 3). Indeed, there are far more serial killers in fiction than in fact, and this disproportionate representation has made academics like Martin Priestman express concern that serial killer novels “come to be read as accurately reflecting an unstoppable trend in ‘real’ crime, so that the fiction-led mass-fear of the serial murderer becomes the lens through which attitudes to actual debates about crime and punishment are shaped” (Priestman 1998: 33). Yet while all serial

killer novels inadvertently narrow their readers' perspective on the vast diversity of real-life crime, they also inadvertently broaden our perspective on the similarly vast diversity of real-life serial killers. Their fictional exemplars can be variously read as embodiments of our personal anti-social impulses, epitomes of our society's repression of women, and expositions of our widespread 'wound culture' – a phenomenon that Mark Seltzer defines as “the public fascination with torn and open bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma, and the wound” (Seltzer 1998: 1). Indeed, in some cases, fictional serial killers can even be read as expressions of right-wing rhetoric in favour of discipline, in which case they represent agents of punishment for left-wing permissiveness. Yet most importantly, Leonard Cassuto concludes, the serial killer's disproportionate representation in fiction exemplifies a “collective anxiety about the presence of the mentally ill in middle-class space” (Cassuto 2009: 262). This calls for a clarification. Writers who make serial killers personify mental illness in general position themselves disingenuously in the still unresolved debate about the efficacy of psychotherapy. As for writers who make them stand in for people with specific mental illnesses – psychopaths whose personality disorders gravely impair their capacity for compassion and remorse – those writers position their readers to differentiate between the mentally ill who deserve sympathy and those who provoke disgust, between people whose actions let us appreciate our human connection and people whose categorical social rejection has led to a collective effort at sensationalist demonisation. That said, both types of writers tend to treat the serial killer as a medical case study of mental illness, the operative question typically not being ‘Why did he do this?’ but rather ‘How did he become this?’ Thus, I agree with Cassuto that, in order to properly explain the popularity of the serial killer novel, “we should place the workings of sympathy and disgust into the historical dialogue about mental illness during the second half of the twentieth century” (Cassuto 2009: 259).

As Cassuto goes on to say, in the late 1950s social activism changed America's mental health debate. Challenging fundamental presumptions of psychiatry, it soon changed both government policy and public perception of the mentally ill. The result was a popular demand for legal reform, so in 1963, President John F. Kennedy signed an act into law that led to a lasting reduction of federal support for inpatient treatment of mental illness: the Community Mental Health Act. Through six administrations, the act led to a redirection of the anti-psychiatry movement toward the government's economic goals. Costs were cut as cheaper outpatient community health centres replaced the old state mental hospitals, and this downsizing continued for two decades until President Ronald Reagan finally consolidated what little federal aid remained for the treatment of mental illness into block grants to states. In short, by the early 1980s, the government had not only deferred its responsibility to distribute mental health care but also deprived its state authorities of the necessary resources to take on said responsibility. Around the country, these economic measures had led to an ever-accelerating deinstitutionalisation, and this, in turn, had led to a ground-breaking shift in the public's attitude toward the mentally ill. After all, as more mental patients were released into the community, mental illness became more

visible and scary, and as more people got scared of psychopathy, more serial killer novels got written. This explains the popular misconception that all serial killers are psychopaths. As Cassuto points out, “The emergence of the serial killer story in America (which remains its point of origin and centre) parallels the movement toward outpatient care and a gradual withdrawal of federal funds to pay for it” (Cassuto 2009: 261). Hence, the fictional, “violent mental patient,” as Richard A. Friedman puts it, “makes people feel safer by displacing and limiting the threat of violence to a small, defined group” (Friedman 2003: 6). And this explains the popular interest in serial killers, both in life and literature. When we discover that multiple murders were committed by a single individual, the positive feeling of relief co-occurs so closely with the negative feeling of fear that we can control and even enjoy the latter by reassuring ourselves that it causes the former. So, as Eric Dietrich and Tara Fox Hall agree, “What is actually alluring is the *idea* of the serial killer, but only when that idea is contemplated from a certain, specific, safe reference frame that allows *both* the positive and the negative emotions associated with serial killers to be experienced at the same time” (Dietrich and Hall 2010: 94-95). Indeed, although most of us will readily agree that a negative feeling can co-activate a positive one, few of us would want to learn that we live next door to a serial killer. After all, fictional serial killers have become popular as safe containers for what Priestman calls “all the horror and apparent randomness of the violence lurking somewhere ‘out there’” (Priestman 1998: 30).

Since 1988, of course, this has often been attributed to the work of one man, Thomas Harris. In 1988, Harris gave the world Hannibal Lecter, the cannibalistic serial killer of *The Silence of the Lambs*. Three years later, in 1991, Jonathan Demme directed Anthony Hopkins in his Academy Award winning performance as the connoisseur of serial killers in his seminal film adaptation of the novel, and although Hopkins was only on screen for little more than 16 minutes, his fascinating blend of sadism and charisma has since made Hannibal ‘the Cannibal’ Lecter a cultural icon the world over. Yet what this notoriety often obscures is that he had important precursors in both fiction and film. Indeed, as Horsley observes, “In the mid-1950s, Patricia Highsmith and Jim Thompson created some of the most powerful portrayals of the ‘abnormally normal’ multiple murderer” (Horsley 2010: 40), and in 1959, Robert Bloch created perhaps the most powerful of them all in his suspense novel, *Psycho*. The titular psycho, Norman Bates, is a transvestite serial killer whose first name can be read as a pun on the protagonist’s ability to seem normal despite his violent, dissociative identity disorder. Norman – who like Hannibal is loosely based on the real-life murderer and body snatcher Ed Gein – is a sympathetic character until Bloch reveals that he killed his mother, keeps her corpse in his house, habitually assumes her identity, and stabs people to death as ‘Mother’ gradually takes control of him. One year later, Anthony Perkins did much the same in Alfred Hitchcock’s 1960 film of the same title, and so successful was *Psycho* that Perkins played Norman in three sequels over the next 30 years. What is more, the topic of *Psycho* has taken such a strong hold of the public imagination that, in 1965, even Truman Capote grappled with it. Taking on the infamous case of Perry Smith and Dick Hickock,

two murderers captured in 1959, Capote gave the world its first ‘nonfiction novel’ – *In Cold Blood* – in order to come to grips with the kind of psychological accident that can lead to a series of murders, and as public interest in this kind of murder grew, John Brophy gave it a name. In his 1966 textbook, *The Meaning of Murder*, Brophy first used the term ‘serial murder’, and when, in the mid-1970s, criminologist and FBI agent Robert K. Ressler was credited with coining the term ‘serial killer’, readers were getting ready for what Harris would offer them a decade later: the definitive serial killer protagonist personified in Hannibal Lecter and the definitive plot formula presented in the opening paragraph of this chapter. The durability and influence of both suggest that, as Cassuto concludes, “we should acknowledge the author as perhaps the most influential American crime writer since Dashiell Hammett... Though he clearly did not invent the serial killer story, Harris thus stands as the Henry Ford of the genre, the man who enabled its mass production” (Cassuto 2009: 242).

How can a literature that revolves around the most loathsome of criminals go into mass production? – It concentrates on cohesion in the ‘normal’ world to which such killers pretend yet fail to belong. Though the genre label ‘serial killer novel’ suggests that such a novel is about the act of serial killing, it is not unusual for a fictional serial killer to spend as little as one seventh of the story time on stage, as does Hannibal Lecter in *The Silence of the Lambs*. Usually, we see rather little of the serial killer, so we identify with the investigator, and this affords us imaginary retaliation against threats to society, while identification with the typical female victim allows male readers to indulge feelings which may otherwise seem embarrassing. Reinforcing this effect, most fictional serial killers are alone, antisocial, and aggressive, sharing their exploits with no one, deriving pleasure from preying on the community, and committing acts as heinous as torture, cannibalism, and murder. Some even enjoy necrophilia. What this indicates is the radical degree to which these characters are alienated from social existence, and what this calls for is some form of explanation. The most convenient explanation for the conduct of serial killers has been to label them as monsters – killing machines. But this is no explanation at all. It is an excuse, implying as it does that the killer is not human and can therefore not be explained to other humans. In short, the cruelty of such killers trumps any medical explanation for their conduct. What is more, the reasoning usually goes, serial killers are not worth explaining. They are simply evil. This, of course, is a contradiction. Machines cannot be evil, so serial killers must be human after all, and this is why the most popular explanation for their conduct has been to label them as psychopaths. But what is a psychopath? And which psychopathological types usually feature in serial killer novels? According to psychologist and criminal justice expert Richard Gray, “in psychopaths, the *amygdala*, the brain’s centre of emotion, is damaged. This means that they are not only indifferent to the feelings of others but the normal processes of learning, including conditioned fear and conditioned pleasure, are defective... they are unable to learn the kinds of felt associations that create a sense of right and wrong, the moral restraints that prevent us from living out our own fantasies and perversions.” Thus, their disorder is defined by “two factors. The first factor accounts for their lack of empathy,

remorselessness, and callous indifference to human suffering, and is shaped largely by genetics. Up to 60 percent of this trait is inherited. The second factor, which is associated with their irresponsibility, impulsivity, and anti-social behaviour, has a strong environmental component” (Gray 2010: 196/192/195). In short, few of them are simply crazy, yet despite the extensive taxonomic literature, only four psychopathological types usually feature in serial killer novels: the hedonistic, the visionary, the mission-oriented, and the power-oriented serial killer.

This, then, brings us to my earlier observation about the sub-genre’s confinement. Not only do most writers working within the sub-genre confine their choice of serial killer to one of these four types. Usually, they separate the killer from the deed so as to defer our disgust enough to keep us reading. Whether they write about the hedonistic type that kills out of lust or for the thrill of it, the visionary type that kills in service of a voice or vision, the mission-oriented type that kills to eliminate a specific kind of person, or the power-oriented type that kills to exercise control or power over another person, most of the time serial killer novelists confine their narrative treatment of serial killing to their experts’ analysis of such facts as numbers of killings, times between killings, and reasons for killings. Most of the actual killing happens off-stage. And unlike the vast majority of real-life serial killing, which victimises those on the social margins, most fictional serial killing happens in the middle class. There, victims can be relied upon as powerful vehicles of sympathetic identification for most readers, but it is a confined space for most writers, all the more so since few middle class readers want to think too long and hard about the implications of living next door to a violent psychopath. Hence, even those who base stories on the serial-killer-next-door scenario confine their killer to a so-called ‘frame’ – a cognitive science concept which influences our perception by presenting facts in a certain context. Indeed, so radically do frames impact our experience that, Deal concludes, “fiction writers change our view of their characters by framing them in certain contexts and giving us some facts and not others.” After all, “Our judgments of moral responsibility are not just a matter of rational thought, but of how the frames through which we view the world impact our emotional responses” (Deal 2010: 164-165). The stereotypical narrative strategy of the serial killer novel therefore centres on simultaneously hinting at and covering up the telling details of the killer’s personality disorder and modus operandi, thus titillating us with both voyeurism and obfuscation to create one of two main reader responses. The stereotypically liberal response aimed at by most writers is compassion, based on a pathological, disease-oriented view of individual cruelty, but this sympathetic response can and often does lead to an eventual rejection of the serial killer on the grounds that he or she is too sick to be ‘one of us’. Similarly hard to direct, the stereotypically conservative response is based on a religious belief in evil, a community-oriented view of sin which suggests embracing the sinner, but this sympathetic response can and often does lead to an eventual rejection of the serial killer as irredeemably depraved. Hence, Cassuto concludes, “Serial killer stories nearly always end with the death of the murderer because there’s no hope for him, and no pity. In other words, no fellow feeling” (Cassuto 2009: 267).

And this brings us to the final, perhaps most confining feature of the serial killer novel, its violence. As the 19th-century philosopher Henry Longueville Mansel observed, “It is necessary to be near a mine to be blown up by its explosion; and a tale which aims at electrifying the nerves of the reader is never thoroughly effective unless the scene be laid in our own days and among the people we are in the habit of meeting” (Mansel 1863: 499). At the end of the 20th century, cultural historian Jacques Barzun reflected that, over the years, “the explosive devices have changed surprisingly little. The dose of shock has merely been increased to keep up with the inflation of all effects” (Barzun 1989: 176). Now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the question of violence in literature has an obvious answer, at least to pop critic Patrick Anderson. “Why all this violence? Why not? Ours is a violent species and this is a violent age. Our writers have grown bolder about holding up a mirror to our darker impulses. And readers have grown more willing to accept – and in some cases be titillated by – these horrors” (Anderson 2007: 219). Yet while these horrors have become a commonplace in most crime novels, those represented in most serial killer novels are so dire that there usually comes a point at which the heroic investigator dispenses with due process of law and exacts a form of frontier justice. In short, the crime fighter will typically justify criminal methods to contain the threat that is the serial killer, and in the course of a series, that crime fighter will typically kill enough serial killers to become one. That, however, is not the frame in which most readers wish to see a representative of law and order, so most writers frame their violence as a containment strategy for dealing with the criminally insane. As for the violence perpetrated by the typical serial killer – the epitome of the criminally insane – most writers confine it to short sections with little plot or character development, sections that are easily skimmed or skipped altogether, because most readers do not read to be surfeited with violence. Indeed, most readers are disgusted by the detail of mental and physical violence, and while disgust can cause broad popular agreement, it can also cause moral paralysis and a reluctance to keep reading. So, whether to avoid the risk of consigning their readers to a disgusted misanthropy, or to afford them an emotional distance, most serial killer novelists do not focus too closely on the ultimate violence, murder. Doing so without the necessary sensitivity and skill closes the gap between reader and killer, raising an uncomfortable question. How can a human being enjoy a book about a serial killer? Typically, however, the writers in this chapter focus on the killer’s rather than on the reader’s motive, driving their narratives with the ever-same question. How can a human being become a serial killer?

The Scottish Serial Killer Novel

In Scotland, the serial killer novel has come to be dominated by Val McDermid and Stuart MacBride, yet its current popularity and underrated diversity both look back on a long and lurid history. In fact, for a country of only five million, Scotland has suffered a surprisingly high number of serial killers. For a full account, read Michael Newton's *Encyclopedia of Serial Killers*, first published in 2000. Suffice it to say here that Scotland's known history of serial killing dates back to the mid-14th century, when Andrew Christie, a butcher from Perth, made his name as a notorious cannibal and serial killer. During a famine, he led ambushes on 30 mountain travellers, earning his nickname 'Christy Cleek' by pulling the horsemen out of their saddles with a 'cleke', a large iron hook fastened to a long pole. Even centuries later, this nickname is said to have been enough to inspire fear in Scottish children. Meanwhile, his story had inspired the legend of another cannibal, that of Alexander 'Sawney' Bean. Sawney is a Lowland Scots diminutive of Alexander, but in the 16th century the English started using the name as an insult for the Scottish because Alexander Bean, Scottish chief of a 48-member clan, was said to have killed over 1,000 people, mostly English. Eventually, James VI had him executed, but his name remained a stain on his countrymen's reputation up until the 19th century. Then, in 1828, two Irish immigrants became the country's most infamous serial killers with their West Port murders. William Burke and William Hare started out rather inconspicuously as grave robbers in Edinburgh, disinterring fresh cadavers and selling them to Dr Robert Knox for dissection in his anatomy lectures, but when demand increased, they supplied even fresher cadavers by 'burking' at least 16 people. Burking was the name given to their murder method of smothering their victims and compressing their chests so as not to damage the bodies, and their impact on popular culture is attested by the fact that the word has remained in the popular vernacular, now meaning to suppress something quietly. The next Scottish serial killer to gain notoriety was Dr Thomas Neill Cream, the Lambeth Poisoner, who, after claiming at least five victims, claimed at his hanging in 1892 that he was Jack the Ripper, and although he was serving a prison sentence at the time of the Ripper's Whitechapel murders, Cream's infamy by association has long outlived him. Incidentally, the same is true of Peter Manuel, the Beast of Birkenhead, who was convicted of nine counts of murder and died on the gallows of Glasgow's Barlinnie Prison in 1958. After all, ever since the movie *Manhunter* was released in 1986, his memory has lived on in Hannibal Lecter, whom Scotsman Brian Cox played with Manuel in mind. So what even this short glance at Scotland's most notorious serial killers suggests is that the number and variety of their fictional counterparts should come as no surprise.

Frederic Lindsay – *Jill Rips*

What might come as a surprise is that the first of these fictional serial killers to appear on screen was, unlike all of the above, a woman. In 1999, and in defiance of both statistics and genre conventions, Anthony Hickox's cinematic adaptation of *Jill Rips* featured Kristi Angus in the role of Jill the Ripper – a female serial killer. Yet while the movie loses the plot by relocating the story to the US of 1977, Frederic Lindsay's novel of the same title is set in the Scotland of 1987, the year of its publication, thus making sense of the dramatic premise. A psychopath is marking the centenary of Jack the Ripper. Jack famously started killing prostitutes in 1887. Now, one hundred years later, someone is signing public murder confessions as Jill, "someone who had it in not for the prostitutes but for their clients... A woman who hated what men did to women, the way men exploited them... A twentieth-century crime just as the Ripper's belonged so well to the nineteenth. Women's lib instead of Victorian exploitation and hypocrisy" (Lindsay 1987: 85). Writing in the year in which Jill took over from Jack, Deborah Cameron and Elizabeth Frazer agreed that the sex killer "provided a self-conscious role or identity for individuals to take up and define their acts by" (Cameron and Frazer 1987: 22). Accordingly, Jill's serial murder along with her savage mutilation of men can be read as a gendered, violent protest against the dominant theory of the time which said that only men commit such crimes. As Elizabeth and Harold Schechter agree, this is a sexist prejudice that still "cuts across political lines, being shared by social reactionaries (who persist in seeing women as the 'weaker sex'), middle-class liberals (who idealise women as less prone to violence), and radical feminists (who tend to see their sex as morally superior to the male)"... Hence, they add, "the female serial killer is commonly denied, or merely ignored, as something of a conceptual impossibility" (Schechter and Schechter 2010: 118/124). Indeed, Camille Paglia claims, "There is no female Jack the Ripper" (Paglia 1991: 247). Whether Paglia meant that no woman was as ferocious or that none was as feared as Jack the Ripper, as Jill the Ripper had proven four years earlier, she could not have been more clearly mistaken. Presumably, that is why Lindsay cast a woman in the ripper role; not only to prove the sexists wrong, but to make his readers realise that it is just as sexist to suggest that woman are simply not capable of killing men as it is to suggest that it might "matter more because it's men who are being killed." So, when a member of the Women's Collective Protest suggests the latter to Lindsay's male investigator, the man states Lindsay's egalitarian gender politics in no uncertain terms: "You're talking rubbish... It doesn't matter whether it's men or women. It makes no difference" (Lindsay 1987: 225).

What does make a difference, as mentioned above, is that Lindsay set this novel in 1980s Glasgow, and this difference to the movie is significant enough to deserve a second mention. In the 1980s, Glasgow was a city of mass unemployment and widespread urban decay as coal mines, steel works, engine factories, and other heavy industries were going out of business. Toward the end of the decade, however, the city was entering its economic and cultural recovery. And in 1987, the year of *Jill Rips*,

it was at a peculiar midway point between post-industrial depression and private enterprise anxiety, which was quickly turning out to be an ancillary cost of a burgeoning financial services sector. Thus, 1980s Glasgow is the ideal time and place for a story about a loner in a world of career criminals, callous entrepreneurs, and corrupt officials. Murray Wilson is one of the last honest men in town, hired by one of the least honest to find the serial killer that is giving shape to the era's cutthroat spirit. As Jill cuts and kills one man after another, Murray's home Moirhill, a fictional suburb of Glasgow, seems ever more aptly named. Not only is this place the physical and metaphysical definition of noir, with its anonymous closed-off tenements where personifications of failure live and die amid strangers. Moirhill is also making Murray's search for sympathy among the sadists and cynics an uphill battle, one in which he gets beaten up by company men and broken by a femme fatale, his brother's wife, and yet he is the man for the job. Murray is soft-hearted and hard-working. "Not the best in the world, but I know my trade. I trace, I snoop, I find out, the way someone else makes chairs or wires a circuit. If a man has nothing else, he can hold to his trade. I'm a good tradesman" (Lindsay 1987: 131)... Holding to his trade, and thus to Glasgow's manufacturing past, Murray resists the temptations of its suddenly ubiquitous get-rich-quick-schemes that are perverting the city as much as his little brother, Malcolm. Yet when Malcolm gives an alibi to his prime suspect, claiming he spent the night with her, Murray can no longer protect the feelings of Malcolm's wife, so he confronts her with his theory that she and her husband have been aiding and abetting a known criminal, her sister, Jill the Ripper. Confessing as much, she confirms his suspicion that their mother was a prostitute killed by her pimp, and that the two sisters have been killing his clients to draw him into the open and avenge her murder. Seeing no other way to end this family murder mission, Murray helps his sister-in-law kill the pimp, yet as the police and media compose the official account of the crime, the novel's conclusion is symptomatic of its existential topic. The wrong prostitute is posthumously blamed for Jill's murders, and Murray is left to shoulder the burden of Glasgow's complicity, alone.

Philip Kerr – *A Philosophical Investigation*

Interestingly, this moral dilemma is also at the centre of Philip Kerr's *A Philosophical Investigation*, published in 1992. Yet while Kerr's serial killer is far more expansive on the topic of utilitarianism – indeed, he debates a professor of philosophy and dedicates a journal to his thoughts on the burden of focusing only on the greater good – he cannot convey a sense of the emotional weight of said burden. In the killer's case, this alienating inability is the logical consequence of an unfortunate genetic defect, an incurable neurological condition that leaves him prey to one raw, irrepressible instinct: aggression. In Kerr's case, it is the unfortunate consequence of focusing almost exclusively on the logic of the killer and his capture, which reduces most of his other protagonists to bit players with generic defects, such as star investigator Isadora 'Jake' Jakowicz, Chief Inspector of the Metropolitan Police London. Smart, sexy, and single, Jake is successful in an environment dominated by men – law enforcement –

neither because she goes by a male name, nor because she is undergoing therapy for her father issues, but because she has learned to channel her hatred of men into her work in the department of gynocide. Now, however, she is asked to lead an investigation into a serial killer of men, the Lombroso Killer, named after Cesare Lombroso, the 19th-century criminologist and founder of criminal anthropology, who is here acknowledged as the intellectual father of a controversial initiative in offender profiling. The year is 2013, the setting a dystopian London on the edge of a crime-ridden European Community, and the Lombroso mental health test a technology that scans male society for potential murderers. Seeing his positive test result, a man codenamed Ludwig Wittgenstein sees an opportunity for civil service where others see the need for secrecy and therapy, so he breaks into Lombroso's database, matches the codenames of men like him to their real identities, and starts killing potential killers. Since their codenames are picked from "the current Penguin Classic catalogue" (Kerr 1992: 145), Wittgenstein derives some pleasure from going after the shapers of the Western intellectual tradition, almost like the real Wittgenstein, the 20th-century philosopher, did in his *Philosophical Investigations*. Yet since the fictional Wittgenstein takes this battle of the wits to a physical level by shooting in the head those of whose mental state he disapproves, he raises three very serious questions of his own. One: are the predators he kills a bigger threat than him? Two: would we welcome pre-crime policing? And three: would we consent to having a protective assassin like him on our government payroll? Each of these questions relates to social contract theories in general. Yet by dramatising what can happen when a person or indeed a government justifies actions on the basis of hypothetical consent, Kerr encourages us to extrapolate Wittgenstein's utilitarianism to specific analogues in the real world, such as implicit endorsement of government-sanctioned black-ops, covert military operatives who capture or kill hostiles who may otherwise harm innocent people.

This scenario plays out in Kerr's techno-philosophical thriller when police and state authorities impede Jake's investigation, first to let Wittgenstein keep doing the government's dirty work for free, and then to drive him to suicide to save the cost of its new capital punishment, punitive coma. Indirectly, then, the government is acting as a serial killer, and its motive, unlike that of Wittgenstein, is a cost-cutting opportunity, not a moral obligation. Accordingly, Jake simplifies the above questions, asking why the killer should be caught. "So what, if someone decided to kill a few potential psychos? It would save her the time and trouble of catching them. Not to mention the lives of all the innocent women they might eventually kill" (Kerr 1992: 49). Unsurprisingly, the innocent are an afterthought, which arguably makes Wittgenstein, for whom they come first, morally superior to police and state. Indeed, for Wittgenstein such a murderous mission "is something that has to be done without malice. This merely corresponds with logic" (Kerr 1992: 10). So, far from being a hot-headed lust murderer, he is rightly diagnosed as "inspired by nothing other than his own sense of mission" (Kerr 1992: 119), and far from pushing a private agenda, as those do who campaign to let him kill for their convenience, he aims only to serve the public interest. Why, then, does Jake change her mind and try to stop him?

And why does she decide that driving him to suicide is not the way to do so? Jake changes her mind, because despite the fact that one of his 12 victims turns out to be a serial killer of six innocent women, and despite the fact that Wittgenstein only chose to kill the man to prevent an even greater loss of life, she comes to the conclusion that even his honourable objective cannot justify murder. Thus, she says, “it’s not your position to make such a choice. It sets a bad example in society” (Kerr 1992: 227). Then, seeing that this is also an argument against the death penalty, she decides that Wittgenstein, too, must not be driven to suicide. Defying her superiors, she concludes that “he’s still got some rights. There is still a proper way of doing things... I want a proper trial” (Kerr 1992: 337). This she gets, even though said superiors try to sabotage her efforts with a strategy borrowed from Immanuel Kant, suggesting that his categorical imperative dictates retributive killing for the killing of innocent people. As Kant argued, “This ought to be done in order that every one may realise the desert of his deeds, and that bloodguiltiness may not remain upon the people; for otherwise they might all be regarded as participators in the murder as a public violation of justice” (Kant 1796: 198). Rejecting this rationale – that the rule Wittgenstein acts upon, the rule to kill threats to society, must be applied back to him – Jake finally apprehends him, and as he embraces punitive coma, order is restored.

Ian Rankin – *Black & Blue*

In stark contrast, no such genre-typical restoration of order will reassure the reader of *Black & Blue*, Ian Rankin’s eighth Inspector Rebus novel, published in 1997. Yet this should come as no surprise, because this is no typical serial killer novel. Not only is the killer not caught and guilt not absolved. The novel is neither about the categorisation of serial killers, nor is it about the crime of serial killing, at least not as much as it is about the state of the nation. The two serial killers are merely symptoms of a greater malady in a bruised Scotland that dominates every part of this novel, including its title. Taken from an album by the Rolling Stones, ‘Black & Blue’ reflects this bruising as well as the novel’s two central themes, oil and cops, which slowly wind their way to one another as Rankin maps and merges four plot strands while encompassing Scotland from Edinburgh all the way to Shetland. Typically enough, there has been a murder, yet once it is attributed to a man nicknamed Johnny Bible, a wanted copycat killer, Rebus starts researching a real-life serial killer, a man who has been known as Bible John ever since he allegedly killed three young women in Glasgow between 1968 and 1969. Since the publication of *Black & Blue*, new evidence has suggested that these women were killed by Peter Tobin, a Glaswegian serial killer who, upon his conviction of three counts of murder in 2009, claimed to have killed 48 women. Yet in 1997, Bible John was as anonymous as he was mysterious – Scotland’s answer to Jack the Ripper – so Rankin brought him out of retirement and fully into fiction. In *Black & Blue*, he chases Johnny Bible, the killer of four whose mission seems to be to copy him. Worse still, ‘The Upstart’ is revering false idols. He is using the name of another Scottish serial killer, Peter Manuel, the Beast of Birkenshaw, whose number of victims in the 1950s ran to at least nine.

Hence, Bible John, who earned his nickname for his supposed bible references and pious demeanour, poses as a cop, a man of secular law and order, as he and John Rebus both chase down Johnny Bible. Yet while their shared Christian name suggests a genre-typical reason for Rebus to enter this race – egotistic competition – he has an untypically altruistic reason. As he remembers, “Bible John meant the end of the sixties for Scotland; he’d soured the end of one decade and the beginning of another. For a lot of people, he’d all but killed whatever dribble of peace and love had reached this far north. Rebus didn’t want the twentieth century to end the same way. He wanted Johnny Bible caught” (Rankin 1997: 26). Yet while the fact that he races to catch him suggests a genre-typical outcome – arrest and analysis – Bible John gets to him first, kills him, and absconds with the only key to closure: an explanation.

Thus, *Black & Blue* is less a serial killer novel than a gothic frontier narrative about guilt and macho. It is only when Rebus crosses an official boundary to access the criminal network of an imprisoned hard man that he gets a lead on Johnny Bible and discovers that his killings all tie into the oil industry. And it is only when he follows this lead across cultural borders to one of Scotland’s offshore oil rigs that Rankin hits his stride, tracing the moral fault lines of the country’s social and political landscape. As Gill Plain puts it, he is “fundamentally concerned with borders and boundaries – the points at which law and social structures unravel to be replaced not by chaos, but violent and threatening mirror images of themselves... Rankin pits this criminal system against the embattled forces of the law” (Plain 2002: 41). Not only is a TV show investigating Rebus over an alleged miscarriage of justice, but he is also the subject of an internal inquiry led by a senior policeman he has accused of corruption. And as Rebus investigates two suicides – that of his former mentor for whom he lied when the man was accused of framing a suspect, and that of the suspect who may thus have been falsely convicted – the sins of the past catch up with him, but rather than agree with his defeated protégée that there is “Too much history around here,” Rebus answers with typical defiance, “What else have the Scots got” (Rankin 1997: 111)? The answer, according to the Gospel of the three Johns, is guilt and macho. Though while Bible John and Johnny Bible act all macho in the belief that guilt is for other people, John Rebus acts like a stereotypical Presbyterian in the belief that there is guilt enough for everybody, so his machismo is a coping mechanism. Although his body, his career, and his ego all take a beating, he does not feel emasculated. Under the burden of guilt for the above suicides he feels empowered, for he believes that by embracing his punishment he is proving both his manly endurance of pain and his even manlier endeavour to redeem the sins of the world through his suffering. As Plain observes, “Rebus’s heroic masochism represents a significant feature of one of the novel’s central concerns – the pressures surrounding contemporary masculinity” (Plain 2002: 40). And seeing as he spends most of the investigation testing the boundaries of male camaraderie, competitiveness, and conscience, Plain believes that, “ultimately, 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” (Plain 2002: 29).

And since Rebus's investigation of these crimes ends somewhere "north of hell" (Rankin 1997: 399), it seems likely that this society is a version of purgatory, in which case the title has another meaning: there is no such thing as a clear conscience in *Black & Blue*.

Douglas Lindsay – *The Long Midnight of Barney Thomson*

A similarly purgatorial mood dominates Douglas Lindsay's *The Long Midnight of Barney Thomson*, published in 1999, but that is where the similarities end. Lindsay's novel is an unusual genre-hybrid, the love – or perhaps the hate – child of a barbershop noir death junky thriller and a serial killer satire. It is also the first in an on-going series of 'Barney books' – seven novels and three novellas to date – which can be read either as daft sendups of genre clichés or as deft illustrations of attribution biases. Barney Thomson is the typical Glaswegian barber, a man who looks at life with a raised eyebrow. Knowing that barbering is about more than cutting hair, he treats his barbershop as a male protectorate, a homo-social sanctuary where modern-day philosophers come together to cultivate their prejudices, pontificate on such pressing issues of the day as the on-going plight of Partick Thistle Football Club, and generally talk pish. Unfortunately, Barney has two left feet when it comes to these pastoral duties. He hates football, cannot keep up with his two colleagues, and all their chat has put him off his game, so much so that a series of follicular disasters has cost him everything – his reputation, his regulars, and, worst of all, his chair in the window. But Barney knows how to get his chair back: "Murder! Why not? They deserved it. You should never humiliate your colleagues in front of the customers. Wasn't that one of the first things they taught you in Barber School?" (Lindsay 1999: 31)? His ranting, of course, is no sign of a psychopathic mind. Barney has no serious intention of killing his colleagues, and yet, accidentally, he does just that. Then, at the thought of his sole survival seeming suspicious, he gets rid of the bodies, thus leaving the police with no evidence and all the time to investigate him, not just for the murders of his colleagues, but also for the murders of another Glaswegian serial killer. And as if to add his own surprise ingredient to this Quentin Tarantino recipe of bad decisions, burlesque dialogue, and baroque violence, Lindsay makes his second serial killer butcher young men, cook them for an unsuspecting houseguest, and post a package of leftovers to each victim's family. The biggest surprise, however, is not the cannibalism but the foul aftertaste, for as it turns out Barney – our sympathetic anti-hero – is the unsuspecting houseguest and his octogenarian mother the cook. Lindsay is thus satirising more genre clichés than that of the killer being the least suspicious character. He is also satirising that of the kinky sex killer, for at 84 Ms Thomson seduces her nubile boy toy victims in a lonely hearts column. As for the clichés of the unsuspecting spouse and tidy conclusion, Barney's wife misses every clue along with his confession because she watches soap operas all day, whereas the investigating officers conveniently kill each other in a Tarantino inspired closing scene, aptly titled 'Reservoir Frogs'.

The intended reader response is relief, and that brings us to the afore-mentioned attribution biases. Attribution biases are distortions in the process of event evaluation. They determine our decisions whether an event is a good or a bad thing, whether it is the effect of an action or that of an accident, and who, if anybody, is responsible. In most serial killer cases, these biases work against the killer, usually not because people object to killing per se, nor because they object to those doing the killing, but because something in this case disgusts them, and as Mark Alfano notes, “when people feel the emotion of disgust they are more inclined to describe someone’s actions as blameworthy or punishable – even if the disgust is wholly irrelevant to the person being judged” (Alfano 2010: 47). Lindsay illustrates this in two cases. First, when Barney learns that his mother is the other serial killer, he decides that she is blameworthy because he remembers the disgusting cooking smells in her home. “All those strange jams and wines and pies she’d made all her life; what had been in those? ... Everything he could remember her doing, and he had over forty years of a dominated life to look back upon, was now shrouded in suspicion, every act potentially barbaric” (Lindsay 1999: 144). Suddenly, Barney even suspects that his mother was somehow responsible for his father’s fatal heart attack. Meanwhile, the police also decide that Ms Thomson is one of those “sick people out there” because, much to their disgust, they learn that she seduced her victims with “eastern lovemaking.” Admittedly, they agree, the sex “isn’t as sick as lopping someone’s napper off and mailing it to their mother” (Lindsay 1999: 154), yet it is when they discuss her sex life, which is really just a situational detail, that they become ever more inclined to describe her serial killing as blameworthy. In this case, then, the personal and official verdicts are both determined by disgust, and both say that Ms Thomson’s serial killing is a bad thing, that they could not have been accidents, and that she is worthy of blame. In Barney’s case on the other hand, Lindsay illustrates that such attribution biases can also work in a criminal’s favour. Although Barney Thomson is as guilty as his infamous predecessor Sweeney Todd, that other legendary barber and serial killer, and although Barney arguably premeditates his crimes, Lindsay predisposes his readers to interpret them as pitiable accidents rather than punishable actions. He presents Barney as a victim, a man who has been dominated by his mother for more than 40 years, yet instead of making him disgustingly aggressive, those years have made him depressingly apathetic. So, from when we first meet him “on a freezing cold, dank, sodden day in March” (Lindsay 1999: 3), we are predisposed to attribute blame to the apparent bullies for preventing his overdue emancipation, while making allowances for his ‘accidents’, simply because Barney seems like a good guy.

Campbell Armstrong – *Butcher*

As for the main risk of attribution biases, that is most evident when the bias approaches the extreme, as is the case in Campbell Armstrong’s *Butcher*, published in 2006 as the final novel of a quartet. Focusing on overt behaviours, rather than underlying personality traits and pathological conditions, his protagonists are extremely prejudiced and put people at risk by badly misjudging one another.

Genre-typically, this has the gravest consequences when an event evaluation is distorted by repulsion, as the killer's evident repulsiveness makes the cops dismiss him, proving Chris Keegan's point that "we may end up missing the grounding reasons for our repulsion towards certain behaviours because we never acknowledge the deep-seated human traits that are being violated" (Keegan 2010: 133). Indeed, when evaluating the threat of Dr Dorcus Dysart, whom he will later identify as a serial killer, Detective Lou Perlman is deeply repulsed by his repeated lying, reckless disregard for others and self, and lack of remorse. But he misses the grounding reason for this repulsion because he acknowledges only Dysart's superficial behavioural deficits, not the deep-seated human trait that is being violated, the ability to feel for other people, to see them as more than bodies from which he can harvest organs. Yet all Perlman sees is an awkward loner with a stutter who lives in a house rumoured to be haunted, a mausoleum full of mementoes of his dead parents. "OK, mildly eccentric, maybe a touch morbid, but a long way from criminal" (Armstrong 2006: 381). Perlman does not see that his nervous stutter, his mechanical use of repetitive speech patterns, and his humourless inability to be anything but literal are signs of an impaired communicative rationality. For instance, Dysart unintentionally makes his organ retailer laugh when he calls his products replacement parts for people, yet he cannot understand "what was so funny about parts" (Armstrong 2006: 495). Dysart cannot take another's perspective, nor can he respond to an emotional stimulus without first rationalising it and parsing a response, which should signal his lack of empathy to Perlman, but when Perlman sees how happy Dysart's dogs are around him, he falsely assumes that the man simply suffers from anti-social personality disorder, not psychopathy. Such confusion, of course, is common enough. As Keegan notes, "ASPD manifests through behaviours like repeated lying, reckless disregard for others and self, and lack of remorse, while psychopathy manifests through personality traits like lack of empathy. The difference is that ASPD is strictly about how we act, whereas psychopathy is about inherent and entrenched reasons or conditions for one's actions" (Keegan 2010: 130). Yet as Perlman admits when he eventually finds an eye-witness to Dysart's psychopathic violence, the difficulty in distinguishing between these two disorders is not an acceptable excuse for a detective's failure to look beyond a person's behaviour. Had he done so, he might have seen Dysart's coldness as evidence of his inherent ability to dissociate, which is what makes serial killing possible. He might even have stopped him.

In the end, it is this regret for having failed the killer's victims, rather than the reason for the killings, that provides the novel's resolution. Dysart kills people to earn money from the sale of their organs, and he has no scruples because his traumatic childhood desensitised him, but this is hardly surprising, for, as Jerry Piven points out, "violence is often the result of protracted shaming, coercion, neglect, and abuse of children" (Piven 2010: 212). And as Dysart himself points out in interior monologues, his mother made him suffer all of the above. Yet by revealing this long before the genre-typical revelation scene, Armstrong focuses our attention on an inevitability that his other characters ignore: "Inflict pain, you always get some of it back" (Armstrong 2006: 155). Long before Perlman singles

out Dysart as the serial killer, Armstrong points out why many others end up as desensitised as him. “These were the city’s children, brought up in doomed housing, failed by parents and teachers and priests, and all those useless theorists and planners of civic order, shrinks, sociologists and politicians” (Armstrong 2006: 248). Armstrong’s Glasgow is full of these children and, upon closer investigation, the adults they have grown up to be. Time and again, his protagonists leave the safety of their homes only to be accosted by gangs of thuggish children that roam the city’s crime ridden council estates, reminding us that Dysart is merely one tragic example of an abused child grown up to be an abuser. Another one is Ben Tartakower, a recluse with a ferret and an apostolic following of feral children, whom Perlman sees as a reliable contact in the underground economy of unlicensed medicine. Unfortunately, Tartakower sees Perlman as the reason for his loss of licence, so he frames him for the murder and mutilation of his dear sister-in-law – and thus for Dysart’s similarly executed killings – yet Perlman sees none of this coming because he cannot see past his fantasy image of Tartakower. Just as he was guilty of an attribution bias in Dysart’s case, he is now guilty of proactive interference, a psychological process in which, as Piven puts it, “Our perceptual schemas funnel whatever we ‘see’ into pre-existing patterns and categories... So we believe we see, but we react to our own fantasies and then believe that’s the way things really *are*” (Piven 2010: 207). When it all comes to a head, Perlman even believes that Dysart could be a risk to Tartakower – the sadist who in fact trained him – and since he cannot see the trap, he rushes to his rescue. It is only Tartakower’s feral child army that, at the very last moment, sees the self-fashioned victim for the cold-blooded killer he is and saves Perlman from having to pay with his life for his proactive interference. In “a wee accident” (Armstrong 2006: 492), Tartakower exits through a high window, while, elsewhere in Glasgow, Dysart drives into the sunrise, leaving Perlman to contemplate the mysteries of temperament.

Christopher Brookmyre – *A Snowball in Hell*

Contemplating those same mysteries – but at the opposite end of the sub-genre’s aesthetic spectrum – is the partially familiar cast of Christopher Brookmyre’s *A Snowball in Hell*, published in 2008. Brookmyre’s forte is social satire, and to satirise the mysteriously temperamental nature of celebrity, he starts with the premise “I’m a Celebrity and I’m Never Getting Out of Here” (Brookmyre 2008: 5). Simon Darcourt, the former terrorist-for-hire who shot to notoriety in *A Big Boy did it and Ran Away*, punishes a famous pop music producer for his life’s work by broadcasting his execution online, abducting a selection of his celebrated products, and incarcerating them for a televised talent show in which their miming performances are judged and their oxygen supplies regulated by public vote – until the losers run out of air time. Any attempt to trace or terminate the broadcast, so police are told, will be penalised with the death of all surviving contestants, so it is decided that the show must go on, and the viewing figures, as Darcourt predicted, are in the millions. “That’s why I’ve never exactly been inclined to hang my head in shame any time the newspapers called me a monster. I *was* a

monster. I am a monster. But let's not pretend for a second that they anything but loved me for it" (Brookmyre 2008: 4). Satirising this false moralism, he creates a veritable media circus when he announces that the competition will be decided by how much news coverage each contestant receives, for soon the papers are competing with one another and the column inches are measured in miles. Meanwhile, DI Angelique de Xavia is leading a stealth investigation when a third party secretly blackmails her to capture and deliver Darcourt into their custody before the police have him in theirs, so she secretly recruits a professional illusionist – Zal Innez, last seen in *The Sacred Art of Stealing* – and from here on in very little is what it appears to be. First, the blackmailer turns out to be Darcourt. Wanting to expose the prurience of reality TV, he manipulates de Xavia to turn his surrender on live television into his final disappearance act, a fake suicide bombing in front of a spellbound audience. Now, without a doubt Andrew Terjesen is right in saying that "The idea of the brilliant, manipulative, and ultimately remorseless serial killer is not unusual in serial-killer fiction" (Terjesen 2010: 142), and without a doubt Darcourt is all of those things, but he is most unusual nonetheless. After all, usually the brilliant, manipulative, and ultimately remorseless serial killer is the easiest one to judge, but although Darcourt admits that he has killed more than 400 people and shows no signs of remorse, he is not as easily judged as those facts make it appear. Indeed, for some of us, every fame-whore he kills makes it more difficult to judge him, for each eloquent, celebrity-bashing justification makes it more difficult to pretend that we anything but love him for it.

That, of course, is at once a speculative generalisation, a crass overstatement, and a rash endorsement, but it is also a fair expression of the moral conflict Brookmyre engenders with his narrative strategy. Telling large sections of the story in Darcourt's voice, he not only makes us relate to his worldview. He also makes us sympathise with Darcourt's criticism of his victims, for in contrast to their rabid, right-wing histrionics and their rehearsed, pop-culture platitudes, his rants seem rather reasonable. Again, some will find room for disagreement in Darcourt's foul-mouthed definition of this contrast, but the left-wing readers Brookmyre is courting are unlikely to fault his criticism of the "fat, sweaty, pish-stained, prematurely middle-aged arseholes seeking the cheap route to notoriety and populist approval by acting the keyboard hardman in a tabloid," or even the "eager little slut-monkeys... only interested in locating the path of least resistance between themselves and the cover of *Heat* magazine" (Brookmyre 2008: 17/100). What those left-wing readers are likely to fault Darcourt for is, ironically, just what Brookmyre's right-wing protagonists are applauded for by his fictional tabloid readers, namely the homicidally censorious self-righteousness that goes beyond the freedom of critical speech, the kind that justifies rounding up whomever you might find disagreeable and doing away with them. And thus we get to the genre-typical question: why does he go beyond criticising to killing people? According to Darcourt, he first crossed that boundary because, "like the Victorian gentleman-amateur, I played for the love of the game." Yet later in life he seems to have developed a social conscience, for he goes on to preach that, "though I can't truthfully present the common good as a central motive,

it does feature as an auxiliary beneficiary” (Brookmyre 2008: 7/13). The main beneficiary, however, is his sense of self. Despite his choice of celebrity victims, he is not a mission-oriented serial killer, for his central motive is not about the people he kills. His central motive is about the killing itself. Darcourt is one of those unusual serial killers who kill for the thrill: the hedonistic type. As he admits, “I did what I did because it electrified me every moment I was awake” (Brookmyre 2008: 210)... While most would identify this as sadistic self-gratification, Darcourt seems to see it as heroic egoism, but, as David Schmid observes, it is normal for a Sadean hero to see it that way. “One of the keys to understanding the psychology and behaviour of the Sadean hero is to appreciate the importance of his egoism... Sadean heroes always evaluate conventional morality through the prism of self-interest.” The other key, Schmid adds, is to appreciate his eager self-justification. “At the slightest provocation, they will pause in the midst of their debauches and undertake the most exhaustive (and repetitive) explanation of why they are entirely justified in their chosen course of action” (Schmid 2010: 35)... The result, satirically, is that Darcourt is an irritatingly vain yet troublingly convincing social critic.

Craig Robertson – *Random*

Yet what may be even more troubling is that this moral conflict does not depend on a cultural context, that it is possible to be sympathetic to serial killers for a single mitigating factor – a personal cause. As Craig Robertson shows in *Random*, published in 2010, the victims can even be selected at random, and still we can sympathise with the person killing them, as long as he or she is framed as the victim. In this case, the serial killer freely admits that he will select all but one of his six victims at random, thus killing people who have done nothing to warrant his deeds, never mind committed a crime that, under some foreign law, may warrant the death penalty. He even describes each murder in detail, starting with his strategic stalking, and walking us all the way through his clinical murder methods, never once showing signs of fellow feeling or second thoughts until he has accomplished his mission. And yet, despite the sadism of killing an asthmatic by filling her inhaler with pure liquid nicotine, despite the killer purposely making her suffer a “grotesque, undignified death” (Robertson 2010: 293), Robertson makes it possible to sympathise with the man. By telling the story from his point of view, he lets us see what his killer sees – that “you can find a reason to kill anyone if you look hard enough” (Robertson 2010: 37). More significantly, however, he lets us see that his killer, unlike most others, finds that reason by looking hard at himself, not at his victims. He is a mission-oriented serial killer, but his mission is not defined by some psychopathological drive to eliminate a certain type of person. It is defined by his grief-stricken and over-whelming desire for revenge against a specific individual, the drunk driver who got away with killing his daughter. To put it in Piven’s words, this shows that, “as selfish and depraved as people might be, murder is not just an instinct or some sinister lurking force waiting to erupt. It reflects the need for control in the wake of helplessness and vulnerability” (Piven 2010: 211). As for his decision to kill other, innocent people and do so with extreme violence,

that is determined by his rationalisation that if the police are busy looking for a sadistic serial killer, they won't look twice at the sad man whose motive for murder accounts for only one of six victims. Yet while such rationalising makes him seem like a psychopath – not a victim worthy of sympathy – we soon see that it is not psychopathological. It is the temporary effect of post-traumatic dissociation, for when he accomplishes his mission, the numbness wears off and he is hit hard by his conscience. He sees that “A man who wants to scream out his darkest secret to the world will never know peace” (Robertson 2010: 334). So, overcome by grief and guilt, he seeks peace and punishment in suicide.

Now, neither his pain nor his self-imposed death penalty will absolve him in the eyes of all readers, let alone all the bereaved, for his way of dealing with the death of his daughter is profoundly selfish. While his wife channels her grief into a zero alcohol campaign to benefit people she does not know, he kills people he does not know to benefit himself. And when he sees how hard it is to live with the consequences of his crimes, he kills himself, which the bereaved may see as adding insult to injury, for while they struggle on to support their grieving families and friends, he takes the easy way out. Not only does he not support his grieving wife. He deserts her by killing himself. But, as he clarifies, the explanation is “Not evil or any such pish, just uncontrollable obsessions. There is a lot of rubbish talked about evil when it comes to serial killers. Numbers mess with people's moral outrage” (Robertson 2010: 113). To prevent such ‘rubbish’ from affecting our judgment, he cautions us that “We are all more than we seem, even to ourselves. We are all capable of much more than we or others might think. None of us can be sure of who we are or what we are, far less of what we might do.” Worse still, he concludes regretfully, “one outrageous fucking horrible life-changing, mind-wrecking, drive-you-fucking-crazy happening” (Robertson 2010: 218/321) is enough to turn an average citizen, a taxi driver with no history of violence, into a serial killer driven by a self-deceiving moral code. Traumatized, he deceives himself that avenging the death of his daughter is the right thing to do – morally – and that anything he has to do to accomplish his murderous mission is therefore excusable – again morally rather than legally – even if that means killing other people and cutting off their little fingers to give the police false clues, which, incidentally, is how he earns his nickname: the Cutter. Too late he understands that committing five decoy murders is not about doing right by his daughter. It is about him avoiding the consequences of his moral crusade: suspicion, capture, and imprisonment. Yet this is far from exceptional. As Susan Amper observes, it “reflects very well the ethics of the day. If earlier ages emphasised obligations to others – called people to duty, to meeting their obligations to God, family, country, community – today people are more called on to work out *their* problems” (Amper 2010: 112). Sharing these ethics, some of us may easily excuse the Cutter's self-centredness, if not his serial killing. Others may find it hard to empathise with his victims because his narrative perspective lets them cross the line into his own sense of victimhood with their identification intact. What is almost certain is that the unease we feel at seeing how easily one person can destroy another, followed so closely by his own suicide, will cause a moral conflict rarely found in serial killer fiction.

Lin Anderson – *Picture Her Dead*

In sharp contrast, the scientific certainty of Lin Anderson's *Picture Her Dead*, published in 2011, leaves room for neither mixed feelings nor moral conflicts. It is the eighth case of Dr Rhona Macleod, a forensic scientist who as usual is the only hope Strathclyde Police have of solving a murder mystery. Not only does she officially assist with the investigation of a crime scene when a decomposed corpse is found at a derelict Glasgow cinema during a search for the disappeared photographer Jude Evans. Rhona also works the case unofficially as a private detective when Jude's anxious friend Liam Hope, who happens to be Rhona's son, asks for her help. Yet rather than focus on the conflict of interest, Anderson focuses on the collection of forensic data, or, as Cassuto puts it, the "careful forensic research that gives scientific authority to procedural serial killer narrative" (Cassuto 2009: 241). Accordingly, the sub-plots about Rhona's personal life are confined to a few interpolated paragraphs, be it the one about her half-hearted effort to develop her strained relationship with her estranged son, or the one about her absent-minded attempt to protect a colleague and former lover from a gangster. These asides repeatedly prove her to be "a mother who was incapable of sustaining any relationship, with a lover or a son" (Anderson 2011: 185), but that is evidently not what this scientist cares about, for neither does this thought get a second airing, nor do such personal affairs distract her from work. Meanwhile, Anderson, as if to reinforce this clinical preference of forensic fact over fellow feeling, reveals little about Jude and her killer as people. The female victim is relevant only as a passive body, first to be the object of an adventurous search, and later to be the object of Rhona's forensic study, while the male killer is similarly objectified, relevant only as proof of a link between Jude's murder, the corpse found at the cinema, and a snuff film, recorded at the ancestral seat of Lord Dalrymple, where three men had died under sadomasochistic circumstances as suspicious as those at the cinema. For the most part, then, attention favours the dead over the living. The narrative focus is on analysis, not empathy; categorisation, not understanding. And the reduction of the killer's stage time to cameos – occasional and impersonal interrogations about his means and method, rather than his motive – reflects a diminished interest in understanding murderous impulses. Explanations no longer matter, not in this case anyway, and so the scientific rationale further separates the killer from the community. In the end, we do learn that Jude's killer, a member of Lord Dalrymple's secret society of sex killers, killed her in a failed attempt to retrieve the snuff film that identifies several members of said society, including the cinema killer, but the pervert's motive for his four known murders remains a mystery. The sadistic impulse, so the conclusion implies, makes them inexplicable in human terms.

In the end, then, a power-oriented serial killer turns out to have killed the man found at the cinema, plus the three found in a prior investigation, so technically *Picture Her Dead* is a serial killer novel. However, since that killer died long before this investigation even started, since he did not kill Jude, and since Rhona focuses on finding Jude's mysterious killer, who turns out to be a first-time offender,

the novel is narratively and dramatically more like a whodunit, a typical private detective novel. Indeed, it is all about finding out who her killer is, not about how this killer became who he is. That, Rhona suggests in passing, is easily answered. He is evil, pure and simple, so she does not dwell on it. “Most people never encountered true evil. And that’s how it should be” (Anderson 2011: 219). Professionals like her do encounter it, but, she implies, they should neither waste their time nor burden other people with attempts at analysing it, for ‘true evil’ defies any human understanding. Such reasoning is not untypical of investigators in serial killer novels, but while some readers are willing to accept that evil can be the only explanation for the killer’s deviance, others clearly are not. One of the latter readers is Peter Messent, who objects that “To consign crime to the realm of pure evil and individual moral monstrosity is a way of isolating it from all social, political or economic causes, and ‘explaining’ it as freakish and psychopathic exception to all that we know to be normal” (Messent 1997: 16). This, of course, is not an explanation but an emotive and general categorisation, and, to put it in Piven’s words, “One surefire way to remain a complete ignoramus is to lump people into rigid, cumbersome, ridiculously simplistic categories, stereotypes, or psychiatric diagnoses. Doing so may provide a nice feeling of certainty and understanding, it may make you feel smart, and it may make you less afraid, but it is actually a method that makes a virtue out of refusing to think” (Piven 2010: 216). In this case, refusing to think also solves a problem frequently found in a series: the continuity error. Refusing to think – or preferring to forget – makes it possible for Rhona to ignore the many clues that incriminate a killer she has studied in forensic detail in a previous investigation. And when the time comes to resolve the odd contradiction that results from recycling old material, Anderson simply lets Rhona notice “A violent sexual death, a leather collar, asphyxiation. Trademarks she recognised from the rent-boy case... She couldn’t believe she hadn’t thought of it before, but it was a depressing truth that she saw so much violence day to day that she preferred to forget the details of each case once it seemed to be over” (Anderson 2011: 307). Perhaps this explains why the novel ends in a series of newspaper clippings – to summarise the case for readers with similar memory loss.

G.J. Moffat – *Protection*

This brings us to another type of expositional storytelling which has become typical of the sub-genre, and which, as Gary Moffat proves in *Protection*, published in 2012, typically serves a subtler purpose. In this case, the fourth of former lawyer Logan Finch, Moffat interrupts his main narrative with several transcripts of a confidential correspondence about dramatic developments happening offstage. These Interpol memoranda provide updates about the agency’s attempts to apprehend an assassin, codenamed subject Eve, who has been hired to kill a high-profile target, codenamed subject Night. Given the latter’s codename, it comes as no surprise that Night soon turns out to be one Chase Black, a suspected serial killer, but what does come as a surprise is the effect of those Interpol memoranda.

As failure after failure is reported, the fact that Black's life is in danger becomes ever more apparent, yet seen from Interpol's point of view, this does not precipitate the genre-typical satisfaction of seeing the serial killer die in the interest of poetic justice. Instead, it makes him seem like a potential victim. At the same time, though, his highly manipulative conduct creates a stark contrast to this impression, and by providing glimpses of a psychopathic mind, it makes it possible to see Logan's moral conflict. Logan, who has recently given up his legal practice for the morally less conflicting job of bodyguard, starts working for Black in the belief that "We get paid to put ourselves in harm's way for our clients. We volunteer to do it and we get trained to ensure we are as good as we can be" (Moffat 2012: 66/145). Yet by the time Black has appealed his life sentence, gained release from prison in the US, and toured the UK to promote a bestselling book about his innocence for the murder of five families, Moffat's narrative strategy has not only made it possible to see past the man's calculating hypocrisy. It has also made it possible to see why even a professional bodyguard like Logan is morally conflicted in the performance of his duty when others suspect the person he is protecting of being a serial killer. Having come to like Black as a person, Logan is unsure whether to trust the person or his reputation, but when he admits as much and Black lies that he "did not kill all those people" (Moffat 2012: 300), Logan believes him, and this gullibility has two subtle effects. One, it shows that, as Gray observes, "humans tend to believe confident narratives over coherent narratives" (Gray 2010: 197). And two, humans tend to think in stereotypes. Logan thinks Black is trustworthy, both because he claims he is, and because he is not what Logan imagines the stereotypically evil psycho to be. On this assumption, he ignores that Black only seems normal when his human side provides a cover for his inhuman side, when his hedonistic killer self is disguised. Thus, Logan ignores the most disturbing implication. Anybody could be a serial killer.

Just how disturbing this implication is becomes obvious when subject Eve, Interpol's wanted assassin, turns out to be a seemingly normal woman. And just how dangerous it is to ignore said implication becomes obvious when Black almost dies because everybody dismisses her as a potential threat. Subject Eve can get close to her target and familiar with his protection because she seems trustworthy – because her human side provides a cover for her inhuman side – so, were it not for Logan's reflexes, she would take advantage of her access to Black to assassinate him and presumably get away with it. It only plays out differently because Logan sees her handgun and shoves Black out of her line of fire, thus saving his client's life and unwittingly setting up the endgame. By foiling the assassin's attack, he forces her to take the risk of a second attempt and the even greater risk of doing so at closer range, and when she does, Black is not just prepared for her attack. He is prepared to do what she would do – kill in cold blood. Yet although Logan sees a suspected serial killer skilfully stab a person to death, and although Logan is surprised that Black does "not try to rationalise the killing more than he had," Logan is only mildly perturbed at the thought that "That's what any normal person would have done – sought to exonerate themselves by giving elaborate details" (Moffat 2012: 372). Gullible to the last,

he wants to believe that Black's violence was purely reactive, an automatic reaction to an acute threat, which would confirm the general consensus that Black suffers from anti-social personality disorder, rather than violent psychopathy, a condition that, unlike ASPD, can manifest itself in active violence. As for Black's lack of rationalisation and remorse, Logan sees both as further symptoms of ASPD, which allows him to reinforce his false belief that Black is neither a psychopath nor a serial killer. What he fails to see is that Black's communicative rationality – his ability to empathise with others, take their perspectives, and reciprocate their intentions – is severely compromised. Time and again, Black has noticeable difficulties in understanding the intended meaning of what people say to him. For example, in the above scene in which Black kills his attacker despite having neutralised the threat, Logan simply asks, "Why?" Yet although the context makes it perfectly obvious that Logan is asking why Black used such excessive force, Black has difficulty understanding the question and has to ask, "What do you mean" (Moffat 2012: 369)? But what makes this example so telling is that Logan, having now seen Black kill a human being with ease but understand a simple question with difficulty, still fails to recognise these symptoms of psychopathy. So, when Black safely departs from Glasgow, while police discover too late that he is indeed a serial killer, this scene provides the only resolution – Logan's resolution never again to forget that anybody could be a serial killer.

James Oswald – *Natural Causes*

Now, as most of us will agree, this may be taking the idea of the human potential for evil a bit too far. James Oswald, however, will certainly not agree with this, for in *Natural Causes*, published in 2012, he takes that idea even further. In this debut of Edinburgh's Detective Inspector Tony McLean, demonic possession makes it possible even for a supernatural spirit to be a serial killer, or so it seems. Oswald handles the supernatural stuff with care, always leaving enough room for an alternative, rational interpretation, but his cast of killers suggests that what these criminals are made out to be by our tabloids – dangerous people possessed by something dark and different – is exactly what they are. After the mutilated corpse of a girl is found who was killed more than 60 years ago in a satanic ritual, five old gentlemen are killed in ominous circumstances by people who, days later, commit suicide, again in ominous circumstances. First the victims, who knew each other from their time in the army, are killed with no signs of a struggle and left with an organ hidden in their mouths. Then their killers, who did not know each other until one at a time they happened to witness the previous killer's suicide, are found dead in public places, having killed themselves just before their terminal diseases could. And what makes this even more ominous is that Tony finds a link between the ritual and serial killing. Not only do personal items interred at the scene of the ritual killing incriminate the five gentlemen, but several organs belonging to the sacrificed girl are found sealed up alongside those personal items, leading Tony to believe that somebody is killing those men to punish them for having killed the girl. His supernatural interpretation is that they raised a demon to steal its power by trapping it in the girl,

raping her, and taking parts of it in form of her organs. As Tony points out, “They’d all been fabulously wealthy and successful, and none of them had died of natural causes” (Oswald 2012: 359), but now construction work seems to have disturbed the girl’s resting place and thus freed the demon, so it is possessing random hosts to kill its captors before one of them can trap it in another virgin. Supporting this theory is the fact that none of these hosts had been diagnosed with terminal diseases, not before their post mortems anyway, which Tony thinks may mean that their bodies were corrupted by the demon before it commanded them to commit suicide so it could pass into a fresh host. Alternatively, Tony cautions in a rational interpretation of this case, “just because demons don’t exist, it doesn’t mean someone can’t believe in them enough to kill” (Oswald 2012: 113). Ultimately, then, it makes no difference whether this serial killer is demonically possessed or pathologically deluded. Either way, Oswald suggests, evil goes far beyond what most of us want to consider.

Interestingly, this is not only suggested by the rationally inexplicable occultism that Oswald shows us. It is also suggested by what he does not show us. In the original e-book version of *Natural Causes*, initially self-published in 2011, the story opens with a graphic flashback to that horrific ritual killing, yet in the subsequent electronic and print versions, published by Penguin in 2012, this chapter is cut. Countless readers had by then reviewed the novel and agreed that it had made them uncomfortable to see such graphic proof of the human potential for evil, especially from the victim’s point of view. Many other reviewers had even admitted that perhaps they should not be reviewing the novel at all, seeing as this scene had so horrified them that they had not read beyond its approximately 500 words. Upon reading those reviews and deciding that he wanted to lose neither his readers nor his chapter, Oswald reverted to his original, less horrifying opening scene, the one he had written for the first version of *Natural Causes*, the short story version published by *Spine tingler* magazine in late 2006. Yet to keep a record of all this and let readers “see what all the fuss was about” (Oswald 2012: 446), he has preserved his controversial opening chapter in a postscript of the Penguin text. In doing so, however, he has also drawn attention to the mystery behind this seldom documented squeamishness. Unease surrounding “violation and violent death,” as Woody Haut puts it, “is often left unarticulated, subsumed by literary preoccupations and sociological discussions regarding crime as a means of gaining autonomy or climbing the social ladder” (Haut 1999: 207), yet in the above editorial process, as much as in the story’s supernatural overtones, Oswald addresses this unease. Knowing that many others have condemned the horrors perpetrated by human beings before they had any demon to blame, it is easier to see those men’s crimes as a means of gaining autonomy or climbing the social ladder, not merely as the product of some mysterious mental problem. And since their crime is unspeakable, literally in this case, Oswald makes them seem like worse monsters than the demon killing them. Thus, Oswald breaks the serial killer novel’s principal genre convention. Ever since Hannibal Lecter, it has been genre-typical to present serial killers as monsters and make them, as Gray observes, “appear as we do and walk among us with the appearance of respectable citizens” (Gray 2010: 192).

Oswald does honour this tradition. He makes his serial killer a monster, a power-oriented spirit that appears as we do and walks among us with the appearance of respectable citizens by possessing them, or, should you prefer a rational interpretation, by making individual, visionary killers commit a series of monstrous murders in the service of some vision. Yet almost uniquely among serial killer novelists, Oswald also makes his victims monsters that only appear to be respectable citizens. In other words, Oswald suggests that anybody could be a serial killer.

Synopsis

Of course, Oswald is also suggesting that any *body* could be a serial killer – as long as that body is possessed by some demon or delusion that can make a person kill in his or her desperation for power. Hence, Oswald’s serial killer, who kills in the pursuit of power, is a good example of a general rule – a rule recently stated by perhaps the ultimate authority on the subject, the Moors Murderer Ian Brady. Having killed five children between 1963 and 1965, and been sentenced to life imprisonment in 1966, Brady wrote a book in 2001 that is part murder confession, part philosophical treatise on serial killing. In this highly controversial book, titled *The Gates of Janus: Serial Killing and its Analysis*, he states: “What the average... serial killer seeks above all is power and the will to power” (Brady 2001: 86). Now, even though Brady was born in Glasgow, this is not necessarily true of all Scottish serial killers, but to readers of *Natural Causes*, it may well seem true of the average fictional, Scottish serial killer. Alas, as I hope my reading of these ten novels has shown, *Natural Causes* is not just a good example, it is also the only example of the power-oriented serial killer, and one out of ten is hardly average. One out of ten is a negligible minority, especially since this single example is based on superstition, and even those who believe in demon killers will find few of them in conventional serial killer novels, for here, too, Oswald’s novel is exceptional. The average serial killer novel has nothing supernatural, and the average serial killer in Scottish fiction does not share Brady’s Nietzschean philosophy. Sure, some of the above serial killers aspire to greatness, but none of them have Nietzsche’s will to power, and not even Oswald’s demon has the discipline to achieve it. The average serial killer in Scottish literature has not, as the above cited psychologist and criminal justice expert Richard Gray may agree, “risen above good and evil by virtue of vision, rank, or discipline, as would Nietzsche’s übermensch” (Gray 2010: 202). Most of the examples discussed here know the difference between good and evil, but none of them comprehend that the many meanings of good and evil depend on cause and context, so none of them follow Nietzsche’s lead and transcend their entrenched notions of good and evil. None of them see that Nietzsche’s übermensch is morally superior in his will to power because his actions are disciplined and determined by the value of the outcome. And none of them really care. Certainly, Brookmyre and Kerr’s conscientious objectors turned serial killers appear to do just that, but even they are not driven by Nietzsche’s will to power or the perseverance under discipline that defines his superior man. Where apparent, those qualities are put in the service of other ambitions, which shows that the average serial killer in Scottish literature is either hedonistic or mission-oriented.

Indeed, with Brookmyre, Anderson, Moffat, and Douglas Lindsay, four out of ten Scottish serial killer novelists write about hedonists. And with Kerr, Armstrong, Rankin, Robertson, and Frederic Lindsay, five out of these ten write about mission-oriented serial killers. So, not only is Oswald the only one to write about a power-oriented serial killer. If you favour the rational interpretation I attempted above, he is also the only one to write about the visionary type. And these odds remain much the same if we include Val McDermid and Stuart MacBride, for as my reading of their seminal novels will show, McDermid writes about a hedonistic and MacBride about a mission-oriented serial killer. Hence, judging by this clear preference of two types of serial killer, one may suspect a mainstream – or two – in the Scottish serial killer novel, and this suspicion may well be strengthened by the fact that the vast majority of these writers give their serial killer narratives the typical form of the police novel. In fact, with the exception of Frederic Lindsay, who gives his the untypical form of the PI novel, they all do; so both the examples above and those below reflect an international trend among serial killer novels. As Horsley states the sub-genre's case, "they have, post-1970s, been increasingly incorporated into investigative narratives in what is often a fairly formulaic way, reliable providers of a lurid trail of corpses, and have been a particularly useful ingredient in police procedurals" (Horsley 2010: 40). Why that is so is best explained by Cassuto. "Serial killer stories mainly take the form of procedurals because it doesn't do to have a single detective chasing a serial murderer. Even when undertaken by groups, serial killer hunting is both a complicated job and a lonely pursuit into darkness and isolation" (Cassuto 2009: 241). And as Frederic Lindsay shows by making his serial killer/PI novel a standalone, the private eye's typical lack of qualification does not lend itself to this sub-genre's typical format – the series. After all, with the exception of Kerr's, all these serial killer/cop novels are part of a series, but lest this imply that they incorporate their serial killers into police novels in a fairly formulaic way, as Horsley observes with regard to an international trend, it is worth noting that all the Scottish writers investigated here accommodate their serial killers in a mainstream-defying multitude of genre niches. As I hope to have shown, Kerr's serial killer novel can also be read as a techno-philosophical novel, Rankin's as a gothic frontier narrative, Douglas Lindsay's as a barbershop noir death junky thriller genre satire, Armstrong's as a mystery of temperament, Brookmyre's as a social satire, Robertson's as a journal of obsession, Anderson's as a murder mystery, Moffat's as an international adventure story, and Frederic Lindsay's serial killer/PI novel can also be read as an existential novel. Multifaceted – not formulaic – is the word to describe the narrative strategies of the Scottish serial killer novel.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is also the word to describe the literature's representation of victimhood. Contrary to their fabled forefathers – national stereotypes such as Christy Cleek and Sawney Bean – the modern-day Scottish serial killers discussed in this chapter display no murderous anti-Englishness. None of them are territorial Scots who kill trespassing Englishmen in the nationalist folklore tradition, for even all those who kill to eliminate a specific kind of person do not define that kind by nationality, let alone Englishness. And as if to further complicate the literature's traditionally nationalist reading,

not one of these serial killers is some monstrous Englishman who victimises innocent Scots. Usually, that is, in eight out of ten cases, Scots kill Scots, and the only reason for the two exceptions, it seems, is geographic realism. Kerr's story is set in England, so his killer and most of his victims are English, while Moffat's is partly set in the USA, so his killer and victims, as far as known, are American. Incidentally, it is in the further interest of realism that all the writers in this chapter break the genre convention implied in my use of the word *forefathers*. Contrary to such habitual gender stereotyping, the contemporary Scottish serial killer novel is rarely ever about insane men killing innocent women. In fact, only two thirds of the writers in this chapter write about male killers, and none of the killers, be they male or female, kill only women. To put it in Cassuto's words, not one of these twelve writers relies solely on "the aesthetic value of adult female victims as vehicles of sympathetic identification" (Cassuto 2009: 244). And half of them resist this tradition entirely by writing about male victims only. What is more, with the exception of Anderson, none of these writers offer a genre-typical resolution – never mind genre-typical absolution – by killing off the killer before he or she can kill again. Sure, two thirds of the killers die, but in nine out of ten cases someone is left feeling guilty nonetheless. Usually, this someone is the lead investigator who feels guilty either for having been morally corrupted by the killer or for having made the critical mistake that led to the killer's escape. Alternatively, the one left feeling guilty is the killer, for as Robertson and Douglas Lindsay illustrate, the memory of having committed a crime as irredeemable as murder, and repeated it multiple times, can lead to guilt that for some is the only truly inescapable punishment. Even more genre-untypically, however, Brookmyre and Kerr demonstrate that the one left feeling guilty can also be the reader. Conflicted by their killer's conscientious objection, some of us may well finish their novels feeling guilty for living placidly in a society that produces, if not deserves, such serial killers. Either way, whether or not this multi-faceted representation of violence and victimhood leaves us feeling guilty, it ultimately creates unease, rather than reassurance, in the average Scottish serial killer novel.

In stark contrast, the representation of violence and victimhood in the average American serial killer novel is by far more sexually charged, and yet ultimately it creates reassurance, rather than unease. There, the serial killer is usually some sex maniac who stalks women from all-American families and deprives them of their purity when he, for he is usually a man, defiles their nubile bodies in death, either by savagely mutilating their sex organs or by sadistically committing necrophilic obscenities. As Cassuto observes, the average American serial killer novel portrays, with considerable prurience, "an imaginary murderer who ferociously attacks an imaginary family of exaggerated warmth, cohesion, and security." And since the serial killer represents, as he puts it, "what we're afraid of" (Cassuto 2009: 270/271), it follows that the average American audience is most afraid of sex crimes. More to the point, however, from the fact that the sex killer is usually caught or killed in the end, whereupon moral purity is restored, it follows that the average American author sees the individual, not society, as the problem. Figuratively speaking, then, in the average American serial killer novel,

the social sickness that is serial murder starts with the individual sicko/psycho – that lethal sex pest – and with his detention or death this social sickness ends. In the average Scottish serial killer novel, meanwhile, only half the serial killers are psychopaths, only a third of them are sexually perverted, and, whether or not they are mentally sick, they are treated as symptoms of a greater social malady. As I hope to have shown, this does not necessarily mean that we are asked to see killers as victims, side with them, forgive them for their killing, or feel that we, too, may be capable of their crimes, though these are possible responses in Robertson, Brookmyre, Kerr, and Frederic Lindsay's cases. Generally speaking, however, it means that we are asked to see that we are all partially responsible, not for other people's genetic predispositions to violent crime, but for letting the sick live in families, communities, and in a country in which such predispositions can develop because they go undetected. Whether the investigator learns this lesson by letting experience correct his or her assumptions about the killer's monstrosity, or whether the story lets us come to this conclusion as we learn how one of us became a killer, the average Scottish serial killer novel draws attention to what Schmid calls "the dialectic between the criminal-as-monster and the criminal-as-representative" (Schmid 2010: 206). Thus, the dilemma is rarely resolved conclusively, for, whether or not the individual killer gets away, the story's social context usually suggests that there must be many more undetected killers out there. In short, rarely ever is there any pretence that the one source of social destruction has been removed, so while most Americans suggest that all is well because it – the killer – is caught or killed in the end, most Scots suggest that it – the problem – is still out there.

Of course, judging by ten examples delivers no final verdict. Another set of ten may invite objection, and another reader may well object to my in- or exclusion of particular writers. The above selection, however, is neither a top-ten list of my personal favourites, nor is it an official canon, not yet anyway. These ten have made the list and countless others have not because, McDermid and MacBride aside, these are the writers who I think have most defined the development of the Scottish serial killer novel, either because their literary merit has inspired writers to contribute to the sub-genre's diversification, or because their commercial success has incentivised other writers to conform to their way of writing. As for the many other writers whose inclusion may have added a facet to the sub-genre's perception, every list has to end somewhere, and a list of ten is long enough to offer an overview of the sub-genre, the context of each writer's work, and the proportion of each contribution to the literature at large. Just as significantly, however, a list of ten is not long enough to provide encyclopaedic detail which, by distracting from both context and proportion, might disguise the sub-genre's immense diversity. And as for my decision to take McDermid and MacBride out of the picture, I did so for two reasons. One, they are by far the sub-genre's best-known representatives, so they disguise its diversity. Two, reading them side by side makes it obvious not only that there are Scots who write the American type, but also that the American and Scottish types can be similarly successful in spite of their differences. As I hope to show in the next and final section of this chapter, McDermid represents the American,

MacBride the Scottish type of serial killer novelist. Yet before I get to their most representative work, I wish to point out – in case I have not already done so indirectly – that such national typology rarely does justice to any one novel or novelist. What I hope it does instead is offer a cumulative definition, for as the examples in this chapter should show, the problem of definition is bigger than one word. The problem is that *any* one word would imply that there is a common denominator in this sub-genre, when in fact the genre crossovers of its most influential exponents show that there is no such thing. The reason for this is that there is no widespread positive identification with any one literary tradition, just like there is no widespread negative identification with any unifying anti-foreign aesthetic. Scottish serial killer novelists, by and large, are not at work on any joint nation building project, instead picking and mixing their topics and techniques. So, while there are certainly those whose significant commercial or critical success can create the first impression of a definitive mainstream, even McDermid and MacBride's huge success has not unified the multidirectional course of the Scottish serial killer novel.

A Comparative Reading of Two Scottish Serial Killer Novels: Val McDermid's *The Mermaids Singing* and Stuart MacBride's *Flesh House*

Between them, Val McDermid and Stuart MacBride seem to define the Scottish serial killer novel. The record sales of their respective series have made both of them household names at home, abroad, and in most airport bookshops in between, so in all three places their reputation now precedes them. They are both known as writers who see violence in the dramatisation of vice as a literary virtue, writers who rely heavily on horror, disgust, and a clear division between the goodies and the baddies, writers who specialise in investigative narratives that hinge on the abnormally normal actions and appearances of psychopathic serial killers, so it is tempting to assume that they are similar writers. Admittedly, as far as their mutual embrace of these genre conventions goes, they certainly are similar, but as I hope to show in this comparative reading of their most representative novels – McDermid's *The Mermaids Singing* (1995) and MacBride's *Flesh House* (2008) – they are surprisingly different. Before I discuss their many differences, though, I should define what I mean by 'most representative'. More than anything else they have written, these two novels represent their authors' literary identities, their narrative strategies and recurrent themes as well as their individual styles and aesthetic foibles. In short, *The Mermaids Singing* is the most representative of McDermid's many serial killer novels, not only because it introduces her serial protagonist, clinical psychologist and profiler Dr Tony Hill, and her usual focus on the personal dramas that slow down the team hunt for hedonistic serial killers, but also because it shows her fondness for nonlinear narration and interpolated interior monologues. On the other hand, *Flesh House* is the most representative of MacBride's many serial killer novels, not only because it offers the usual glimpse of an insight into the backstory of his serial protagonist, Detective Sergeant Logan McRae, when Logan meets the serial killer who once, briefly, killed him, but also because it shows his disorientatingly kaleidoscopic shifts in points of view and his sparing use of expository devices which together speed up the team hunt for mission-oriented serial killers. Both novels, then, can be read as representations of the authors' larger contributions to the sub-genre. Yet they can also be read as representations of the American and Scottish types of serial killer novel. In this reading, *The Mermaids Singing* represents the average American type, for it tells of a sex killer who sadistically stalks, rapes, maims, and kills innocent people, yet in the end all is well because it – the killer – is caught and killed. On the other hand, *Flesh House* represents the average Scottish type,

for it tells of an asexual killer who kills enough people with impunity to cause concern that there must be many more undetected serial killers in the world, so in the end it – the problem – is still out there. Objectification is key in both cases, but as I intend to demonstrate in this comparative reading, McDermid dramatises its effect on individuals, MacBride that on society.

This essential difference is most evident in their opposite approach to the loaded question of sexuality. Genre-untypically, each writes about a female serial killer, and neither reveals this until the very end, but long before this revelation, the objectification of these two women takes opposite dramatic effects. McDermid focuses on her killer's modus operandi, "a bizarre parody of love" (McDermid 1995: 87). Consequently, Elizabeth and Harold Schechter observe, "we see a dark, grotesquely distorted version of traits that have been traditionally associated with women: fatal care-taking, lethal nurturing, depraved romantic devotion" (Schechter and Schechter 2010: 124). McDermid's serial killer, after all, "was a gay man who couldn't cope with his sexuality because of cultural and family conditioning" (McDermid 1995: 399), so he sold sex to pay for a sex change, but prior to this psychoanalysis, McDermid focuses on the symptoms of his identity disorder. Having been objectified as a gay man, the killer goes out and kills other gay men, but McDermid is less interested in the gender politics than she is in the domestic dramas played out in the private lives of the killer and her main adversaries, Detective Inspector Carol Jordan and psychological profiler Dr Tony Hill. The two analyse everyone, but most of all themselves and increasingly each other, so even though a serial killer is on the loose, their self-absorption soon leads to distracting romantic tensions in their professional relationship. Carol regularly discusses her feelings with Nelson, the other man in her life who, incidentally, is a cat, and before long we learn that "the ending of her last relationship had dealt her self-esteem too seriously a blow for her to enter on another one lightly... Carol wasn't about to risk her heart again" (McDermid 1995: 58). Of course, that is exactly what she ends up doing, yet Tony cannot reciprocate, for not only does the profiler see himself as a "sexual and emotional cripple" (McDermid 1995: 110). He also sees himself as a potential serial killer. As he tells the real killer in an imaginary conversation, "I'm the poacher turned gamekeeper. It's only hunting you that keeps me from being you" (McDermid 1995: 193). Meanwhile, we learn from the killer's journal that she is just as obsessively concerned about her compromised sexuality, and in a parody of the profiler's objectification of her, she turns both herself and Tony into sex objects by calling him anonymously to have phone sex. These raunchy conversations, Tony's various considerations about continuing what may or may not be erotic therapy for his impotence, and the emotional complications this causes when Carol finds out, all of this takes centre stage as the investigation loses focus and suspense gradually moves toward nil. Thus, McDermid mainly focuses on how people's objectification of one another affects those people, and this focus on the individual makes two things plausible: one, there is a single cause for this drama, and two, when this murderous individual is caught, the general risk of random murder is contained.

In contrast, MacBride focuses on his serial killer's effect on society, on how a murderous individual can incite mass panic when he or she is turned into an object of terror that has no clear victim profile, a subhuman monster that might murder anyone anywhere at any time. Until he provides a motive, which he does in brief in the last chapter, MacBride draws attention to everything but this individual. By splicing double page collages of photocopied, fictional newspaper clippings in between chapters, he illustrates how the media's alarmist rhetoric influences public perception of this case as it unfolds. So when one journalist claims to be writing about "the most notorious serial killer in Scottish history" (MacBride 2008: 136), he is not conveying any interest in understanding this murderous individual. He is conveying an increasing alarm about the enormity of the threat to Scottish society in general. Soon, alarm turns into hysteria as the papers report that human meat may have entered the food chain, and when a victim's flesh is found in a butcher's shop, even a policeman loses his nerve, shouting: "PEOPLE HAVE BEEN EATING IT" (MacBride 2008: 39)! Then the murder weapon is identified, and an Environmental Health Officer explains the potential implications: "If he's used a pithing cane there's a risk of variant CJD. Then there's HIV. And Hepatitis C doesn't die unless you cook it at one hundred and sixty degrees, for about three-quarters of an hour... There's going to be a lot of people wanting blood tests" (MacBride 2008: 359). Amid this panic, the afore-mentioned policeman notes, crime statistics are soon on the rise. "Muggings, rapes, assaults, shoplifting, vandalism, extortion... The whole city's going to hell" (MacBride 2008: 367). And as if to demonstrate that no one is safe, this policeman suffers collateral damage himself. His name is DI David Inch, and his tragedy is that, when the serial killer first appeared 20 years ago, Inch beat a confession out of the wrong suspect. Now, this suspect has been released from prison and taken his revenge. Inch's "house's been trashed, his dog's been put to sleep, he's got two traumatised kids, his wife's in hospital with a breakdown, and his daughter's dead" (MacBride 2008: 258). But rather than focus on this individual tragedy, MacBride contextualises it in several other examples of what can happen when human beings reduce one another to objects in a bid to pursue their personal satisfaction. On one darkly comical occasion, someone even wears the serial killer's infamous costume in the bedroom, and after a nosy neighbour contacts emergency services, "Police raid kinky serial killer sex games" (MacBride 2008: 424-435). And what contextualises all this objectification is that, all along, a TV crew is filming a documentary, for each interaction with the crew acts as a reminder that every official story is objected to editing, and this focus on perception management illustrates one thing: the idea of the serial killer 'out there' is bigger than any one individual.

Now, in neither case can the public escape this impression that the idea is bigger than the individual, for the press objectify both killers with nicknames that make them seem like archetypes of horror, rather than the mentally ill individuals they are. McDermid's is nicknamed 'the Queer Killer', MacBride's 'the Flesher', and both of these nicknames, with their definite articles and capital letters, suggest that an individual thus objectified is best thought of in the categorical. Each is a type of killer,

a thing that is objectively definable, not a person with subjective traits that make him or her unique. Yet unlike MacBride, McDermid does not look beyond how this dehumanisation affects individuals. When her killer is mistaken for the mission-oriented type who kills to eliminate closet homosexuals, she focuses on her killer's fury about being misunderstood and underestimated: "He had insulted me. He had poured scorn on me, refusing to acknowledge the extent of my achievements. I couldn't help but see his disposal as a challenge" (McDermid 1995: 310). The man in question, of course, is Tony, who eventually figures out that the killer is a hedonist, for even though she set out to find a husband, which was a straightforward mission, she soon noticed that she enjoyed killing unsuitable candidates, so her motive changed after her first murder. Tony sees this when he makes her the object of a profile, yet what he really sees is his ego. "It was a battle of wits now, his insight against the killer's stockade. Somewhere in the pattern of these crimes there lay a labyrinthine path straight to a murderer's heart. Somehow, Tony had to tread that path, wary of misleading shadows, careful to avoid straying into treacherous undergrowth" (McDermid 1995: 45-46). Even this flowery imagery cannot hide that what Tony says about the killer – when he still thinks that she is a man – could also be said about him: "He's desperate to be the best... He just doesn't go for the easy option" (McDermid 1995: 152). Driving her narrative toward the inevitable confrontation between these two competitive egomaniacs, McDermid demonstrates that, in her book, serial killing and its investigation is all about individuals, and she reinforces this interpretation when she reveals that her hedonistic killer is also a list murderer. As Cassuto observes, "List murderers look like scarily random serial murderers until the pattern, usually based on revenge, shows up." Of course, it does so "after the members of the worlds within and outside the book... get a chance to contemplate the disturbing possibility of random murder" (Cassuto 2009: 246/247). Moreover, McDermid not only builds tension by putting Tony on the list. She also offers her readers two forms of reassurance: one, she discounts the danger of random murder, for the fact that this hedonistic killer selects victims for revenge implies that, as Cassuto concludes, "no maniac kills purely for pleasure" (Cassuto 2009: 247). And two, she discounts the danger of further revenge murders, for Tony kills the killer.

In contrast, MacBride is more concerned with the uncontrollable risks of such categorical thinking. Once the press have made the public think of his serial killer as a type by nicknaming it the Flesher – a larger than life caricature of evil in a butcher's apron and a Margaret Thatcher Halloween mask – MacBride offers no reassurance whatsoever. Instead, he shows what can happen when a community, alarmed by amateur psychoanalysis, is encouraged to suspect anyone who even remotely fits the type. As the victims are overweight, the Flesher is objectified as "a chubby chaser" (MacBride 2008: 275), whereupon police and public fixate on the afore-mentioned false suspect, a certain Ken Wiseman, who has just been released from prison after serving a sentence for killing several weight watchers. This tantalising clue soon leads Logan to another convicted serial killer, a certain Angus Robertson, also known as the Mastrick Monster, who met Wiseman in prison and is offering Logan information.

His reason for offering it to Logan in particular is that it was Logan who arrested him three years ago, and even though Robertson managed to stab him 23 times, he wants to mess with him some more: “Quid pro quo, Sergeant McRae...” But Logan ruins his act: “You’re not Hannibal Bloody Lecter: you’re a nasty wee shite from Milltimber” (MacBride 2008: 145). And with this reference to Lecter – the prototype of the fictional serial killer – MacBride illustrates what a risky business typology can be. Modelling itself on a type, any nasty wee shite can commit copycat killings and mislead investigators, and while police, press, and public are distracted by the grim antics of false suspects, more people die. At the same time, vital clues are missed, so most of us are bound to expect the killer to be a man, despite the Thatcher mask, and when this is pulled back to reveal a previously unsuspected woman, most of us are bound to mistake her talk of imaginary siblings for proof that she is the visionary type. After all, much like *Psycho*’s Norman Bates, who kills his victims while channelling his dead mother, MacBride’s killer slips in and out of the murderous persona of a family member that no one suspects, until it turns out to be a figment of her imagination. “Kelley Elizabeth Souter was a very disturbed young lady when we took her into care, Sergeant. I understand she named ‘Jimmy’ after her father. Any time she did anything wrong it was always Jimmy’s fault” (MacBride 2008: 565). This time, Jimmy is killing people, but as one of his hostages explains, “Jimmy’s only doing it to make us pure” (MacBride 2008: 586). In short, he is on a mission to purify people by making them eat human flesh, so for two reasons the ethic of *Flesh House* differs considerably from that of *The Mermaids Singing*: one, MacBride’s serial killer kills for a purpose greater than herself. And two, she gets away with it, so the problem does not go away.

On the contrary, the problem of uncontainable killing gets even bigger. Having survived to the end, the Flesher’s hostage has developed Stockholm syndrome – a form of traumatised capture-bonding – so even though her captor has caused her severe injuries and ultimately abandoned her in a bone mill, she resolves to punish the man who, according to the Flesher, is really to blame. “It was my father... Mum died when I was six. And he... he said he had needs” (MacBride 2008: 403). Always gullible, especially now that she has lost her mind, the freed hostage believes this and accepts it as justification. Worse still, when MacBride revisits her in the epilogue, she is living alone in a boarded up house, where she is taking to the Flesher’s mission with gusto. She kills the killer’s father and eats his heart. So, rather than end his novel with the killer’s capture, MacBride creates a second killer in her image, the implication being that the consequences of abuse can be as fatal as they are far-reaching. In short, hurt people hurt people. And this focus on repetition compulsion is visible in the novel’s violence. Contrary to the violence in *The Mermaids Singing*, which is sadistic, choreographed, and protracted, the violence in *Flesh House* is dispassionate, practised, and short. Whereas the Queer Killer enjoys it, calls her torture dungeon “the pleasure dome,” and admits that she admires those who “examined the human body so intimately that they could engineer such exquisite and finely calibrated suffering” (McDermid 1995: 96/3), the Flesher brings a labourer’s efficiency to what, for her, has become a job.

Trained in butchery, she kills with a pithing cane. “Bolt gun shoots a metal rod through the skull... you take a flexible metal rod and shove it in the hole through the brainstem and down into the spine... Then you slit the animal’s throat” (MacBride 2008: 357). For her, murder is but a means to an end, not an end in itself. She kills people like cattle because, at the age when we learn how to treat others, she was taught that the personal needs of those with power trump the human rights of those with none, and ever since, she has seen no reason to respect needs other than her own. Focused on her mission, she has been trying to purify people whose appearance in the papers made them figures of authority, thus repeatedly and compulsively purifying the ultimate figure of authority – her father – by proxy. The Queer Killer, on the other hand, is one of those serial killers who are, as Carl Goldberg puts it, “searching for an apocalyptic sexual orgasm that will compensate – by giving them a sense of power, importance, and superiority – for all the abuse they have suffered” (Goldberg 1997: 32). In short, while both of these women effortlessly reconcile their killing with the feeling of being the abused, rather than the abuser, only McDermid’s hedonist is so sanctimonious as to enjoy the role reversal.

Thus, it is easy to read the Queer Killer’s death at her lover’s hands as punishment for her deviance, which is why, despite a few critical comments on the struggle for gender equality in the workplace, *The Mermaids Singing* is ultimately a conservative novel. In contrast, the Flesher’s unharmed escape, both from police and lawful punishment, suggests that *Flesh House* is best read as a subversive novel, a novel that inspires confidence in neither the efficacy of the law nor the social order it should protect. Yet despite the novels’ many complexities, it is a simple question which delivers final proof that *The Mermaids Singing* can be read as a representative of the average American type of serial killer novel, *Flesh House* as a representative of the average Scottish type. To put it in the words of Manuel Vargas, “Does madness mean no badness” (Vargas 2010: 67)? In McDermid’s case, the answer is a clear no. The Queer Killer knows the difference between good and bad but chooses to behave like a bad girl, and for this she is punished. In MacBride’s case, the answer is ambiguous. The Flesher knows the words ‘good’ and ‘bad’ but does not know the moral distinction which sane people take for granted, and at this distance from conventional morality badness is an intellectual model not remotely relevant. However, by ending his novel with a non-judgmental demonstration that abuse can be a vicious circle, MacBride rejects the genre-typical judgment only to turn the question of moral relativism over to us. And this, finally, brings us to MacBride’s treatment of the killer as a fantasist. Unlike McDermid, who concentrates on her killer’s MO and analyses it as an attempt to replicate her fantasy scheme, MacBride concentrates on the collateral damage suffered by a community when a child in foster care – for whom all the typical attachment and maturation changes of adolescence are especially difficult – is so neglected that it deals with developmental stressors by developing an uncontrollable fantasy life. So, while *The Mermaids Singing* and *Flesh House* can both be read as case studies of psychopathy, McDermid’s diagnostic focus is on the individual, compared to which MacBride’s is more expansive, for his also takes in the surrounding community of the novel’s real-life setting, Aberdeen. In contrast,

McDermid's fictional Bradfield plays no significant part in the story, nor does it really come to life, and since its only distinguishing feature is its cosmopolitanism, predicated on its large gay population, the city might be more at home in the West of the United States than it seems in the North of England. Now, this may seem incongruous, seeing as Tony claims that "we're not like the Americans... more than ninety per cent of murders are committed by family members or people known to the victims" (McDermid 1995: 13). However, since McDermid's killer represents those other ten per cent – America's favourite – such incongruities simply illustrate what huge variety there is in the Scottish serial killer novel.

Chapter Four – The Noir Novel

Typically, the noir novel avoids both length and judgment as it tells the story of an outsider who is – or soon will be – alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating. Stereotypically, the noir novel tells this outsider’s story with little exposition and no resolution but a lot of fragmentation and disorientation, breaking up any residual sense of continuity, of cause and consequence, with its non-linear narrative, its narrator’s limited perspective, and his or her questionable reliability. Surrounding the outsider, whose sense of self is rapidly disintegrating, are jive-talking cynics and wise-cracking criminals, strangers riding rattling trains in silence and even stranger people forming faceless night-time crowds, neon signs advertising 24-hour liquor stores and tired salesmen selling other people’s futures, silhouetted urban jungles obscured by clouds and rain, late-night bars wreathed in cigarette smoke, sultry femmes fatales sheathed in cocktail dresses or tangled in sweaty sheets as they ooze sex appeal, while down in the dimly lit streets, shots ring out and people die like vermin, never to be mourned. What is mourned, instead, is a past that never was, and what follows from this is existential dread, inarticulate resentment, radical disengagement, desperate self-annihilation, and rapacious eroticism, none of which leads to a happy end. After all, the noir novel with a happy end has never been written, nor can it be, for it is about life’s losers, people who were doomed long before we ever met them, some because their authors decided to defeat their best efforts by creating a predetermined universe, but most because they make their own decisions yet are denied the intelligence or the independence necessary to make good decisions. And since they are all driven by an ever-increasing desperation, they make one bad decision after another in a life that is little more than a struggle for survival. Thus, things start bad and end worse in the noir novel.

If all of this seems as well-worn as a series of stills from Hollywood pictures of the mid-20th century, it does so for an interesting reason. Literary noir has long been influenced by film noir, the creators and critics of which first influenced each other in a cross-Atlantic discourse spanning several decades. As James Naremore recaps, “The discourse on American film noir was initiated by two generations of Parisian intellectuals, most of whom declared the form extinct soon after they invented it... Eventually, as old movies became increasingly available on television or in retrospectives, a European image of America was internalised by the Americans themselves. By the 1990s, noir had acquired the aura of art and had evolved into what Dennis Hopper describes as ‘every director’s favourite genre’” (Naremore 2008: 27/28). It had also inspired a new generation of writers to borrow those directors’ dramatic motifs and narrative techniques, and this has both re-popularised and re-defined literary noir,

the very form of noir that first started this cross-fertilisation by providing inspiration for film noir. After all, as Barry Graham points out, “Even while Arthur Conan Doyle was writing his Sherlock Holmes cozies in the 19th Century... his brother-in-law, E.W. Hornung, was writing the dark tales of Raffles, Victorian gentleman and cricket star who moonlights as a burglar. Raffles seems to be a gentleman of leisure, but it’s all about surface appearance and desperate avoidance of losing his upper crust status... he is always one theft away from destitution” (Graham 2013: 1). And this border state – noir’s *raison d’être*, its belief that those worth writing about are only ever one step from the abyss – has become a popular aesthetic attitude and a counter-cultural space for the most subversive minds. Buoyed by the surge of sensational American pulp fiction, which was primarily addressed to working-class men and popularised in the 1920s, and buoyed further by the surge of the literary crime novel, which was supported by middle-class book clubs and popularised in the 1930s, tough guy writers like Carroll John Daly and Dashiell Hammett pioneered a prose style that became known as ‘hard-boiled’. Over the following decades, this heightened passion for literary toughness was channelled into books and screenplays about the lowest reaches of human nature by such notable writers as James M. Cain, Horace McCoy, W.R. Burnett, Cornell Woolrich, Erskine Caldwell, Day Keene, Dorothy B. Hughes, Jim Thompson, James Hadley Chase, Chester Himes, Charles Williams, John D. MacDonald, David Goodis, Charles Willeford, Patricia Highsmith, Peter Rabe, Gil Brewer, James McKimney, Elmore Leonard, Derek Raymond, Donald E. Westlake, Lawrence Sanders, Ted Lewis, and James Ellroy. Together, these writers paved the way for today’s noirists by processing a growing awareness of violence in the period around World War II, a return to consumer economies and a rise in crime rates, the ideological tensions of both the Red Scare and the Cold War, and a widespread institutionalisation and popularisation of psychoanalysis.

But before I go on, I need to clarify something. It is misleading to discuss noir as if it was one thing. About the only thing that is not debatable about noir is that it is the French word for ‘black’. Everything else, from its chief influences to its generic conventions, has been debated ad nauseam, often with the laudable intention of saving arguably underrated writers and writings from obscurity, but just as often with a lamentable tendency toward antiquarianism. The problem, Naremore explains, is this: “a concept that was generated *ex post facto* has become part of a worldwide mass memory” (Naremore 2008: 39), so, as Joe Lansdale concludes, “You can’t point at noir and call it one thing” (Lansdale 2010: 1). Indeed, it is much easier to identify a noir novel than it is to define noir in general, but that does not mean that the term should no longer be used to discuss art which is identifiably noir. It simply means that we need to think of noir in broader terms. *Noir*, as Naremore reminds us, “functions rather like big words such as *romantic* or *classic*. An ideological concept with a history all its own, it can be used to describe a period, a movement, and a recurrent style” (Naremore 2008: 6). And as we can deduce from the on-going discussions about the definitions of these other ‘big words’, the critical concern about the meaning of noir arises out of an old confusion about the way in which

generic concepts are formed. To be clear, people do not form them by grouping things objectively. They create networks of relationship by using their subjective forms of association, and so, over time, a number of more or less authoritative definitions enters our cultural discourse. In the case of noir, there may seem to be no place for this democratic process, given that something is either black or not, yet endless debates can and are held about how *much* black has to be in something for it to be noir. Thus, it seems that we may never establish clear boundaries and uniform features for the noir novel, nor are we likely ever to arrive at a 'right' definition – only a number of more or less interesting uses. The challenge, then, is to find the most interesting and informative of these uses, and I intend to do so, neither by discussing the work of the above-mentioned noirists, nor by distilling it into some formula, but by deferring to noir's unique metaphysics. In noir, more than in any other form of narrative art, character precedes plot. Not only do internal developments take precedence over external events. They also radically change the way we read those events as they reconstruct the narrator. Hence, while the noir plot is typically simple enough, the telling of it is not. Indeed, typically it is complicated by five characteristics, so I shall focus on the noir protagonist's tendency to be alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating.

Typically, the noir protagonist is born alone, he struggles alone, and – if it comes to it – he dies alone. Yes, the noir protagonist is typically a man, and as such he is alone both individually and universally. As he tries in vain to assert or at least understand his masculinity, the woman in his life reminds him of his loneliness, his emasculating failure to be as manly as all the men who actually deserve her love, and ultimately of man's failure to share his loneliness with other men. To make his life even lonelier, there is typically someone to exploit these failings, the so-called femme fatale who, as Naremore says, "gets her name from France; her most important ancestors can be found in the pornographic fantasies of the Marquis de Sade and in the novels of Emile Zola and the naturalists" (Naremore 2008: 279). Like these worldly ancestors, today's femme fatale embodies sexual availability and empowerment, breaking not only man's heart but also his spirit by making him feel his impotence to hold on to her, typically post-coitus to let him fully appreciate the difference between lonesomeness and loneliness. Of course, there is another side to this story. As Damien Seaman points out, "Maleness, the idea of it and the reality of it, dominates noir fiction more than any other genre I can think of. Because of this, the treatment of women in noir can be unsettling. At best it betrays a range of psycho-sexual obsessions, at worst unthinking misogyny. Far from being a stereotype, the femme fatale is the key to understanding a woman's place in the noir world. If she's not the instigator of the crime, the spider in her web, then she's a victim of male brutality or abuse." And what further intensifies this ambiguity is that "Behind the sexy femme fatale image lies the male's cry that woman is the cause of all his grief" (Seaman 2012: 1). In short, noir ambiguity differs from the disorientation found in most crime fiction. It comes from the individual's isolation, so it is less to do with narrative than with ethical complexity, just like the protagonist's plight, Lee Horsley observes, "is less to do with a desperate search for some

way out of an economic impasse than with an irremediable sense of exclusion” (Horsley 2009: 154). What all of this comes down to is just how alone the protagonist can bear to feel, how lonely in love, how disconnected from work, how separate from the social order, how out of touch with normality, and how detached from his hope, without losing his sense of self and making the first bad decision. Yet wherever this point of maximum endurance lies, the noir protagonist is eventually pushed past it, so he makes that bad decision and once the damn is broken he follows through with several more, until the feeling of being an outsider turns into the feeling of being an outcast.

Typically, this makes the noir protagonist afraid – afraid of being alone, afraid of falling in love, afraid of the man he has become, afraid of being killed for his bad decisions, and afraid of surviving, for that would condemn him to a life of fear. Yet nowhere is he more afraid than in the psycho thriller, for in this variation of the noir novel, which typically focuses on the protagonist’s psychopathology, his mind gradually but inexorably turns in on itself, until he is afraid that he cannot even trust himself. In this existential crisis, two things happen. One, his paranoia convinces him that whatever identity is, the social institution that is trying to assimilate or exterminate him is both its opposite and its enemy. And two, to be at odds with any social institution on either side of the law is to know that, in the end, the world will always break your heart. By dramatising this, Philip Simpson notes, “noir and the psycho thriller critique the deleterious impact of social institutions upon psychological development” (Simpson 2010: 197). They show that while the noir protagonist brings his misfortune upon himself, he does so less by acting than by *reacting*, for even when he is acting in the spirit of vice or depravity, he is reacting to the source of a fear that is both underlying and overwhelming. In the psycho thriller, this source is typically some psychopath who poses the grave threat of violent and sadistic death, which is why this form of the noir novel falls within the genre boundaries of horror fiction unless the protagonist’s fear of individuals is superseded by an even greater, general fear of the future. After all, noir protagonists are so afraid of the future that, as Paul Schrader observes, they “dread to look ahead, but instead try to survive by the day, and if unsuccessful at that, they retreat into the past. Thus film noir’s techniques emphasize loss, nostalgia, lack of clear priorities, and insecurity, then submerge these doubts into mannerism and style” (Schrader 1996: 58). Given its narrative advantage over film, literary noir can take this psychological striptease even further and let us read the protagonist’s mind, so without staging a therapy session, the noir writer can address directly what drives the protagonist – fear. What is more, the noir writer can let us deduce from his protagonist’s thought pattern that he is drawing on an expansive gallery of fears, and this is possible even in scenarios in which the protagonist is not aware enough of his thoughts and fears to articulate them all in filmable dialogue. For instance, even when he is not aware of his reasons for being afraid of the femme fatale in his life, his thought pattern can let us see whether he fears her for being a destabilising force in the workplace, a moral threat to the family, a danger to his ideal of romance, or any other hazard only he can see.

Typically, the noir protagonist is so inarticulably afraid, he gets himself into a general state of anxiety, and this soon makes him angry. Add to this his dilemma that he cannot choose the world he lives in, only the way he lives in it, plus his anger when his choice, inevitably, leads to his life's destruction, and it becomes obvious why noir is often called 'working class tragedy'. For two reasons, however, this is a misnomer. Neither is noir exclusive to the working class nor can it be subsumed into tragedy. As Ray Banks points out, "While the traditional audience for noir fiction in the pulps was more than likely working class, in noir the upper and middle classes have just as much of a voice as the working poor and underclass" (Banks 2011: 1). And, as Naremore agrees, "It certainly isn't a proletarian art" (Naremore 2008: 298). It only seems that way because a lot of its protagonists struggle financially, but they struggle as loners and outsiders, rather than in the spirit of class solidarity or social mobility. Besides, other noir protagonists struggle although they do not have to get out of an economic impasse, which proves that noir is less about the particulars of the impasse than the problem of the struggle. After all, while Graham is right in that noirists "shatter the mainstream fantasy of what is 'normal', and depict the ordinary madness of life, the third world hidden inside the first" (Graham 2013: 1), there are those who do so without focusing on people who enter that third world via the working class. Instead, they focus on the way in which their middle or upper class protagonists bring destruction upon themselves, which brings us to the second problem of defining noir as 'working class tragedy': the implication that noir is a form of tragedy. It is not. There is no such thing as a tragic hero in noir, for in noir there are no heroes at all, just protagonists. As for their supposedly related self-destruction, according to Aristotle, the tragic hero brings his misfortune upon himself, "not by vice and depravity, but by some error of judgement" (Aristotle 2004: XIII). The noir protagonist is far less discriminating. Typically, he makes not one but several errors of judgment and most of them reflect vice or depravity. The closest this comes to tragedy is when, as David Corbett observes, these errors reflect "the belief, often born of desperation, that a criminal act can redeem one's pitiless luck." Such a belief, however, is not tragic but desperate. There is little room for redemption in noir, yet since, Corbett concludes, "There was nowhere else for a tragic vision to go but noir... noir has had to shoulder an artistic burden it was never meant to carry. And the strain shows" (Corbett 2010: 1). Some borderline noir is now trying to accommodate straightforward redemption by removing the form's ultimate ambiguity, its blend of self-destruction and angry defiance.

Typically, the noir protagonist makes us feel ambiguous because he defies his inevitable destruction and yet fails to fully redeem himself, for rather than let go of his anger and move toward acceptance, he holds on to it and soon embraces his amorality. Eventually, his action becomes transgressive, which is why noir is often more accurately called 'transgressor fiction'. As Peter Messent puts it, "individuals' motivations and/or desires lack connection with the social values of their larger group, and lead accordingly to transgressive action" (Messent 2013: 51). There is only one problem with this. Readers of transgressor fiction might expect its authors to focus exclusively on transgressive action,

not on its many ambiguous readings and restraints, as noirists typically do. They might be surprised to discover that in noir fiction, as Horsley points out, “The transgressions represented can be a mirror, the damaged self as an image of the society that caused the deformation or the unbalanced mind as a metaphor for society’s lunacy. They can also be a protest, an attack on corruptions or injustices in the wider community” (Horsley 2009: 13). Typically, at least one of Horsley’s readings is made possible, and indeed encouraged, by noir’s close relationship with restraint. This might come as a surprise, given noir’s well-known fondness for violence, vice, and depravity, but it is because of its restraint that its transgressions stir and elevate us above the numbing excess of a slaughterhouse documentary. Noir protagonists spend a lot of time holding back, so although they, too, eventually act amorally, they give us enough time and insight to see that they do so in reaction to those who make them alone, afraid, and angry, and this lets us appreciate that their transgressions represent serious criticisms. What is more, it lets critics like Banks appreciate that, because of its vice and depravity, noir is black, but if its vice and depravity were not restrained by compassion, noir would ultimately just be bleak. “As the most marginal of sub-genres, so it deals with the most marginal of people and, without compassion, their stories would be nothing more than a series of unfortunate events. It’s the reason why pessimists can’t write decent noir – they lack compassion, or they avoid it because compassion may throw up something that contradicts the relentless cynicism that informs their worldview. It’s also difficult for a pessimist to fully commit to an optimistic protagonist. And noir protagonists, despite their bluster and moan, are the most optimistic protagonists in fiction. They have to be. If they weren’t, we wouldn’t have a story” (Banks 2011: 1). After all, if noir protagonists were not optimistic, they would have no motive to defy the forces of destruction. They would consider the odds and quit. It is only because they believe that a criminal act can redeem their pitiless luck that they struggle on, and it is only because they are this optimistic that they have the necessary energy to seek redemption, despite being alone, afraid, and angry.

Typically, though, redemption does not come into the noir protagonist’s sight, never mind his reach, and as he is hit by the realisation that he cannot make things better, he again embraces his amorality, then gets angry because he only makes things worse, afraid because he antagonises the wrong people, and alone because his actions are alienating. In short, the noir protagonist is stuck in a vicious cycle. And the reason he can never break free from it is that, as Otto Penzler puts it, “noir is about losers. The characters in these existential, nihilistic tales are doomed. They may not die, but they probably should, as the life that awaits them is certain to be so ugly, so lost and lonely, that they’d be better off just curling up and getting it over with. And, let’s face it, they deserve it” (Penzler 2011: 1). That said, the fact that they somehow manage to delay seemingly imminent death – or even survive the story – can make them oddly sympathetic protagonists for readers and highly worthy subjects for artists. Yes, they alienate us by emphasising what Bran Nicol calls “the destructive power of individual desire,” but they can also make us appreciate this destructive power by exposing “how fragile and

inconsequential are the moral codes that structure liberal-democratic society” (Nicol 2010: 504). Corbett explains this alienated appreciation by pointing out that “Noir responds to a desire for the truth that the prevailing culture is desperately trying to drown out with consumerist pep talks, invincible heroes, feel-good schmaltz, and bad slapstick” (Corbett 2010: 1). This hidden truth is that – both in the first and in the third world – the social contract breeds culpability. Noir, in all its violence, can alienate us, but like perhaps no other art form, it can also make us appreciate our own violence, for before and after its protagonists are involved in physical violence, they suffer systemic violence. Noirists typically dramatise, to put it in the words of Slavoj Žižek, “not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation” (Žižek 2009: 8). They attack the exculpating delusion that tends to attract the privileged to tragedy, the delusion that suffering inspires some moral nobility. In the real world, so noirists tend to agree, suffering rarely produces saints. In the real world, suffering just produces more suffering, and in noir, there is no escaping this, not into sentimentality, not into the whitewash that comes with a happy end, and not into the easy condemnation of some black sheep, for “Even in the darkest reaches of noir,” Charles J. Rzepka rightly points out, “identification with the criminal protagonist remains intact” (Rzepka 2010: 6). Perhaps this explains why none of the many terms used to describe noir have stuck. As Naremore concludes, “noir is not merely a descriptive term, but a name for a critical tendency... an antigenre” (Naremore 2008: 22).

The Scottish Noir Novel

In Scotland, the noir novel did not start, nor did it reach its pinnacle, with ‘the King of Tartan Noir’, Ian Rankin, and saying so betrays neither a literary value judgment nor any hope to court controversy. It is simply a statement of fact, for only a writer of noir could ever become the King of Tartan Noir, and Rankin does not write noir, not tartan, not any. He writes police novels that are so far from noir, they are based on the premise that the legal, political, and social systems which govern Scotland are, ultimately, worth defending. Yes, his cops have to bend or break the occasional law to preserve order, but preserve it they do, and yes, they have minor flaws, but they manage them like the heroes they are. If Rankin wrote noir novels, his cops would not be bending or breaking any laws to preserve order, because there would be no order. If Rankin wrote noir novels, his heroes would not have any flaws, because he would have no heroes, just protagonists. And finally, if Rankin really wrote noir novels, his protagonists would not care about laws or flaws – never mind the solution of some crime – because none of that would ever command their attention quite like their daily struggle for survival. So, how has somebody who does not even write noir come to be known as the King of Tartan Noir? As Rankin was quick to admit when I asked him, he was given this unofficial title by James Ellroy, the American noirist, before Ellroy had read any of his writing. Rankin met him at a literary festival, introduced himself as a fellow writer, and asked him to sign a book after saying about his own work: “You could call it Tartan Noir.” Ellroy “laughed and signed the book to ‘the King of Tartan Noir’” (Rankin 2011: 3). After Rankin told a version of this story in public, people started parroting Ellroy, using his authority to lend credibility to a literary movement that Rankin had personally invented – Tartan Noir – and within a few years Rankin became the form’s internationally recognised figurehead. In Scotland, this moved some noir from the margins to the mainstream, for with Rankin’s popularity, the demand for Tartan Noir rose dramatically, the market was flooded with novels promoted as such, and these have included some actual noir. Of course, as Rankin’s false promotion as a noirist proves, they have also included non-noir crime fiction, the kind that gets labelled noir because it is a bit dark, not because it is noir in the above-defined meaning of the word. Perhaps more unfortunate, however, is that this mislabelling has included famous Scottish examples of crime fiction and social realism, writers like Arthur Conan Doyle and George Douglas Brown. I believe this is unfortunate because, when false genre genealogies remain uncontested, they offer muddled minds models for mislabelling, so it is time to look at a few examples of actual, Scottish noir.

Alexander Trocchi – *Young Adam*

One of the first noir novels to come out of Scotland was *Young Adam*, written by Alexander Trocchi, first published in 1954, and long ignored before his voice of dissent was to echo through Scottish noir. For decades, Trocchi's writing was so far beyond the pale of conventional morality and aesthetics that the literary establishment deemed it to be juvenile delinquency, unworthy of serious consideration, and thus destined for permanent exile. According to John Pringle, however, "the danger has passed" (Pringle 1996: v). Pringle declared this in 1996, when he introduced the 1966 version of *Young Adam*, the version Trocchi authorised as "the definitive text" (Trocchi 1966: xi). Almost two decades later, Pringle is still right. *Young Adam* is still demonstrating the longevity of the noir ethos that inspired it, the ethos of *The Outsider* by Albert Camus. Like Meursault, the enigmatic narrator of *The Outsider*, Joe, the enigmatic narrator of *Young Adam*, talks about his life before and after a suspicious death, only he reverses the order in which Meursault does so, and he claims that the death was an accident. When we first meet him, Joe is working for a bargeman somewhere on the Edinburgh-Glasgow canal. We know that he is easily bored and that he is the kind of man whose mind is always watching itself. One page later, he sees the corpse of a woman in the water and, after several detached observations, he fishes her out. Only much later does he admit that he knew her in life, and knew her intimately. First, he seduces his boss's wife. Then, he proceeds just as callously: "I wanted to talk about Ella... For that reason, and not to complicate the issue, I said nothing about Cathie" (Trocchi 1966: 77). What he also neglected to mention is that he had slept with Cathie just before he watched her die, though he hastens to add that the latter was an accident. She was pregnant and threatening marriage, so he walked away, and when she ran after him she tripped and fell into the River Clyde where, unable to swim, she soon drowned. Of course, "there was only my word for it that it was an accident. Or was it an accident? I suppose it was. It had never occurred to me to kill her" (Trocchi 1966: 81). Yet once he questions himself, a review of the fact that he made no attempt to rescue her casts doubt on both his lack of compassion and the lateness of his confession that he withheld information. Furthermore, he adds, "The furtive sexuality of the situation would tend to make it appear criminal" (Trocchi 1966: 83). Perhaps worst of all though, when an innocent man is accused of Cathie's murder, he again makes no rescue attempt. Instead, he makes the ultimate empty gesture of humanitarianism. He sends the judge a letter proclaiming the trial's injustice, yet he sends it anonymously to make sure he won't take the accused's place in court.

Of course, the letter is ignored, as Joe knew it would be, and of course the man is sentenced to death, as Joe knew he would be, but even so an alternative reading makes Joe's amorality difficult to judge. As we learn in one of the later flashbacks to his courtship with Cathie, Joe has literary ambitions and a realist's writing philosophy: "I'm not interested in all the usual paraphernalia. Don't you understand? That's literature, false. I've got to start with the here and now" (Trocchi 1966: 125). If *Young Adam*, as its first-person limited narration and episodic structure suggest, is meant to be read as Joe's journal, then we may have to concede that he simply did not say right away that he could identify the corpse,

not because he had no compassion for Cathie, but because he had to start with ‘the here and now’. And if he is indeed trying to tell the story without literary falseness such as character consistency, then we may have to concede that the novel’s psychological and moral fragmentation should be read, not just as evidence of his caprice and selfishness, but also as proof of his candour and sincerity. Accordingly, we may read his account of his refusal to confess, not as a pseudo-intellectual excuse, but as a conscientious objection. He refuses to confess because to do so “would have been an indirect but very fundamental way to affirm the validity of the particular social structure I wished to deny” (Trocchi 1966: 146). What he wishes to deny about this social structure becomes clear at the trial, during which the notion that Cathie’s death may have been an accident is never even entertained and, worse still, the guardians of his puritan society “condemn a living creature in deference to the system” (Trocchi 1966: 150). Cathie’s body was found naked, so they conclude that it must have been murder. They further conclude that if there is a crime, there must also be a culprit, and if there is a sex crime, any culprit will do. Disgusted, Joe thinks the other man’s arrest “was no more absurd than the position which would be thrust upon me by an unintelligent society perennially bent on its moral purification: ‘What! She didn’t have her knickers on’” (Trocchi 1966: 90)! Such conscientious objection, if true, would further suggest that his seduction of married women is a revolt against repressive sexual mores, and while such a reading may not refute the charge of callousness, it certainly proves that his writing, like sex, is rarely simple let alone pure. But lest anyone doubt that this is noir, let’s consider the title. Since Trocchi’s next novel was *Cain’s Book*, it seems fair to say that *Young Adam* refers to the Bible, specifically to the Old Adam in Genesis who represented man in his unredeemed state. Like the Old, the Young Adam picks self-interest over self-negation. Thus, man is still beyond redemption. Literature does not get any more noir.

Hugh C. Rae – *Skinner*

Despite such pioneering success, however, subsequent noirists have not collectively followed his lead. As the huge diversity of Scottish noir indicates, he has been succeeded by individualists like himself. Take Hugh C. Rae. Whether or not he had read Trocchi by the time he wrote his debut, *Skinner*, published in 1965, he resisted the trend to write about the transgression of sexual-moral boundaries, which had by then become one of the counter-culture’s most talked and written about preoccupations. His main protagonist, Arnold Skinner, does prey on women, he even kills several of them savagely, but not because he is revolting against repressive sexual mores, “not even,” his sister Rosemary says, “because he couldn’t stop himself, because his sex is too strong for him, but because he wanted to” (Rae 1965: 278). Rae is not interested in the intellectual experience and explanation of transgression, not in Skinner’s anyway. He is interested in the animal instinct that can turn a man into a predator, that and the changes which take place even within civilised people once Skinner gets into their heads. In other words, Rae is interested in how something that lies beneath language, a sub-human instinct,

manifests itself in a man's behaviour and environment, and this explains the novel's unusual, polyphonic narrative strategy. There would be no story without Skinner, yet none of it is told by him. Instead, it is told by eleven people who know parts of the story because they know parts of Skinner. They are family members, work mates, casual acquaintances, criminal accomplices, police detectives, and the bereaved, and they all take turns in telling their parts of the story, one at a time, like in court. And like in a court transcript of witness testimonies, each chapter is headed with the narrator's name. This narrative strategy draws attention to Skinner's behaviour and away from noir's typical concerns: why the main protagonist misbehaves and how this misbehaviour affects his thinking. Furthermore, by granting access to the thoughts of those whose lives are adversely affected by Skinner's behaviour, Rae simultaneously draws attention to how Skinner gets into their heads and how this changes them. For example, before he rapes Ruby, a long-time admirer, he utterly demoralises her until she despairs, "I didn't have the guts left to even be full of fear or enough of the stuff of life to want to crawl away" (Rae 1965: 171). By trivialising such heartlessness he makes even Booth, a reputedly stoic detective, admit, "I hated him because he was not human enough to be afraid of us, or the law, or of himself... He killed because he wanted to kill, for self-glorification, and for the love of blood, and that exempted him from any sympathy I might have had left to give" (Rae 1965: 149). When Skinner is finally arrested and doomed to hang, Booth's humanitarian partner Muirhead speaks for most of us: "I only long to pull the lever of the trap myself" (Rae 1965: 286).

This is the deeply disturbing power of *Skinner* and perhaps the only true measure of noir. After all, Rae does more than record his narrators' ever-increasing alienation by Skinner's predatory behaviour. He also conveys the shock and self-disgust of someone like Muirhead, a man of proven compassion, when Muirhead's seasoned humanitarianism suddenly loses out to a harsh desire for Skinner's death. When – after a six month investigation on suspicion of multiple murders – they finally arrest Skinner, he notes with alarm: "I suddenly ceased to be affected by any of it: the moment of triumph or of truth. I lost it." Skinner, he suddenly realises, will "talk, cooking his perverted lies in braggart and evasion, spinning out over the months through all due process of law his foul defeat, reducing it at last, in time, to an arid pattern of ritual justice... Right to the moment when the boards tilt and shoot him into total darkness, some part of him too will go on snapping and squirming for life" (Rae 1965: 284/285/286). And when Skinner interrupts these troubling thoughts to ask not for repentance but for a cigarette, Muirhead is both shocked and disgusted by his uncharacteristic desire not just to see Skinner hang but to pull the lever of the trap himself. Now, as far as final thoughts go, this one is doubly disturbing. Firstly, because Rae puts it in the head of his most reasonable, honourable, and identifiable narrator, so most readers are likely to relate. And secondly, because it takes an awful lot to disturb Muirhead. He is not even truly disturbed by Skinner's savagery, only by the man's trivialisation of life and death, his reduction of human beings to things that serve the single purpose of satisfying his animal cravings, and this becomes disturbingly obvious when Skinner, facing the death penalty for multiple murders,

demonstrates that he is already thinking about his next trivial indulgence by asking for that cigarette. Yet what may be most disturbing about this attitude is that it cannot be mistaken for defiant bravado, for Skinner has had it all along, even when he confessed to a trusted friend who posed him no danger: “‘I did do them,’ he says in the same voice he might tell me he liked draught better’n bottle, quiet and casual like. ‘I did them all’” (Rae 1965: 205). And as Skinner’s sister eventually comes to understand, he has always been casual and inhumane enough “To shoot a child in the face because he wanted to: not because he was afraid. He had never been afraid in all his long life” (Rae 1965: 279). Indeed, unlike most noir protagonists, he is disturbingly aggressive because he nurtures his animalistic nature, not because he is afraid, and thus his serial killing is more than a disturbing crime. It is also a deeply disturbing denial of the basic humanism with which we expect human beings to treat one another – and this animalism soon became a trend among Scottish noirists.

Gordon Williams – *The Siege of Trencher’s Farm*

Indeed, in *The Siege of Trencher’s Farm*, published in 1969, Gordon Williams followed Rae’s lead by ignoring the counter-culture’s most popular form of transgression – that of sexual-moral boundaries – and focusing instead on the animal side of man which, if enlarged, can turn him into a predator. However, Williams looked beyond that to an intellectual experience and explanation of transgression, a noir tradition which his compatriot Trocchi had only very recently imported from France. Thus, Williams took his readers back to the roots of noir – Europe’s male fascination with the instinctive – by writing about some dark places to which instinct can take men when their masculinity is in crisis. One of those dark places is the fictional Dando Monachorum, a remote rural enclave in Cornwall, England. Another one is the mind of George Magruder, an effete American professor of English who moves with wife and daughter to Trencher’s Farm in Dando so he can finish his book on Branksheer, a fictional 18th century British diarist. Yet despite the geographic proximity to his academic subject, Magruder cannot concentrate and his mind soon turns into a battleground over which the forces of idealism and insecurity fight their grimly impersonal campaigns. Proud of his intellect and liberalism, he soon rightly fears that his wife, who has tired of his impotence, has stepped outside their marriage, and so he berates himself, “What good did it do a man to know he had brains? How could academic knowledge make up for loss of *maleness*? This was what had attracted him to Branksheer in the first place, that drunken old pox-ridden lecher, at home with Ovid or a London whore, a *complete* man” (Williams 1969: 47). Magruder is driven by his desire to become and, perhaps more importantly still, be remembered as a complete man, a broad man of the world who is symmetrical in his development, not a stunted ascetic who is so busy channelling his energy into a single, narrow area of expertise – for instance some 18th century British diarist – that the other branches of his being wither and die. Magruder yearns to prove that he is both servant of a tender conscience and master of his own house, so after he goes out in a snow storm, accidentally drives into a stranger, brings the hurt man home,

calls a doctor, learns that the stranger is an infamous child killer and a fugitive from the local asylum, learns further that a young girl fitting the killer's profile has gone missing and that several local men, upon discovering that he is harbouring the main suspect, have formed a mob to lay siege to the farm, Magruder finally sees his chance to become that complete man. So, in spite of the escalating hysteria that is triggered by a home invasion and a domestic drama, he defends his people along with his principles in the belief that "Tomorrow morning he'd be the man who had done the right thing" (Williams 1969: 185).

Unfortunately, tomorrow morning is a long way off, and his abstract belief in doing the right thing leads to several bad decisions and a very real dilemma in which he repeatedly does the wrong thing. Not only does he insult the local men by taking the moral high ground and talking down to them, instead of respecting their legitimate concerns and explaining that the fugitive he is harbouring could not possibly have harmed the missing girl because he was unconscious at the time she went missing. What is more, because Magruder is forever preoccupied with his private jealousies and insecurities, he blithely riles the men's social envy as he lectures them from within a farm none of them can afford, and when the clannish villagers lay siege to his home, he rapidly goes from insensitive to instinctive. Feeling both alone and afraid in a place beyond laws, a place where human nature returns to savagery, he no sooner gets caught up in his adolescent fantasy of manliness than he loses his life-long civility, his habitual self-control, and any sense of proportion in the violent pursuit of some frontier justice. Until then, he is proud that "All his life he'd fought against violence, signed petitions, written letters, taken unpopular lines in discussions. Violence was an obscenity" (Williams 1969: 146). Yet suddenly, he breaks – and breaks violently – with this history of conscientious objection and he does so, ironically enough, among his academic notes on an outdated role model of romanticised masculinity. With a snowstorm raging in the night outside and him running around the dark house to put out fires, some of the bloodthirsty men have got in through the window in his study so, amid elemental forces, he grapples with the armed intruders in what his wife describes as an animalistic struggle for survival: "They were like lions fighting in a dark cage" (Williams 1969: 216). Of course, as usual in the novel, she is wrong. In *Straw Dogs*, the movie adaptation of 1971 directed by Sam Peckinpah, she is right, but in the novel a person dies, and once that line is crossed Magruder goes beyond self-preservation. He finds that violence can be an end in itself and fights men as animals that "had to be destroyed" (Williams 1969: 218). With this newfound machismo he wins back not just the wife he has protected, but also his virility, and after she assures him "I don't deserve you, George, it's true, I don't, I don't..." It was the first time in his life that he was able to make love to a woman with the light on. He didn't have room in his head for *thoughts*. He had won" (Williams 1969: 223). Yet while, by his definition, he has become 'a complete man', the conclusion – six lives lost or ruined – suggests another reading. By acting on his darkest instincts, he has become a lesser man, morally. In typical noir manner, enlarging his animal side makes him whole, not wholesome.

William McIlvanney – *The Papers of Tony Veitch*

This noir way of looking at life – the unblinking gaze at the whole of it, not just its wholesome parts – is perhaps shown off to its best advantage in a trilogy by William McIlvanney which started in 1977, yet that does not explain his recent increase in popularity, let alone his title Godfather of Tartan Noir. As the above examples have shown, Scots were writing noir before McIlvanney turned his hand to it, and as I will show below, his successors have since drawn on the tradition of this earlier Scottish noir, so why is McIlvanney now commonly accorded the merit of literary paternity ahead of his noir elders, writers like Trocchi, Rae, and Williams? As ever, this kind of question is about more than books. McIlvanney was the first Scot to lend a massive reputation of literary credibility to crime fiction when doing so was deemed trivial, yet his work suffered no loss of credibility or – and this is just as vital – literariness. To many, this suggests he is temperamentally incapable of writing bad prose in any genre, so his revival as the Godfather of Tartan Noir – which is the result of a recent image campaign led by popular Scottish crime writers who regret that he was criticised for sullyng his literary reputation, that is, for slumming it in the genre ghetto, when he should have been heralded as a pioneer of what has since become one of Scotland’s bestselling literatures – such a revival has a pleasant side-effect. When a writer of McIlvanney’s exceptional literary merit is known as the Godfather of Tartan Noir, any old potboiler that is successfully marketed as Tartan Noir is potentially a literary classic. After all, McIlvanney has written three so-called Tartan Noir novels, they were all initially read as potboilers, and all of them are now recognised as literary classics. But the main reason for this recognition – aside from literary merit and his recent celebration as a pioneer, which would be rarities in any genre – is that in each of these three books McIlvanney did something that is extremely rare in crime fiction. He wrote about familiar types – cops and criminals – in ways which were both original and powerful, so much so that several of his innovations have become genre conventions of Scottish crime fiction. For instance, in *Laidlaw*, a detective novel published in 1977 as the debut of his Glasgow-set trilogy, he set a precedent by writing about DI Jack Laidlaw as a man who just so happens to be a detective, rather than as a detective who just so happens to be a man. In *Strange Loyalties*, a police novel published in 1991 as Laidlaw’s last case to date, he set another precedent by showing that even stories about common crimes like hit-and-run accidents can be moving meditations on the limits of the law. And in *The Papers of Tony Veitch*, a noir novel published between those better-known books in 1983, McIlvanney set his perhaps most underrated precedent.

In this story of murder, betrayal, and retribution, he showed that the noir atmosphere is most pervasive when the realisation that this is a dirty story is accompanied by the sense that, as Laidlaw puts it, “Most of them are. Some folk just tell them nice” (McIlvanney 1983: 203. To remove any ambiguity, it is worth noting that Laidlaw is not suggesting that most stories are offensive to common decency. He is using the word dirty in its metaphysical meaning of morally unclean to suggest that this story,

like most noir stories, is dirty because it tells of a society that treats the weak as inconvenient rodents. Indeed, in this story about a brutally corrupt and disaffected social system – ours – the disaffected simply ignore Eck Adamson, one of the city’s countless vagrants, as he lives and dies in squalor. Laidlaw alone bothers to find out that Eck was poisoned like a rat because he knew too much and that many of his social betters are happy to collude with Eck’s poisoner because it is the simplest way of suppressing his knowledge that the seam of corruption runs from top to bottom of Glasgow’s society. Yet Laidlaw only bothers because Eck managed to unravel that seam and send him a cryptic message, because as a cop, Laidlaw knows he has to “accept the need to face what you would rather not see” (McIlvanney 1983: 21), not because he is a hero. Laidlaw is all too aware of his failings as a husband, a father, and a human being, and since his partner Harkness also gets to voice his opinion of the man, so are we. But none of that is new. After all, he had the same flaws and self-awareness in *Laidlaw*. What is new is that his decision to investigate ‘what you would rather not see’ leads to more deaths, including that of the student Tony Veitch whose papers are important enough to make it into the title, not just because they contain clues to the deaths, but because they contain cues for a moral discourse, a discourse Laidlaw develops by drawing dangerous people with personal experience of criminality, corruption, and complicity into a series of highly charged conversations. He talks to the big bosses, the little skivvies, and the inconspicuous beneficiaries of Glasgow’s far-ranging criminal industries, people like Tony’s father whose financial wealth insulates them against Laidlaw’s social conscience, for all they have found is financial success, not the self-doubt that examines the terms of such success. What becomes apparent in the course of these many penetrating conversations is that McIlvanney, like Laidlaw, is less interested in the regeneration of the flawed man who solves this murder mystery than he is in the degeneration of the humanitarian ideal that he witnesses both in and around himself. Yet despite McIlvanney’s pioneering reputation, this metaphysical noir has not defined Scottish noir. After all, most of his successors have gone back to the earlier focus on the animal side of man.

Iain Banks – *The Wasp Factory*

A good example of this is Frank Cauldhame, the alienating macho protagonist of Iain Banks’s debut, *The Wasp Factory*, published in 1984. Not only can Frank’s struggle to become ‘a complete man’ be read as a study in biology and physiology. It can also be read as a story about the psychology of masculinity in crisis. At 16, Frank is approaching the age of manhood and yet, much to his frustration, his body is nowhere near the male ideal. The reason for his effeminacy – so his father has explained – is that the family dog bit off his genitals when he was only a boy. Ever since this violent castration, Frank has lived on a small island off the West Coast of Scotland, i.e. cut off from society’s mainland. He has preferred to live there in ultimate emasculation, i.e. with no one but his domineering father, “no birth certificate, no National Insurance Number, nothing to say I’m alive or have ever existed... for my own good reasons; fear – oh, yes, I admit it – and a need for reassurance and safety in a world

which just so happened to treat me very cruelly at an age before I had any real chance of affecting it” (Banks 1984: 13-14/136). Yet in the spirit of full disclosure that animates his many dark flashbacks, he admits that he has spent the intervening years doing his best – or worst – to affect said cruel world. For instance, to avenge himself and make his mark on the natural world, he has bombed the island, killed its wildlife in the triple digits, and filled a bunker with the severed heads of sacrificed animals. As for the social world, he has killed three of his relatives. “That’s my score to date. Three. I haven’t killed anybody for years, and don’t intend to ever again. It was just a stage I was going through” (Banks 1984: 42). So, even prior to the novel’s dramatic action, Horsley’s theory of noir is illustrated: “The noir preoccupation with the undermining of identity and with the communication of a marginalised character’s narrative is central.” And once the action starts, “The ‘marginal man’ theme is turned into an even more explicit examination of prejudice and exclusion” (Horsley 2009: 171). Frank’s dangerously unstable older brother calls to inform him of his escape from a mental hospital, so Frank spends the remainder of the novel in anxious anticipation of his arrival, fearing a power shift, flashing back to his past crimes, and fortifying the island’s defences along with his sense of exclusion, all of which offers several opportunities to examine not only other people’s prejudices against Frank but also Frank’s prejudice of masculinity. To Frank, masculinity is about the survival of the nastiest, and, despite not yet being a man, he plays the role to perfection. This, as Carl D. Malmgren observes, “calls in question ideas of innate goodness or the essential Self and invites readers to experience vicariously various forms of psychopathology” (Malmgren 1997: 131).

For the most part, it lets us experience a spirit of malevolence which survives its practical exertion. Frank is like William Hazlitt in that he has found lasting pleasure in his hatred and is energised by it, so much so that – but for the accident of birth – he could have inspired Hazlitt’s resolution of 1826, “that there is a secret affinity, a hankering after evil in the human mind, and that it takes a perverse, but a fortunate delight in mischief, since it is a never-failing source of satisfaction” (Hazlitt 1970: 398). Throughout his lonely life, Frank has treated human beings in general, and women in particular, with a mystic horror and superstitious hatred which most sane people reserve for snakes and spiders, but for all his diverting torture games and lord-of-the-flies-megalomania, Frank’s story is, ultimately, about coming to terms with the cause of his crisis, the accident of birth. As he eventually discovers, Frank was not born Francis, but Frances. His male identity is a lie concocted by his eccentric father, who has secretly been treating him with male hormones ever since his supposed canine castration, which turns out to be another lie in his father’s experiment to banish femininity from the island. Having been abandoned by his mother at birth, and having never had his birth officially registered, Frank has never attended school. Thus, with weak biological and zero social developmental markers, he has created his own maturity rituals and rites of passage to escape a life of perpetual childhood. Ironically, he has built and burst countless dams in an unconscious cycle of protest against repression, yet rather than leave, he lives in his head as “unchallenged lord of the island and the lands about it”

(Banks 1984: 139). More ironically still, several years ago his father gave him *The Tin Drum*, which, if only he had read it, may have let him prevent his predicament by studying that of Oskar Matzerath, the man-child whose refusal to mature led to criminality. Yet Frank, too, rejects adult guidance and, with the only potency at his command, murders three children before either can become the one thing he can never become, an adult. Indeed, Frank even reinforces his rejection of growing up by picking, as his only friend, a dwarf. Perhaps the greatest irony of *The Wasp Factory*, however, is that Frank, having grown fond of the childish primitivism and superstition represented by the titular wasp factory, a homemade oracle, loses himself in puerile soldier games and so confuses manliness with machismo. Hence, he acts like a macho, not a man, when he kills weak relatives, alienates his surviving family, and understands only when his actions lead to the emasculating defeat of his father and brother that, unmanned, he has tried all his life to out-man all those around him, “a small image of the ruthless soldier-hero almost all I’ve ever seen or read seems to pay strict homage to... talk about penis envy” (Banks 1984: 183).

Barry Graham – *The Book of Man*

Yet despite the predominance of hate, of egomaniacs with twisted minds who loudly beat their chests, attack others, and destroy themselves, noir also leaves room for the opposite, for straightforward, quiet love. In fact, as Barry Graham poignantly demonstrates in *The Book of Man*, published in 1995, it is not merely possible for a noir novel to be a love story, but the potential to be alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating is far greater in love than it is in hate. This is the story of Michael Illingworth, a Glaswegian writer who has recently died of AIDS at 35. At least that is what the story’s narrator, Kevin Previn, believes when he returns to Glasgow to research a documentary about his old friend. Yet as he revisits their shared past to look beyond Mike’s obituary – which does not reveal the man, only the memory that “His best and most original work was the despairing novel *The Book of Man*, with its harrowing accounts of drug abuse and urban alienation” (Graham 1995: 7) – Kevin comes to see that this is his story. It is about Kevin coming to terms with having needed Mike to find himself, with having needed to leave his friend behind so as not to lose himself in the service of Mike’s needs, and with having needed to confront the little boy inside him after years of running from his childhood. It is about the difference between need and love. Walking around the third world districts of Glasgow, and talking to its forlorn and forgotten inhabitants, Kevin suddenly sees this difference everywhere, yet it hits him the hardest when he revisits his friendship with Mike and his courtship with Helene, both of whom needed heroin more than they loved him. Having always accepted this unquestioningly, Kevin observes that “Watching someone fix is like watching someone wank” (Graham 1995: 27). Fascinating at first, it can soon leave the observer feeling self-conscious, sordid, and sad. Eventually, he remembers, he could no longer take the loneliness of living among the permanently self-absorbed, yet although no one noticed, never mind prevented, his mental breakdown, it is he who feels guilty,

mainly because he lost it quietly, and while he nursed his existential jaundice in a psychiatric hospital, he left Helene, a woman suffering from chronic depression and heroin addiction, in charge of David, their infant son. As he remembers ruefully, “What model parents for David we must have been – Helene out of it on junk most of the time, me almost as much of a child as he was” (Graham 1995: 129). But there is another, underlying reason for the guilt Kevin feels for this entire period of his life. By leaving Glasgow to save his son along with his sanity, he withdrew from people who needed him, and now the man dearest to him has died because he was deserted when he most needed a friend: “Mike, I am so sorry” (Graham 1995: 79).

What makes this a love story is that the protagonists’ lives are defined by decisions made in love. What makes this a noir love story is that although Kevin makes these life defining decisions in love, they could hardly lead to disappointment, despair, and death any faster if he made them all in hate. Initially, to help Mike find happiness by channelling his self-destructive energy, he decides to read, discuss, and reread his novels in countless drafts, yet in doing so he encourages Mike’s obsessiveness, exhausts himself, and ends up worn-out to the point of neglecting his responsibilities as a family man. Later, to help Mike regain his health by stemming his obsessiveness, and thus the heroin that fuels it, Kevin decides not only to stop discussing his work in progress but also to stop talking to him entirely, yet in doing so he does not free Mike from his addiction. He just makes him feel alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating, so when Mike dies of AIDS, Kevin has to assume that he contracted the virus because he no longer cared to take precautions, be it in his communal drug use or in his casual sex. The bitter irony of this failure to help is that all Kevin “ever felt for him was unmitigated love” (Graham 1995: 6), yet it seems to have been a perceived withdrawal of love, not an abuse of heroin, that killed Mike. Much as he regrets it, Kevin had “to get out of this scene, this whole context” (Graham 1995: 143), if only to become a functional father and act in the spirit of the novel’s title. Having a child, he finally had to close the book on his own childhood and start acting like a man, which to him is about doing what you know is for the best, even when it does not make you feel good. Perhaps the best example of this comes – symbolically enough – at the end of *The Book of Man*. Having avoided a confrontation with his parents ever since they made him feel unwanted as a child, he visits them to find closure but instead finds that his mother has died, that his father has gone blind, and that he himself no longer needs justifications of family history. What he needs now is forgiveness, not from his dead or desensitised parents, but from the scared little boy he locked up inside himself, and when he admits this to himself, a vision of the boy comes to him, holds him crying in his arms, and finally releases him from himself. So, while *The Book of Man* by Mike Illingworth concludes that “Life is only varying degrees of suffering” (Graham 1995: 28), there is no need for the word ‘only’ in *The Book of Man* by Barry Graham. As Kevin’s heart-rending but on-going regeneration illustrates, life in Graham’s book is varying degrees of suffering, but for those who embrace their vulnerability, even a noir life has a silver lining.

Duncan McLean – *Bunker Man*

That, however, is very much an exception. Typically, the prospects of noir protagonists are black. After all, typically, noir protagonists do not embrace their vulnerability. They are embarrassed by it, and as Duncan McLean shows in *Bunker Man*, published in 1995, the typical result is *degeneration*, not *regeneration*. The noir protagonist in question is Rob Catto, a man who, when we first meet him, is settling into married life and his new job as head janitor in a school in the North East of Scotland, yet his seemingly stable sense of self dissolves inexorably, rather like his name does when his wife, Karen, writes it in the sand on a romantic walk along the beach and he watches the tide wash it away. Reacting to his self-destructive impulses as though they, too, were natural forces beyond his control, Rob starts seeing this problem everywhere. In his private life, he is soon distressed by his suspicion that Karen “had things on her mind he didn’t know about, he couldn’t control” (McLean 1995: 91), and though he is not aware of it, his instinctive response is precisely what he will later accuse her of, i.e. that “She wants to have you, to control you, she wants to rule your life. And if she can’t do that, she’s going to wreck it instead” (McLean 1995: 288). So, when he cannot control Karen’s social life, he insults her friends, demeans her parents, and eventually even goads someone into raping her. Meanwhile, his emotional and physical violence is escalating at a similar rate in his professional life, where the mere report of a strange man trespassing on the school premises triggers his control issues, a porn magazine which is traced back to a fourteen-year old, female pupil arouses his moral outrage, and an illicit store room blowjob from the same girl turns into a full-blown affair the very next day. Soon, he is taking advantage of the girl’s need for affection to act out his most depraved sex fantasies, and, unlike most hardcore pornographers, McLean usually provides in-depth physical descriptions. Furthermore, by focusing on his protagonists’ physical performances he keeps their feelings sketchy, and this forces the reader, as Gore Vidal puts it, “to draw upon personal experience in order to fill in the details, thereby achieving one of the ends of all literary art, that of making the reader collaborator” (Vidal 2007: 330). So, readers who do not share Rob’s fetishes may experience two forms of disgust: one, a visceral disgust, as when he tells his mistress that he will push a Mars bar up her anus and then “lie there, gobbling it up, chewing it inch by inch, eating every last bit as it slides out your arsehole” (McLean 1995: 153). And two, a moral disgust, as when he reminds her of their power dynamic: “You’ve a reputation, Sandra Burnett. Me, I’ve got a flawless record, twelve years’ worth at two schools. Nobody would believe your lies” (McLean 1995: 77).

Now, most readers will find Rob rather alienating, be it because they condemn violence on principle, or because, as Mark Alfano points out, “when people feel the emotion of disgust they are more inclined to describe someone’s actions as blameworthy or punishable” (Alfano 2010: 47). However, only two years prior to the publication of *Bunker Man*, John Major, the Prime Minister of the time, had famously proclaimed that “Society needs to condemn a little more and understand a little less”

(Major 1993: 1), and McLean makes Rob paraphrase this conservative attitude on several occasions, as when Rob, with tears of righteousness in his eyes, proclaims that feminists, lesbians, drug pushers, and perverts alike merit condemnation: “We can’t pussyfoot around trying to see their point of view, to understand their sad fucking emotional problems. Look at the bastards. Judge them right or wrong. Give them a fair trial, then fucking condemn them. Stamp on them. Wipe them out! It’s the only answer. Rid the planet of the cunts.” Yet rather than point out Rob’s double standard in her response, his wife answers, “You need help” (McLean 1995: 248), and most readers are likely to agree with her, be it because they are alarmed by the abusive tone, the right-wing rhetoric, or the implication that this, ultimately, is the can of worms Major opened, for there is a serious problem with public moralism. The grandstanding moralist’s stated love of virtue rarely denotes a wish to address, let alone amend, personal faults. Instead, moralists like Rob atone for their obstinate adherence to their personal faults with the most virulent intolerance of other people’s human frailties. And when this is not reigned in, they can become raging radicals, or as Karen puts it in Rob’s case, “Something nasty’s got into you, you never used to be like that” (McLean 1995: 181). The reason he is now like that, a nasty hypocrite, is that Rob has for a long time now been demonising others for what he most detests about himself, and ever since he became conscious of all his irrational projecting, his conscience has required ever more incensed reassurance of his moral integrity. In other words, “Rob was beginning to feel guilty. He didn’t like the feeling.” And to avoid finding fault with himself he focuses his moralism on others, as when he deals with his guilt about his adultery by convincing himself that Karen has a secret lover and telling himself that if he “ever found out who it was he’d kill the cunt, he’d smash his head in! Aye, and be proud of it: that kind of cheating dirty cunt deserved everything he got! As for Karen, well, she would deserve everything she got too” (McLean 1995: 211/49). In a truly noir final scene, this radical moralism at last takes full control as Rob bullies the Bunker Man, a childlike innocent, into raping Karen so he can run in and smash his head in. Aye, and be proud of it.

Irvine Welsh – *Filth*

What this type of noir comes down to is man’s defeat by the very thing he most detests about himself, and while McLean seems to have taken this to the extreme, Irvine Welsh took it even further in *Filth*, published in 1998. This is the story of a powerful man who becomes so controlled by his self-hatred, he ends up killing himself, yet even though this inevitable conclusion becomes increasingly desirable, it is unexpectedly moving, for it comes at just the moment when he no longer seems worth hating. The man in question is a policeman, an Edinburgh Detective Inspector by name of Bruce Robertson, who admits he is “consumed by an overwhelming urge to be cruel... The impulse to hurt and control, in order to try and fill the void inside.” As he will eventually understand, the reason for all this is that “We hate ourselves for being unable to be other than what we are. Unable to be better” (Welsh 1998: 118/389/392). Now, one way to read this, and one way to explain why Bruce often seems a bit grand,

is that he thinks about himself in the royal 'we', and if this reading seems to ignore his proletarianism, it may be worth remembering just how reminiscent the name Bruce Robertson is of Robert the Bruce, also known as Robert I who famously reigned over an internally divided Scotland from 1306 to 1329. In this reading, the fact that Bruce Robertson has been elected the local Police Union Representative – a schizophrenic who stands for “the guiding principle of destroying without overtly making enemies. The corporate way” (Welsh 1998: 221) – implies that in modern-day Scotland we hate ourselves for being unable to be other than what we are, unable to be better than our internal divisions. Then again, Welsh would not be Welsh if he did not accompany such grand critique with some ingenious satire. Bruce has a tapeworm, and not only can this tapeworm talk but it does so without Bruce's knowledge, literally talking over Bruce's first-person narrative in soliloquies that are printed in bold over the text. This guttural voiceover tells the odd anecdote about traumas Bruce suffered in his formative years, and the deeper the tapeworm probes the identity of its host, the more it fills 'the void inside' of Bruce, so the 'we' in the statement above may be referring to the divided self that is Bruce and his tapeworm. In this reading, the fact that Bruce gets the tapeworm because he is defiantly uneducated about his diet and then continues to abuse his body with fast-food and drugs because he simply cannot help himself, that may imply that 'we', the people of the Scottish proletariat whom Bruce cannot help but represent, hate ourselves for being unable to be other than what we are, unable to be better than our self-abuse. As the tapeworm admits, “This is the only real way I can interact with the environment I am in” (Welsh 1998: 70).

In another reading, the tapeworm symbolises a self-destructive lad culture that is at risk of destroying the police service from within. Officially, Bruce is in charge of a high-profile murder investigation, but unofficially, he is playing what he calls 'the games' to secure promotion to Detective Inspector, and these games – spiteful sabotage of the competition – distract both him and his team from the case. However, while his methods are controversial, his general meanness turns out to be all too common, for most of the men on the force are happy to distract themselves from the job with chauvinistic trivia, not just because this particular victim is black, but because their general attitude to criminals is that “their antics mean newspaper headlines, which means big-time OT and a cry for extra polis resources. That's the way it works” (Welsh 1998: 76). So, rather than follow several leads on a mystery woman, allegedly the last person to have seen the victim alive, they compete with each other by doing drink, drugs, and most depravities known to man. Soon, the book reads like one big penis measuring contest, first metaphorically and then literally, for Bruce has them all photocopy their penises in a party game, and, as if to capture his philosophy in one image, he uses the enlarge function and wins by cheating. Moreover, Bruce's philosophy is that “Life is one big competition” (Welsh 1998: 195), and when society is so tolerant of attacks on meritocracy that it lowers standards in the spirit of equal treatment, the able and ambitious simply have to practice ruthlessness. Hence, Bruce neither makes apologies, nor does he hold himself to account for being a bigot and a bully, yet rather than judge him for this,

Welsh sends in the tapeworm. Thus, we learn that Bruce is the son of a man he only calls ‘The Beast’, a now imprisoned sex offender who raped Bruce’s mother and gave him his mental health problems: anxiety attacks, depression, and schizophrenia. We learn that this made Bruce an outsider in the mining community of his childhood, and we learn that he has tried to forget about this time and place of dark memories ever since he accidentally got his stepbrother killed in a mine and, in the process, became an outcast for life. Next, we learn that his first girlfriend died in another accident he caused, that his philandering is a release valve for his many unprocessed emotions and unwholesome desires, and that his wife and daughter have recently left him, both making accusations of domestic abuse. Finally, we learn that he has since been cross-dressing to sustain the illusion of familial happiness, that, when dressed as a woman, he killed a man he mistakenly suspected of cuckolding him, and that, in doing so, he became the mystery woman everyone has been looking for. So, when he kills himself, we share his unsentimentally sad and uncompromisingly noir realisation that dying alone is horrible, but no worse than living alone.

Ray Banks – *Beast of Burden*

When such a last-minute realisation concludes a life-long process of soul-destroying disillusionment, something profound can change in the way we read the noir protagonist’s death. The prior conviction that his death will not be mourned, steadily reinforced until just a moment ago, now seems heartless, and as we appreciate the human potential for change through the renunciation of one’s dark nature, most of us will come to see the departed in a much warmer light, perhaps even empathise with him. Now, this works best when his disillusionment and death are not delivered by some deus ex machina, but when they arrive unexpectedly with what, in hindsight, turns out to be psychological necessity – i.e. when his conscience finally catches up with him – and among Scotland’s contemporary noirists, nobody does this better than Ray Banks. Perhaps the best example of this is *Beast of Burden*, published in 2009 as the last of four novels about long-suffering Private Investigator Callum Innes. Originally from Edinburgh, Cal started out as an unlicensed PI in Manchester in *Saturday’s Child*, newly out of prison and entirely out of his depth in the world of his client, gang-lord Morris Tiernan. Even then, Cal was what Horsley calls “the antithesis of the iconic private eye – morally deficient, lacking in all effective agency and representing traumatized masculinity at its most vulnerable” (Horsley 2010: 39), but as he comes full circle in *Beast of Burden*, once again working for Tiernan, Cal is most unlike the iconic private eye in that he is obviously carrying the burden of his past. Having suffered a stroke, his face is set in a partial but permanent smirk and he limps along on a cane, so he can neither wise-crack his way out of a fight nor fight his way out of his predatory environment. To stay one step ahead anyway, Cal has to hustle, and his moral compromises are far from attractive, for he is nowhere near the genre-typical, boozed and sexed up private dick. Cal is an impotent cripple, a broken man who was raped in prison and has since become addicted to painkillers. Yet this physical

infirmity only sets Cal apart from most fictional PIs. What sets him apart from most noir protagonists, both in and beyond Scotland, is the emotional integrity of Banks's writing. Banks writes close up, always. In Cal's case, this means not only that he writes in the first person and in the present tense, but also that he lets us see how Cal feels in the way he talks, in his mood sensitive speech rhythm. Indeed, to put it in Naremore's words, "This rhythm is meant to seem more instinctive than eloquent. It is a transparent language, of the sort that wants to cut through the crap and get down to truths so basic to the culture that they seem like natural laws" (Naremore 1983: 50). This instinctive, straight, and hard rhythm beats behind the story with a bare-knuckled rawness like a blues bar in the bass.

Meanwhile, the story reinforces this blues rhythm as it follows a pattern of repetition with variation. As in his first case, Cal is hired by Morris Tiernan and ends up in trouble because of Tiernan's son, Mo, but this time Mo is not competing with Cal as an amateur PI. This time, Mo has gone missing, and Cal gets into trouble with Tiernan Senior because he took the job, not for money, but for payback. After all, as in his first case, Cal's brother re-enters his life because he struggles with drug addiction, but this time the brother dies, and Cal blames his dealer, Tiernan, so he takes the job to get revenge. As he puts it, "These people fucked my life. They deserve everything they get" (Banks 2009: 253). Thus, as in his first case, his ever more reactive attempts to retain control repeatedly lead to violence, but this time they do so because, as Horsley observes, "The revenge plot, with its central action of exposing and scourging, requires a protagonist who strips off the civilised part of himself and accepts a reduction to a primitive or existential state in which he is capable of the violence required to bring down or reduce the transgressor" (Horsley 2009: 112). Thus, when a punch-drunk Cal finds Mo dead, he beats up the corpse to make it look like Mo was killed in a family feud by Tiernan's daughter, Alison. As in his first case, there is a lasting uncertainty about the consequences of Cal's risk-taking, for Banks again challenges the PI's typical sense of individual autonomy, objectivity, and authority, but this time, when he splits the novel's narrative perspective between two first-person points of view, he does not let Mo tell his story and thus clarify how he died. Instead, he lets Detective Iain Donkin, also known as 'Donkey', talk about the investigation and his unwavering conviction that Cal is guilty. Now, Donkey does pursue Cal long after he is suspended from duty on a charge of police brutality, but he is not really after the truth. In contrast to typical PI fiction in which, as Maurizio Ascari says, "the quest for 'truth' and for a 'transcendental meaning' is still a prime motive" (Ascari 2007: 12), Cal and Donkey are both driven by a dark and desperate need to convince everybody that their story, and their story alone, is the truth. All along, the two slowly but surely become more alike one another, not only because they both behave like the titular beast of burden, but also because they both back their way into dramatic disillusionment. The difference is that when Donkey discovers that he was not only wrong about Cal but that his police brutality has cost him his career, he seeks solace in cynicism. When Cal discovers that he was wrong to underestimate Tiernan and that his desire to protect Mo's murderer with a false confession will cost him his life, he confesses anyway, for he seeks redemption.

Liam McIlvanney – *All the Colours of the Town*

Thus, on the very rare occasion that a noir protagonist embarks upon a journey of self-destruction but, to his and his reader's surprise, rises above dark instincts, loves another more than he hates himself, and demonstrates this transformation by way of self-sacrifice, we discover that, even in Scottish noir, there is room for redemption. Of course, as Liam McIlvanney shows in *All the Colours of the Town*, published in 2009, not even a redeemed noir protagonist should ever look forward to a bright future. McIlvanney shows this in two cases when Gerry Conway, a political journalist working in Glasgow, follows a lead on Peter Lyons, Scotland's Justice Minister, who, according to an anonymous tipoff, had connections to loyalist paramilitaries in the early 1980s. The two have since developed a friendly, mutually beneficial relationship and Conway is twice conflicted about digging up dirt on Lyons. Firstly, he knows that Lyons is the First Minister in waiting and will make him his media conduit. Secondly, he knows that Lyons, whether or not he was bad in the past, has been good for Scotland. "To hear some of his acolytes talk, he had saved the new Parliament from dying of embarrassment" (McIlvanney 2009: 81). On the other hand, he knows that "In this part of Scotland, sectarianism sold. It was better than sex." And, speaking as a jaded journalist, he adds, "I wanted to know if a fact, properly primed and planted, could still make a difference" (McIlvanney 2009: 79/128). Thus, Conway follows the story to Northern Ireland, where his encounter with the country's sectarianism, both past and present, soon makes him self-consciously explore Scotland's part in the Troubles, starting with his own tribal memories of growing up sheltered yet posturing as one of the oppressed. Now as then, he says, "Across the West of Scotland, in the clubs and lodges, the stadiums and bars, people missed the Troubles... There is something narcotic in watching a war unfold on your doorstep, knowing all the while it can't harm you" (McIlvanney 2009: 131). Realising that men like Lyons and, he is ashamed to admit, men like him hijacked an historical cause without suffering the consequences, he is emboldened by the thought of making a high-profile example of Lyons, only to realise that he is, once again, guilty of the same charge. While he is working for a paper which, to increase circulation, will print his story because it promises to titillate readers with a scandalous, yet as ever safe, exposé, his contacts in Belfast risk their lives every day by reporting the mundane reality of sectarian murder. "That's what they do here... They shoot people dead for telling the truth" (McIlvanney 2009: 153). Sobered by these realisations, his motive changes, he does the job out of a sense of historic duty, and, as a Catholic in enemy territory, he risks his life by scratching the cosmopolitan surface of Belfast, "the foreign city with its repertoire of hurt" (McIlvanney 2009: 200).

Thus, McIlvanney locates Conway's journey of enlightenment in the larger context of what Naremore calls "the Dark City, a literary topos inherited from the nineteenth century" (Naremore 2008: 44). With an eye for the telling detail and an ear for the coded messages of the pathologically suspicious – which together indicate a sensibility trained in cultural studies as much as in classical poetry –

Conway composes a travelogue of a community that, despite the peace process, remains divided, primarily because of the economic disparities between those who paid for living here with the lives of family members and those who are now paid EU development money to lay off their murderous trade. Heightening this tension is the sense that the city guards its past because, for some, it is the present. For some, as Conway discovers when his probing questions are eventually answered with a beating, the Troubles are far from over. So, while Belfast may appear to be reminiscent of “an older Glasgow, a darker, truer city before the stone-cleaning and the logos, Princes Square and the City of Culture,” he realises that, “For all the city’s hard-man swagger, its razor kings and ice-cream murders, Glasgow wasn’t Belfast. A life meant something in Glasgow, a death mattered, in a way it didn’t here” (McIlvanney 2009: 33/122). And what this contrast clarifies is that, for all their hard-man swagger, Scots like Lyons will eventually walk away from paramilitary groups like the Ulster Volunteer Force, for even if their own conscience is untroubled by their armed campaign, they know that, if found out, they would be judged harshly at home. Conway understands that Lyons only left the UVF because, for those with political ambition in Scotland, association with terrorism in Ireland is career suicide, yet before Conway links Lyons to the Troubles, McIlvanney lingers on Conway’s family troubles. Now, readers of political thrillers may see these domestic scenes as unnecessarily retarding elements, the private indulgence of a young father and debut author, but this is more than just a political thriller. It is also a noir novel, and by contrasting the political drama with the private anxiety of a man whose failed marriage has made him doubt his judgment as much as his fitness to serve as a role model, these domestic scenes allow for a fuller appreciation of the complexity of the novel’s central theme: the inter-generational enterprise that is political Devolution. Inevitably, McIlvanney subtly suggests, such an enterprise is in part determined by people as compromised and wanting as the nations for which they fight. And to demonstrate the difficulty of decision making when there are no clear lines, be it in political or personal affairs, he rewrites the bright future for which both men seemed destined. Lyons is publicly disgraced, and Conway, who discovers too late that he has abetted a criminal conspiracy to remove the Justice Minister, is fired. Thus, rather than make Scotland a better place, they merely change a few hierarchies in Glasgow’s underworld.

Synopsis

This is not the stuff of Tartan Noir, the mainstream crime fiction that Ian Rankin first named and then, with the help of internationally bestselling police novelists like Val McDermid and Stuart MacBride, associated with Scotland. First of all, only four of the above ten noirists write about police detectives, and not one of them respects the police novel's central genre conventions: the hassled but heroic cops, the focus on police procedures, and the restoration of order. But their subversion goes even further. None of them agrees with Rankin – who has nonetheless been feted as the 'King of Tartan Noir' – that the legal, political, and social systems which govern Scotland are, ultimately, worth defending. Indeed, as the four examples above have shown, cops in Scottish noir are unlike cops in Tartan Noir, i.e. mainstream Scottish crime fiction, who valiantly bend or even break a few laws to preserve order. Few cops in Scottish noir have such drive for the simple reason that there is no real order to preserve. As Ray Banks illustrates by writing about a rogue cop who gets disoriented amid gangland crime, there are only the many ever-shifting hierarchies of more or less visible centres of unofficial power. And unlike cops in Tartan Noir, who typically have some minor flaws which they manage heroically, cops in Scottish noir have major flaws which they cannot manage, and the reason for this, once again, is simple. As William McIlvanney illustrates by writing about a cop who, defeated by his flaws, makes decisions that cause several brutal deaths, there are no heroes in Scottish noir, just protagonists. Yet as I hope to have shown, the greatest difference between the cops in Tartan Noir and those in Scottish noir is that the latter rarely care about laws or flaws, never mind the solution of a crime, because none of that can command their attention for very long. As Irvine Welsh illustrates by writing about a cop who spends as little time examining criminals as he spends examining his conscience, cops in Scottish noir tend to spend most of their time in somebody's ceaseless struggle for survival, and it is usually their own. As for the few occasions upon which cops are not themselves struggling – as when Hugh C. Rae writes about two who arrest a man locked into a struggle of animal violence – there is no happy end either, no conservative notion that all is well now that order has been restored, for though they restore a semblance of order, they do so at a personal loss that is deeply disturbing. Thus, these four noirists have more in common than the fact that their studies of self-destruction and its collateral damage are in effect studies of Scotland's societies and fragments of its personality, examined through the lens of a police investigation. They also employ a communal *modus operandi* – a synthesis of popular fictions about policing which they subvert by creating an often seriocomic irony between mass image and real life.

Yet the difference between Tartan Noir and Scottish noir goes beyond such technical differences between police novels – even the relatively dark and gritty ones popularised by Rankin, McDermid, and MacBride – and noir novels that adapt and subvert a few of the police novel’s genre conventions. As every one of the ten novels discussed above demonstrates – whether or not it is about the police – Scottish noir is not dark and gritty in the sense in which even the darkest and grittiest Tartan Noir is. Even in such Tartan Noir – the less famous type that I have discussed in the three previous chapters – dark and gritty denotes a social and psychological realism that is, to a varying but significant extent, sanitised for public consumption. Some of its protagonists do struggle economically and emotionally, but their worst struggles are nowhere near as deeply disturbing as those dramatised in Scottish noir, where protagonists live beyond the reach of our support systems and can rarely even afford the hope of being rehabilitated by novel’s end. They live in the third world that exists in the shadow of the first, and they take for granted depths of desperation and depravity that most of us will consider dreadful. This is not just darker and grittier than Tartan Noir but more extreme, for it shows the world as it is, not as it has to be for the hero’s flaws to be contained by the establishment for which he or she works, for the system to seem strained but serviceable, and for the status quo to seem worthy of preservation. However, as the above examples have shown, this does not mean that all Scottish noir is proletarian. In fact, only in the novels of Barry Graham and Ray Banks does capitalism seem to be a crime, perhaps even the root cause of all crimes other than crimes of passion. Yet in the other eight novels, Scottish noir is just as subversive without being proletarian, because it tells the truth about Scotland, about its ordinary madness of life, which is to say it shatters the mainstream notion of what is normal. It shows that most people who are forced to suffer will pass on their suffering and/or fall apart. Thus, it attacks the exculpatory belief which attracts readers to Tartan Noir just as it attracts them to tragedy, the belief that suffering inspires some moral nobility. In the real world, so Scottish noir suggests, suffering rarely produces saints. In the real world, suffering generally just produces more suffering, and in Scottish noir, there is no escaping this, not into the reader-absolving whitewash of a happy end, not into the scapegoating of a black sheep, and not into crime fiction’s often sentimental promise that, the plot notwithstanding, no likeable protagonist was lastingly damaged in the making of this novel. Instead, all its protagonists have to live with the soul-destroying consequences of their bad decisions, and we have to live with the thought that they live among us.

After all, even though the criminals in these novels typically act like animals, they are rarely arrested, and it is almost as rare that one of them is otherwise prevented from future acts of (self-) destruction. In fact, out of the above ten examples, Rae is the only one who eventually has his criminal arrested. None of the other nine noirists shares this conservative vision of a world in which cops are good, criminals bad, and readers reassured that the former will terminate the transgressions of the latter. William McIlvanney does agree with Rae’s premise that most cops are morally superior to criminals, but he has a less conventional view of criminals some of whom have an uncompromising moral code,

and so it is not his detective who deals with his main transgressor by enforcing the letter of the law, i.e. by arresting him, but two gang-lords who intervene by enforcing the spirit of a stricter, moral law, i.e. by executing him. The only other main transgressor who is prevented from future acts of (self-) destruction is that of Irvine Welsh, but in his case the method of prevention is suicide, not arrest. Disturbingly, the conclusion thus implies, other cops like him get away with shocking transgressions, for even though his conduct was more reprehensible than that of the criminals he was paid to arrest, he was neither arrested himself nor sacked. His only punishment was that he did not get a promotion. And as I have shown above, this disturbing implication is created by eight out of ten Scottish noirists. Even Duncan McLean's transgressor, who is caught in the act by his wife, transgresses with impunity, for by the end of the novel neither the police nor the public have become aware of his crimes, and, judging by his past ruthlessness, he will not let his wife get in the way of future transgressions. Similarly, Ray Banks's main transgressor will let neither the police nor the one witness who might testify against him get in the way of future transgressions, yet rather than leave room for ambiguity, he proves his impunity by having the witness killed even though he is under police surveillance. Likewise, Liam McIlvanney's main transgressor sets his sights on an unsuspecting persona non grata, has him removed by letting others do the dirty work, and takes it for granted that he gets away with it, so much routine does he have in transgressing with impunity. As for those with less routine, they, too, get away with breaking the rules, for no matter how many they break, they always respect at least one: the rule of the jungle. Indeed, different though their situations are, the transgressors of Barry Graham, Gordon Williams, Alexander Trocchi, and Iain Banks are like those with more routine when they take care of their personal interests. On those defining occasions, they all ruthlessly take what they want, be it hard drugs or harder actions, another man's wife or another man's life.

There is, then, a trend in Scottish noir that runs counter to its reputation, a trend toward the instinctive, a male fascination with the nature of animalism and its power to turn ordinary people into predators. To those who consider Ian Rankin the King and William McIlvanney the Godfather of Tartan Noir, this will come as a surprise. Certainly, both have written about protagonists who act like predators, but neither is known for letting that set the mood of his work, Rankin because he does not write noir, and McIlvanney because he has only done so once, in perhaps the least known of his Laidlaw novels. But perhaps more importantly, those who have most defined Scottish noir – and are far less reputed – have made this trend run counter to just about everything the label 'Tartan Noir' denotes and, indeed, to everything it connotes when applied to some of the writing discussed in previous chapters. See, apart from its country of origin, Scottish noir has nothing in common with a tartan, even a dark one. First of all, the country's noirists are neither as common a sight nor as commodified as are its tartans. Secondly, tartans are patterns made by criss-crossed horizontal and vertical bands in multiple colours, and, unlike each of the novels discussed above, they are designed with an easily discernible regularity, for their elements repeat themselves in a predictable manner that is observable without much analysis.

What is more, these patterns are only visible because even the darkest tartan has at least two colours, so the notion of a black tartan is chromatically impossible and the term ‘Tartan Noir’ an oxymoron. As for its figurative meaning, in relation to Scotland’s literature of transgression tartan is misleading. It creates the false impression that the literature, like the pattern that is worn by both men and women, is unisex, i.e. that it is written in similar numbers by men and women, about men and women. Further, that it is defined by clear contrasts between light and dark, clear distinctions between right and wrong, and clear-cut categories of guilt and innocence. Typically, however, the Scottish noirist is male, focuses mainly on male protagonist and male issues, and, as Naremore observes, does not write about “guilt and innocence, or even about professional ethics, but about what he regards as a bewildering, predatory struggle beneath civilisation” (Naremore 1983: 64). That is Scottish noir’s defining trend, so while the tartan label is well suited to the more colourful writing discussed in previous chapters – the kind that conforms both to easily discernible genre conventions and to clear-cut moral categories – it ill befits the country’s noir. Now, is that a result of me over-analysing a clichéd moniker which, some will say, is no more than a marketing label? Perhaps so, but since it has also, and often falsely, been used as a genre label, it has created an inaccurate sense of a national literature without such help, so let’s distinguish between Tartan and Scottish noir.

A Comparative Reading of Two Scottish Noir Novels: Helen FitzGerald's *Bloody Women* and Allan Guthrie's *Slammer*

A literature like Scottish noir is hard to know, because so much has been labelled 'Tartan Noir', which is a sort of friendly caricature that hides the country's actual noir like a disguise. For most, Tartan noir has come to be associated with the work of Ian Rankin and William McIlvanney, that is, good cops, bad criminals, a correction system which, though often strained, is ultimately serviceable, and a status quo that is worthy of heroic efforts in one man's serialised struggle for its preservation. Typically, this is nowadays underpinned by what in the mainstream passes for gritty social realism, and since this is often mistaken for a definition of noir, it is by no means safe to assume that, underneath the Tartan Noir label, a piece of writing is indeed noir. Instead, it would seem to be advisable to peel off the label so as to get a glimpse of the unsuspected noir I so vividly have in mind. I refer to a literature that is currently perhaps best represented by Helen FitzGerald and Allan Guthrie, a literature not to be described wholly or mainly by the familiar adjectives, gritty, dark, and violent, but rather as one combining the traits literary criticism notes in the most deeply disturbing of books, books about people who are so alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating, they behave like animals. Yet after writing about such people for almost ten years, FitzGerald and Guthrie are now cult writers, which goes to show that rather few of Tartan Noir's many fans are interested in Scotland's actual noir, and this despite the early endorsement of none other than Rankin, the so-called 'King of Tartan Noir', who in 2004 urged his audience at the Edinburgh International Book Festival to read Guthrie's debut: "You should seek him out and buy his book" (Rankin 2004: 1). Seven years later, Brian Lindenmuth, a renowned critic and reviewer of crime fiction, extended this endorsement to FitzGerald when he made the memorable comment that one of her novels was "like an Allan Guthrie novel with ovaries" (Lindenmuth 2011: 1). Now, before I extend this comparison to two later novels by the same writers, it is worth noting that Lindenmuth's anatomical image ably illustrates the animalism of Scottish noir, its focus on the animal element in human psychology and interaction which, under stress, takes over, and nowhere is this more intimately and disturbingly examined than in *Bloody Women* and *Slammer*, both published in 2009. What is more, both are pervaded by the fear that most defines Scottish noir, an inherent fear of a particular moment which McIlvanney, the so-called 'Godfather of Tartan Noir', has encapsulated in an anecdote about football, Billy Bremner, and Alan Sharp: "When Billy Bremner

failed to score and take us to the next level, he was down on his knees with his face buried in his hands, and Alan said: ‘I know that moment. It’s a Scottish moment – the moment you’re found out’” (McIlvanney 2012: 1).

To be clear, Sharp did not mean that Bremner’s failure to score had been a deliberate act of sabotage, nor did he read the player’s prostration as a sign of his fear that his rule breaking had been found out, so this ‘Scottish moment’ is not about the discovery of guilt. Accordingly, the protagonists of Scottish noir are not afraid of being found out in the sense in which most law breakers of crime fiction are. Sure, at times they, too, are afraid that people will find out about their moral and legal transgressions, but before and after such specific fears they tend to suffer the general fear that, as McIlvanney says, “This time, *this* time they’re going to see the emperor is bollock naked here” (McIlvanney 2012: 1). Theirs is a self-deprecating and often unreasonable fear that they will be found out for being frauds, that there will come a moment of reckoning when everybody will see that, like the infamous Bremner, they have been playing above their league. With this fixation on the inevitability of being ‘found out’, Scotland’s contemporary noirists continue the tradition of James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson, two celebrated 19th-century writers in whose seminal works of Gothic horror, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and the *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), the central protagonists spend relatively little time in fear of being found out for their transgressions. Increasingly, they live in fear that the disturbing cause of their deplorable actions will be found out, the animal side of their personality which they struggle to control and fear will finally consume them. So, it is not just their work on split personalities that has become a genre convention of Scottish noir, though both FitzGerald and Guthrie – and indeed a number of their better known contemporaries – write about protagonists with this rare mental condition now known as dissociative identity disorder. No, the pioneering contribution that Hogg and Stevenson made to Scottish noir is far more subtle. They showed that the fear of being ‘found out’ can be greater than that of being outed as a criminal, and that this fear is exacerbated in those who suffer from an illness like dissociative identity disorder, for when a part of yourself is unknown even to you, it carries a far greater risk of shameful revelation. Two centuries later, FitzGerald and Guthrie both create this very atmosphere of anxious anticipation, for their central protagonists both live in permanent fear of the moment when they will be ‘found out’, not simply because they worry that they may be guilty of the crimes they are accused of committing, but because they labour under a life-long sense of misfortune that has been exacerbated by trauma, hallucination, and memory loss. They can trust neither their perception of others nor even themselves, and so they fear their own minds as something too dangerous and disturbing to be divulged.

Both FitzGerald’s Cat Marsden and Guthrie’s Nick Glass, then, suffer from severe mental illnesses, and some of their symptoms are so exacerbated by their deep fear of being ‘found out’ that they are manifest in their storytelling – i.e. Cat and Glass frequently distort or repress key memories – so we –

like they – see neither the full extent of their illnesses nor their effects on their perception of events, not until they get into so much trouble that an intervention is staged to finally make them face reality. In Cat’s case, this intervention is the joint effort of her mother, her best friend, and her biographer, and with Cat’s late cooperation it is successful. In Glass’s case, only his psychotherapist intervenes, and without Glass’s cooperation he ultimately fails, yet before either we or they get to that conclusion, both writers offer several conflicting versions of events in a tightly compacted sequence of flashbacks, so each of these stories soon turns out to be, as Malmgren puts it, “more a subject to be experienced, less an object to be known... that experience is decidedly disturbing, disquieting, even disorienting” (Malmgren 1997: 131). After all, it allows us to appreciate not only *that* they fear their own minds but also *why* and *how* they do so. It becomes apparent that they are afraid of their deep memories because, as Cat observes, “It looks like I did it and I can’t say for sure I didn’t... Since my teens I’d had a tendency to black out in stressful situations, as well as a tendency to assume my own guilt” (FitzGerald 2009: 10). And she is just as troubled by these tendencies as Glass, who asks himself, “Why did he keep imagining the worst” (Guthrie 2009: 169)? Aside from amnesia, low self-esteem, and manic depression, the answer in both cases is that there is strong external evidence of their guilt, and to avoid the internal evidence of said guilt, which they fear may be buried in their sub-conscious, they redirect, side-track, or lock down their thoughts whenever they stray into dangerous territory, such as memories of heartbreak, murder weapons, or deaths in the family. As Cat admonishes herself, “I needed to stop the flashbacks, or perhaps not the past, just dreams, perhaps... just nonsense... burning their way into my grey matter” (FitzGerald 2009: 53). This irrationality is shared by Glass, who “Sat there while time passed and things happened in his head and he forgot them and then they happened again and he changed what happened because what he saw in his head wasn’t right, couldn’t be right, wasn’t going to be right, hadn’t been right” (Guthrie 2009: 147). And in both cases, this surrealist atmosphere of delusion and confusion is intensified by the fact that sections of the stories are situated on the margins of dreams. The main difference, then, lies in the narrative strategies which structure this surrealism. FitzGerald provides several long extracts from Cat’s biography; Guthrie lets Glass process his memories in psychotherapy.

The shared effect of these rationalisation strategies is that of a stencil placed on a chaotic mind map. Cat’s biographer and Glass’s psychotherapist both blank out their subject’s seemingly irrational talk, so in both cases their highly selective representation eventually creates a sense of coherence that is, for a long time, absent from the narratives, and when it is present, it is not necessarily reliable. Indeed, it soon becomes apparent that while in Glass’s case it may be reliable, in Cat’s case it certainly is not, even though it is Cat who offers the fuller disclosure. When she unexpectedly finds herself in prison, awaiting trial for the murder of three ex-boyfriends she cannot remember killing, she decides that “Janet was my lifeline. She would help me remember. She would help me hate myself a little less” (FitzGerald 2009: 14). Janet is a false friend who claims she wants to “help get your side across”

(FitzGerald 2009: 7) by writing a true crime book about Cat's life leading up to her imprisonment. Unfortunately for Cat, what she ends up writing is a series of assumptions about Cat's murder motive, titled *Cat Marsden, Portrait of a Serial Monogamist*. As she says in the introduction, "This book will attempt to explain why. It will offer some insight into the mind of an obsessive, man-hating, violent, crazed killer" (FitzGerald 2009: 20). As Cat discovers when she almost becomes the fourth victim, Janet is wrong to suspect her, yet until then even Cat is impressed by the coherence of her narrative, for though she finds a few factual errors, she fears the composite image may nonetheless be the truth. After all, as David Schmid puts it, "the truth of true crime means getting to the heart of the matter; emotional truth is prized far more than literal truth" (Schmid 2010: 205), and until the moment Cat, with the help of her mother and best friend, stops hating herself and starts rebuilding her self-worth, she believes that Janet is telling at least the emotional truth. This is because her gullibility is fostered, and FitzGerald shows how that can be done to most readers even by a sub-standard true crime writer, for rather than go back to Cat's childhood to offer a fair appraisal of mitigating circumstances, Janet, like most true crime writers, goes back only to focus on a few incidents of childish insubordination, imply their almost daily occurrence, and sensationalise them in such a way as to suggest that Cat is not just evil but that she has shrewdly disguised this fact ever since her childhood. Indeed, Janet says, "Catriona's primary school years were littered with incidents that could have warned the world" (FitzGerald 2009: 29). On this background, the fact that she "had accidentally smiled once" is enough to make Cat's guilt a foregone conclusion rather like that of Amanda Knox and Lindy Chamberlain, for "once was enough for the gawkers with mobiles to snap the 'smirk of evil'" (FitzGerald 2009: 8).

Such an external manipulation of the way a suspect is seen is deeply disturbing, especially when it is this successful despite the fact that it is clearly mean-spirited and its coherence is highly unreliable, but, as Guthrie shows, an internal manipulation can do just as much damage. Glass's guilt, after all, seems to be just as much of a foregone conclusion as Cat's, even though his psychotherapist is fair, fastidious, and friendly when he tries to create a coherent narrative from Glass's fractured memories. The reason Glass seems guilty nonetheless is that he filters everything he tells said psychotherapist, starting with the emotions he is willing to show when he first discusses his new job as a prison guard. This discussion is set in 1992, when he is only in the job for six weeks and already caught up in lies. He is dishonest and hyper-sensitive about his wife and daughter in a way that only later makes sense, and he lies about his anxiety around prisoners, so when one of them makes threats against his family, he agrees to act as a drug courier yet refuses to admit his helplessness to a non-judgmental therapist. Soon, he can no longer hide that "The last few weeks he'd muled smack, coke, speed, acid, poppers, Es, tranx, anti-psychotics, anti-convulsants, painkillers. Each time, he put a little aside for himself" (Guthrie 2009: 93). And the more stressed he feels at the thought of his blackmailer's power over him, the more of his drugs he takes, so much so that his actions and thoughts become increasingly erratic. At one point he even wakes up without his right index finger yet cannot remember who cut it off.

What he can remember, though, is seeing the scar of an injury at a time when he had yet to sustain it, and so he starts messing up the timeline of his memories. Soon thereafter, or maybe long before then, he starts presenting multiple versions of events, which not only reinforces the impression of his guilt. It also makes it seem like the entire novel is Glass's schizophrenically fragmented interior monologue, that or a series of therapy sessions set, like the end of the story, in 2009, when Glass reviews his past. Either way, the coherence that seems to be created by therapeutic intervention is by no means reliable, for it may all be happening in Glass's head. After all, when he offers two versions of the same events, his therapist's voice asks "“WHICH IS IT?”... in Glass's head" (Guthrie 2009: 156). So, in the end, though the therapist is convinced that Glass is a delusional murderer, we cannot be certain of his guilt. "“You ever wondered why you made up a story about a guy who killed his wife and kid and... this guy not only has someone cover up for him but he can't even remember he's done it. You see a parallel?" 'No,' Glass said. 'You see a parallel'" (Guthrie 2009: 246-247).

In their separate ways, then, both Cat and Glass illustrate a disturbing phenomenon that Mark Alfano, a professor of moral psychology, notes in the way we determine whether someone is guilty of a crime, especially when that crime is murder: "In addition to biases that influence judgments of intentionality, agency, and good and bad, people are affected by biases when assessing who performed an action" (Alfano 2010: 48). In Cat's case, the general public assumes, as most likely does the average reader, that she is guilty of murdering three men despite the absence of the murder weapon or any witnesses, and they do so, not because they are all professional psychologists, but because, like her biographer, they sense that her amnesia is perhaps a little too convenient, and, when they see her 'smirk of evil', they take the biased view that someone with her lack of empathy and propriety simply must be guilty. After all, not only does she smirk, but when asked to identify one of the corpses by its severed penis, she reacts to the stressful incongruity of the situation with laughter, whereupon she says "I'm sure my involuntary chortle at the sheet-covered knob was partly why they decided to arrest me two days later, why I was no longer viewed as the bereaved ex-lover of three men, but was accused of shagging, mutilating and murdering them, not necessarily in that order" (FitzGerald 2009: 4). This new view, however, is not amusing for long. As Cat reads a draft of her biography while awaiting trial in prison, she soon realises that her judge and jury are likely to take the same view as her damning biographer, and when she suspects that even her mother is convinced of her guilt, she, too, takes the general view: "I realised I was sounding crazy. But I was crazy. Things had started ram-raiding my head" (FitzGerald 2009: 49). One of those things is the bias that she is crazy just because she is amnesic; another is the bias that she is an animal just because she was capable of laughing at a severed penis. Cat starts believing that this means she must also have been capable of killing the owner of said penis, but, as her best friend reminds her, she "always blamed herself for things that were not her fault" (FitzGerald 2009: 124). Alas, when Cat comes to see that she still has an unfair bias against herself, she lets a similarly unfair bias affect her assessment of who framed her for her three alleged murders:

she blames her mother who, so she briefly believes, suffers from Münchhausen Syndrome by Proxy, which would mean that she caused her daughter's suffering to gain sympathy as a struggling mother. As it turns out, however, it was neither Cat nor her mother who acted with animal aggression and amorality when mutilating and murdering those three men. It was a jealous, manipulative misogynist, but due to the above biases, he almost escapes suspicion.

However, the novel's potential to disturb is limited by a containment strategy. The animal aggression, a sub-human, mysterious, and untameable force which haunts the novel almost beyond its conclusion, is finally given human shape, explained, and tamed when the aggressor is identified, psychoanalysed, and killed. The serial killer is a man who has long been aware of his animal aggression and amorality, not a woman who is afraid that she may be capable of committing and then forgetting such atrocities, and so the unease that anyone may have an unknowable – and untameable – animal side is contained. In the end, FitzGerald reassures us that Cat Marsden is neither a feral wild cat nor a moral wild card. She was falsely suspected, and when she, too, is reassured by this insight, her earlier wish comes true, i.e. she hates herself a little less. To this type of 'noir light', Guthrie provides an interesting contrast. In Glass's case, his psychotherapist assumes, as most likely does the average reader, that he is guilty of murdering three men as well as his wife and daughter despite his denial of at least the latter crimes, and they do so, not because they are all professional psychologists, but because, like Glass himself, they sense his lack of conviction when he reassures himself that "No way he could take a human life, no matter how despicable that human was. He just wasn't a killer" (Guthrie 2009: 55). Like Glass, they sense that he is dangerously out of his depth among convicted murderers and might lose control. "Any sign of weakness and these predators would rip him apart... They were animals. But so what? He was an animal too" (Guthrie 2009: 13/22). What at first sounds like bravado turns out to be true, but whether or not he loses control of his animal self so completely that he kills his family in a frenzy, that much is impossible to verify. If, by the novel's conclusion, it seems almost certain that he did – that his amnesia is too convenient and anyway, his amorality and aggression are sufficiently proven – this assessment is still affected by the bias that a schizophrenic's denial is, ultimately, unreliable. Glass does spend the final scenes in a closed psychiatric hospital where, although imaginary witnesses repeatedly try to convince him of his innocence, he accepts his detention without the slightest protest, but none of this is proof that he committed the many crimes he so variously and unreliably discusses. They may have happened in his head, and he may have accepted his detention only because of his psychotherapist's subtle persuasion that his mental illness makes life outside the hospital a health risk. And while it seems almost certain that he will eventually be found out as a man of animal violence, there is room for doubt whether he is actually guilty or just theoretically capable of such violence. Thus, there is no containment of the unease that anyone may have an unknowable – and untameable – animal side.

Yet whether or not this unease is finally contained, the fear of being ‘found out’ haunts both novels. This is most evident in a shared piece of symbolism. Both Cat, with her feline ability to bounce back, and Glass, with his fragile inability to do just that, are so afraid of seeing who or what they really are, they try to smash a mirror. Yet on closer inspection this image reflects far more than their shared fear. It also reflects their main difference, for Glass succeeds where Cat fails. In fact, Glass succeeds twice, once with a bullet and once with a fist, and after he smashes the second one in a psychiatric hospital, his doctor deems all mirrors to be health hazards and therefore removes them from his environment. In a symbolic sense, then, Glass is actively prevented from ever seeing who or what he really is, because his mental health is deemed too fragile to deal with the strain of being ‘found out’ by himself. In contrast, Cat tries time and time again to smash the mirror in her prison cell with her forehead, but, after failing to do so and being acquitted of all charges, she eventually learns to look at herself again. When she does, she sees that her fear of being ‘found out’ was exacerbated by her partial amnesia, that she was unreasonably afraid of shameful revelation because part of herself was unknown to her. Yet although she now sees that the animal side of her personality was never at risk of consuming her, she still has a genetic predisposition to stress related blackouts and a lifelong habit of self-deprecation, so her fear of being ‘found out’, unreasonable thought it may be, is unlikely to ever stop haunting her. After all, Cat and Glass live in a noir world which is, as Philip Simpson observes, “both existential and deterministic. Arbitrary chance may strike down the most virtuous of characters for no good reason whatsoever, but the essence of a character also usually determines his or her ultimate destiny” (Simpson 2010: 197)... And like most Scottish noirists who make their characters inhabit this world, FitzGerald and Guthrie are less interested in the ultimate destiny of their characters than they are in analysing their fear of being ‘found out’ and their efforts to control that fear before it controls them. So, whether bad luck or bad habits will ultimately defeat Cat and Glass in their diegetic afterlife, FitzGerald and Guthrie focus on current evidence of both to show that either could occur at any time. Doing so, they show that while both can curb their animal instincts and keep their overt actions within the bounds of humanity, they cannot subdue their sentiments and imagination to the same mild tone, and while both can distance themselves from brute violence, they cannot part with the mentality. Since both suspect this to be all too obvious, the fear of being ‘found out’ haunts them beyond novel’s end.

Conclusion

So, what is Tartan Noir? As I hope to have shown, it cannot be a synonym for Scottish noir. After all, it is a mystifying marketing label for a national literature – dark contemporary Scottish crime fiction – and a collective term for different types of writing which can be divided into four main sub-genres. The first of these discussed in the previous pages is the Scottish detective novel, for the man believed to be responsible for Tartan Noir, William McIlvanney, was given his title ‘Godfather of Tartan Noir’ for giving Scotland its first divorced drinker with a detection problem, and this model has been copied so often that it has created an associative link between Tartan noir and the Scottish detective novel. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the many examples I have discussed alongside McIlvanney have illustrated that even his pioneering work has not led to any coordinated effort of any one school of art, working on a shared syllabus or drawing on shared influences. Like their individualist detectives, Scottish detective novelists rarely collaborate, be it on a common agenda or a common aesthetic. Instead, they tend to pick and mix both their topics and their techniques, at times co-opting and at others counterpointing them. Almost always, however, they do so by looking beyond Scottish borders, orienting their politics toward the left, and going back to the domestic ideology of an earlier time. Despite their diversity, then, they tend to look inward as they write about their private investigators’ shared journey, a journey of restoration from a crime on the social, cultural, or political periphery that takes them through the fall of a self-destructive society to its collapsing centre, the family. Hence, rather like the prototypical PI of American detective fiction – Raymond Chandler’s Philip Marlowe – the protagonist of Scottish detective fiction is less of a ‘free agent’ than he or she would like to think, and there are two reasons for this: one, while they pledge their loyalty to the job rather than the client, they let their personal involvement with other people’s problems get in the way of their personal gain. Indeed, these private detectives are committed less to free agency than to family-centred community – to bringing people together whenever they can. In other words, much like the American prototype, Scottish PIs let their actions contradict the stereotypes of hard-boiled free agency and self-sufficiency. Yet unlike Marlowe, they do so as they walk among the mean mounds of Europe’s historical rubble, the countless disasters of the war-torn, death-ridden twentieth century which buried their sense of self. It is this meditation on individual dysfunctionality that provides their measure of the world’s disorder, and so their retrospection brings us to reason number two for their limited free agency: the sense that they are condemned by the crimes of their ancestors and thus not wholly masters of their own destiny.

The Scottish detective novel, then, is proto-American in its embrace of the literature's first principles, yet in its deeply entrenched self-analysis it is retro-European.

Moving on to the Scottish police novel – the form perhaps most closely associated with Tartan Noir – I have shown that this sub-genre, too, is far more diverse than its reputation of gritty social realism, anti-authoritarian scepticism, and private eye individualism. This reputation belongs to Ian Rankin, Scotland's most famous contemporary crime writer who not only created the associative link between the Scottish police novel and Tartan Noir by making his name in said sub-genre, inventing the term, and defending his title 'King of Tartan Noir' to this day. Prior to the literature's current popularity, Rankin also added grit to its burgeoning social realism, created an iconic maverick in DI John Rebus, and gave the quaint stereotype of the anarchic Scot a new lease of life. Perhaps surprisingly, however, few of his compatriots write about cops who have a hard time identifying with institutional authority. The vast majority write about police officers who not only enforce the law but also embrace its spirit, so much so that they frequently treat the state apparatus of which they are a part as a surrogate family. However, while the majority of these police officers at first appear to be the familiar team player type, the type that thrives on collaboration, they are only successful once they act on their own initiative. So, rather than simply mirror rogue cops like Rankin's Rebus by representing the opposite virtues, they present a more nuanced view of individual agency and the workings of official authority systems, typically by trying to accommodate similar moral ideals within the limits of institutional self-reform. What this tends to lead to is a heightened self-consciousness and that manifests itself in a strong trend toward Scottish settings and casts: local crimes for local cops. Yet like in the Scottish detective novel, even such self-consciousness has too many multi-cultural tributaries and single-minded currents for a mainstream to take the form most foreign readers may expect to find: a fervent anti-Englishness. So, not only is there no widespread positive identification with any one literary tradition in this sub-genre. There is also no widespread negative identification with any unifying anti-foreign sentiment. Instead, there is a trend toward complicating nationalist readings of this Scottish self-consciousness, and that, ironically, is one of the trends which unite most of Scotland's police novelists in a national literature. The other is a trend toward writing in detail about the powers, the politics, the philosophies, the ethics, the professional hazards, and especially the personal sacrifices of policing – just not its procedures. Each one of the novels discussed in these pages is sketchy at best when it comes to police procedures, not simply because their authors feared that books about bureaucrats would otherwise be hard to read, but because every one of these writers prefers to focus on the individual rather than the institutional, even though most of them do so in stories about team players who defy Scotland's – and Rankin's – stereotype of the ever-rebellious contrarian.

Further dissecting this and other Scottish stereotypes, I moved on to the Scottish serial killer novel, for ever since the international success of *Wire in the Blood*, a British serial killer television series,

this sub-genre of dark contemporary Scottish crime fiction has also been associated with Tartan Noir. One reason for this associative link is that the series is based on characters created by Val McDermid, a bestselling writer of serial killer novels who has become well-known as the ‘Queen of Tartan Noir’. Another reason is that, like her, most of Scotland’s serial killer novelists may seem to be noirists in that they see violence in the dramatisation of vice as a literary virtue and specialise in investigative narratives that hinge on the abnormally normal actions and appearances of psychopathic serial killers. Perhaps surprisingly, however, the Scottish serial killer novel is neither noir, nor is it as formulaic as this sub-genre is commonly believed to be. As I hope to have shown, it is surprisingly multifaceted. For instance, it defies the Nietzschean ethos of real-life serial killers like Moors Murderer Ian Brady, whose claim that they all act on the will to power is borne out in most American serial killer fiction. In marked contrast, most serial killers in Scottish literature are either hedonistic or mission-oriented, and unlike their fabled forefathers – national stereotypes such as Christy Cleek and Sawney Bean – the modern-day Scottish serial killers discussed in this chapter display no murderous nationalism. Indeed, breaking with the nationalist folklore tradition, none of them are territorial Scots who kill trespassing Englishmen, and none of them are monstrous Englishmen who victimise innocent Scots. Typically, Scots kill Scots. Now, since that kind of killer/victim profiling hardly sounds multifaceted, it is worth noting that, in contrast to the literature’s habitual gender stereotyping in its role allocations, the contemporary Scottish serial killer novel is rarely ever about insane men killing innocent women. Only two thirds of the authors in this chapter write about male killers, none of whom kill only women, and only half of these killers are psychopaths. The vast majority, whether or not they are mentally ill, are treated as symptoms of a greater social malady, so the typical Scottish serial killer novel draws its reader’s attention to the dialectic between the criminal-as-monster and the criminal-as-representative. Consistent with this avoidance of neat judgment is its tendency not to offer a genre-typical resolution – never mind any genre-typical absolution – by killing off the killer before he or she can kill again. The result is a sense of shared responsibility, not for anyone’s genetic predisposition to violent crime, but for living in a society which is sufficiently atomised for such predispositions to go undetected, until they lead to serial murder. So, while for instance the American serial killer novel implies that society is ultimately safe and sound because it – the individual killer – is caught or killed in the end, the Scottish serial killer novel implies that it – the social malady – remains uncured and lethal.

This disturbing implication finally brings us to the Scottish noir novel, the country’s literature which, due to the shared noir label, is most commonly and perhaps most falsely associated with Tartan Noir. Yet as I have shown, this is a literature far more disturbing than Scotland’s mainstream crime fiction, a literature not to be described wholly or mainly by the familiar adjectives, gritty, dark, and violent, but rather as one combining the traits literary criticism notes in the most deeply disturbing of books, books about people who are so alone, afraid, angry, amoral, and alienating, they behave like animals. Typically, this leads to a self-deprecating and often unreasonable fear that they will be ‘found out’,

not just for committing a crime, but for pretending to be something other than what they really are, and this something is typically a deeply troubled individual with a dangerously enlarged animal side. Reminiscent of the psychologically unstable characters of James Hogg and Robert Louis Stevenson, these individuals labour under a life-long sense of misfortune that has been exacerbated by trauma, hallucination, and memory loss. They can trust neither their perception of others nor even themselves, and so they come to fear their own minds as something too dangerous and disturbing to be divulged. This surrealist atmosphere of delusion, confusion, and anxious anticipation of being controlled or indeed consumed by one's animal side is intensified by the fact that sections of the stories are situated on the margins of dreams. And what makes this literature even more disturbing is that it tells the truth about the ordinary madness of life, which is to say it shatters the mainstream notion of what is normal. It shows that most people who are forced to suffer will pass on their suffering and/or fall apart. Thus, it attacks the exculpating belief which attracts readers to Tartan Noir just as it attracts them to tragedy, the belief that suffering inspires some moral nobility. In the real world, so Scottish noir suggests, suffering rarely produces saints. In the real world, suffering generally just produces more suffering, and in Scottish noir, there is no escaping this, not into the reader-absolving whitewash of a happy end, not into the scapegoating of a black sheep, and not into crime fiction's often sentimental promise that, the plot notwithstanding, no likeable protagonist was lastingly damaged in the making of this novel. Instead, all its protagonists have to live with the soul-destroying consequences of their bad decisions, just as we have to live with the thought that they live among us. After all, even when they learn to curb their dangerous animal instincts and thus keep their overt actions within the bounds of humanity, they fail to subdue their sentiments and imagination to the same mild tone. Even when they distance themselves from brute violence, they do not part with the mentality. And since they suspect this to be all too obvious, the fear of being 'found out' haunts them beyond novel's end.

Scottish noir, then, is not disturbing in the sense in which even the most disturbing Tartan Noir is. After all, even in the most disturbing Tartan Noir, which I have discussed alongside the mainstream, disturbing denotes a social and psychological realism that is, to a varying but significant extent, sanitised for public consumption. Some of its protagonists do struggle economically and emotionally, but their worst struggles are nowhere near as deeply disturbing as those dramatised in Scottish noir, where people live beyond the reach of social support systems and can rarely afford the hope of being rehabilitated, never mind rely on it. They live in the third world that exists in the shadow of the first, and they take for granted depths of desperation and depravity that most readers will consider dreadful. This is not just darker and grittier than Tartan Noir but more extreme, for it shows the world as it is, not as it has to be for the hero's flaws to be contained by the establishment for which he or she works, for the system to seem strained but serviceable, and for the status quo to seem worthy of preservation. Yet despite such differences, Scottish noir is hard to know, for so much has been labelled Tartan Noir, which is a sort of friendly caricature that obscures an enormous range of Scottish writing. This is why,

rather than assume that underneath the oxymoronic Tartan Noir label a piece of writing is indeed noir, I have tried to peel it off and provide a glimpse of Scotland's multifaceted literature of crime and noir, a literature which rarely conforms to the expectations created by the word 'tartan' and its traditional, repetitive, and easily discernible patterns of crossed horizontal and vertical bands in multiple colours. In other words, Tartan Noir is neither all noir, nor is it all colourful designs and clear contrasts between light and dark, and if reading my discussion of the above texts has not created any sense of a homogenous national literature that can be described in a couple of words, then I have done my job. After all, to discuss its diverse subjects, styles, and sensibilities is to create a sense of fragmentation, for they are not the coordinated effort of some Scottish genre building project or a single school of art, working on a shared syllabus or drawing on shared influences. Most of them are not even that tartany, which is to say that they are not in any stereotypical sense Scottish. The label 'Tartan Noir', however, is unlikely to yield to the more suitable yet rather prosaic 'dark contemporary Scottish crime fiction', too marketable is its evocation of Franco-Gaelic exoticism. So, to answer my opening question – What is Tartan Noir? – I have discussed the books that have most influenced either the literature's reputation or its identity, and it is my hope that in doing so I have – if not demystified Tartan Noir – then at least defined the term and refined its use.

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