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Ward, Christopher J. (2010) *It's hard to be a saint in the city: notions of city in the Rebus novels of Ian Rankin*. MPhil(R) thesis.

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***It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City: Notions  
of City in the Rebus Novels of Ian Rankin***

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Submitted for the degree of M.Phil (R) in January 2010, based upon  
research conducted in the department of Scottish Literature and  
Faculty of Arts, University of Glasgow

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‘And when the heat came down it was left on the ground  
The devil appeared like Jesus through the steam in the street  
Showin' me a hand I knew even the cops couldn't beat  
I felt his hot breath on my neck as I dove into the heat  
It's so hard to be a saint when you're just a boy out on the street’

Bruce Springsteen, “It’s Hard To Be A Saint In The City”

## *Acknowledgements*

To acknowledge fully everyone who helped me through the writing of this thesis would necessitate another 30-40,000 words, so I am left with little recourse but to hope that everyone who did help knows who they are, and have my gratitude as a result. That said, I must pay particular thanks to the postgraduate community of the Scottish Literature department at the University of Glasgow, especially Alistair Braidwood, Louise Hutcheson, Thomas H Murphy and Jennifer Orr for being sounding boards in trying times; to Andrew Kellard, for living alongside the erratic daily routine of the research student for the better part of a year without losing it completely; to Yo La Tengo, Bob Dylan, Arab Strap, Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, The Twilight Sad, The Hold Steady, The Beatles, The Smiths, Sufjan Stevens, Ghostface Killah, Talking Heads, Phoenix, The Flaming Lips, Titus Andronicus, Radiohead, The Velvet Underground, Belle and Sebastian, countless others and, of course, Bruce Springsteen, for keeping me sane whilst writing and in the process suggesting a title; and, most of all, to Margaret Connor, to my grandparents, John Ward and Robert & Margaret King, and to my parents, John & Clare Ward, for funding this whole thing when nobody else would.

## ***Introduction: The Crime, The Place***

Few Scottish authors are held in such close association with place as is Ian Rankin with Edinburgh. Over seventeen novels and two books of short stories, Rankin has time and again guided his most famous creation, Detective John Rebus, through the streets of the nation's capital, only occasionally seconding him to other parts of the country and only once removing him from Scotland entirely.<sup>1</sup> Whilst doing so, he has become one of not just Scotland but Britain's best-selling authors ('the tenth bestselling fiction writer in Britain since 1998', according to a 2005 profile in *The Guardian*, and estimated to account 'for 10% of all UK crime fiction sales', including sales of non-British authors<sup>2</sup>). His own particular take on Edinburgh is so widely disseminated that it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that his writing has become one of the predominant means of experiencing the city for a significant percentage of British readers. Rankin and Edinburgh have become almost inextricable from each other and, in reaching such a consistently large readership over an extended period of time whilst continuing to set his novels in real-time (the first novel in the series, *Knots & Crosses*, was published in 1987, and the cover of every Rebus novel since *Black & Blue* (1997) bears the legend 'The Number One Bestseller'), Rankin is uniquely placed in his ability to document and pass comment on Edinburgh and its place in Scotland as the twentieth century becomes the twenty-first.

Despite, or perhaps because of, his status as one of the best-selling authors in the country, critical material on Rankin is relatively scarce, relegated to a handful of essays in more broadly-themed anthologies, or brief references in pieces about other authors. Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray's encyclopaedic *Scottish Literature* (2002) contains only three passing references to Rankin in its 1,269 pages; discussion of Rebus and Rankin is confined to two pages in a chapter on post-war British crime fiction in Martin Priestman's (ed.) *Cambridge Companion To Crime Fiction* (2003); the only book-length examination of Rankin's work is Gill Plain's reader's guide to his *Black & Blue*;<sup>3</sup> even the chapter "Concepts of Corruption: Crime Fiction and the Scottish 'State'" in Berthold Schoene's (ed.) *Edinburgh Companion To Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007), which focuses largely on Rankin, is also written by Plain, suggesting that critical interest in Rankin is confined to a limited number of interested parties.

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<sup>1</sup> *Tooth & Nail* (1992), the third novel in the series, sees Rebus sent to work in London.

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Wroe: "Bobby dazzler", accessible at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/may/28/crime.ianrankin>, last accessed 02/08/09.

<sup>3</sup> Gill Plain: *Ian Rankin's Black and Blue: a reader's guide* (2002, New York, London: Continuum).

This thesis aims to go some way towards correcting this oversight, contesting that, beneath the generic trappings of crime fiction that may dissuade some from serious study, the Rebus novels contain an ongoing subtext wherein Rankin carries out an investigation of his own that is key to the overall success of his work: an investigation of Edinburgh as a city caught between past and present, one that challenges the idea of isolationist national literary traditions and presents a vision of a city that, ultimately, can never be capable of anything but superficial change.

[N.B.: A chronological list of the Rebus novels is included in the bibliography for purposes of reference.]

### **The juncture of two traditions**

The depiction of Edinburgh in the Rebus novels is a product of two separate traditions: those of Scottish literature, especially such Edinburgh-raised authors as Muriel Spark and Robert Louis Stevenson, and hard-boiled American detective fiction, particularly the early genre-defining work of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, focused on solitary men moving through the mean streets of the twentieth-century city. If Rankin is to be believed, however, he was completely unaware of any debt he might owe the American noir tradition upon writing the first of the Rebus novels, *Knots & Crosses* (1987), as he outlines in his introduction to a collection of the first three books in the series:

I think I'm still the only crime writer I know who hadn't a clue about the genre before setting out. There were crime sections in bookshops and libraries - news to me - and a healthy number of practitioners extant. So instead of my literary studies, I turned to the likes of Rendell, James, Hill, Ellroy, Block... And the stuff wasn't bad. The form was flexible. I could say everything I wanted to say about the world, and still give readers a pacy, gripping narrative.<sup>4</sup>

Taking this admittedly disingenuous claim at face value (Rankin has elsewhere spoken of his boyhood love of Ernest Tidyman's series of novels featuring John Shaft - 'my introduction to detective fiction'<sup>5</sup>) would suggest that Rankin starts writing, to his mind, in a predominantly Scottish mode, only beginning consciously to exploit the generic hallmarks of hard-boiled fiction as the series progresses and he becomes more familiar with the work of his forbearers in both traditions (Rankin's initial conviction that he was not writing mere mysteries went so far as to result in his moving copies of his early books from

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<sup>4</sup> Ian Rankin: "Exile on Princes Street" (1999) in *Rebus: The Early Years* (2000, London: Orion), vii-viii.

<sup>5</sup> Ian Rankin, interviewed in J Kinston Pierce: "The Accidental crime writer", *January Magazine*, January 2000.

the 'Crime' sections of bookshops to the shelves of 'Scottish Fiction'<sup>6</sup>). Both traditions, however, are clearly intertwined from the beginning of the series, despite Rankin's protests to the contrary.

The hard-boiled form is an ideal vehicle for Rankin's exploration of ideas of city, so inseparable is it from urban milieus in theories of crime fiction. The key difference engendered by the move from the rural environs of British crime fiction to the modern American city in works such as Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (1939) - an archetypal example of the hard-boiled form - is an emphasis on realism, both psychological and societal. The crimes committed are no longer the parlour games of 'Golden Age' British detective fiction, but reflect the state of the wider world, factoring real world change and anxieties, and distinctive local character, into the solving of a case. Locale becomes almost as important as plot, with Dennis Porter saying: 'From the beginning many of the most interesting works in the genre claim to be about places on the map as well as about the detection of crime.'<sup>7</sup> Chandler's Los Angeles is as much a character as Marlowe, his detective protagonist, and his novels reveal equal amounts about both. Rankin places his Edinburgh squarely in this tradition, the Rebus series charting in real-time not just the effects of aging and ever-approaching retirement on Rebus himself, but the ways in which the city changes and develops in the same time period. The cases Rebus deals with also tend to live up to John Scaggs' description of the modern city in hard-boiled fiction as 'a polluted wasteland', one that 'emphasises the notion of a more general corruption in modern society that threatens to poison and corrupt even the private eye'.<sup>8</sup> The more deprived or depraved parts of Edinburgh to which Rebus must often travel are, as Scaggs suggests, frequently made emblematic of wider societal problems, from the junkie squats of Pilmuir in *Hide & Seek* (1990) to the hostile treatment of asylum seekers in the derelict estates of *Fleshmarket Close* (2004). Rankin deals more broadly with these problems throughout the series by giving many of the crimes Rebus investigates a topical bent, be they sex trafficking (*The Hanging Garden*, 1998), paedophilia (*Dead Souls*, 1999) or school shootings (*A Question of Blood*, 2003), lending his urban wastelands a constant sense of timeliness even as real change continues to elude them.

Hard-boiled fiction is, by definition, an explicitly, near-exclusively urban genre,

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine Ashley: "Scots Abroad: The International Reception of Scottish Literature" in Berthold Schoene (ed.): *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 348.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Porter: *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (1981, New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 190.

<sup>8</sup> John Scaggs: *Crime Fiction* (2005, Oxon: Routledge), 70.

usually localized around one particular town or city for the duration of a novel, if not series. Walter Benjamin, in his study of Charles Baudelaire, suggests an affinity between the figure of the detective and that of the *flâneur*, the quintessentially urban observer with an eye for detail who takes pleasure simply from regarding all that is happening around him as he walks through the city streets:

In times of terror, when everyone is something of a conspirator, everybody will be in a situation where he has to play detective. Strolling gives him the best prospects of doing so [...] If the *flâneur* is thus turned into an unwilling detective, it does him a lot of good socially, for it accredits his idleness. He only seems to be indolent, for behind this indolence there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant. Thus the detective sees rather wide areas opening up to his self-esteem. He develops forms of reaction that are in keeping with the pace of a big city. He catches things in flight; this enables him to dream that he is like an artist.<sup>9</sup>

For Benjamin, the detective becomes a uniquely urban figure, his own rhythms attuned to those of the city around him. His very purpose is *flânerie*: simply to walk through the streets, observing all that takes place as he does. Scaggs further parallels the urban landscape with the character of the detective, defining hard-boiled fiction as ‘a type of fiction that was characterised, among other things, by the ‘hard-boiled’ and ‘pig-headed’ figure of the private investigator around which the sub-genre developed, a threatening and alienating urban setting, frequent violence, and fast-paced dialogue that attempted to capture the language of ‘the streets’<sup>10</sup> – the hard-boiled detective has been formed in large part by his surroundings, reacting in kind to the city’s treatment of him. Hard-boiled fiction is clearly, then, a suitable framework for Rankin to use in his exploration of Edinburgh through the character of Rebus, a man very much a product of his adopted hometown.

In focusing on a single city, however, Rankin challenges theories of a single, national Scottish literary tradition: the Scottish writers who prove most influential to his work are those who, like Rankin, write about Edinburgh. Cairns Craig writes in the introduction to his *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999) of continuity between a wide variety of Scottish writers past and present:

[T]he argument of this book is designed to establish some of the underlying continuities - both in terms of the issues of Scottish society and in terms of the formal development of the novel - that link Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy - and even Irvine Welsh - in the 1980s and 1990s to the founding moments of the modern Scottish novel in the work of Stevenson, Brown, Barrie and Buchan a century before. Through works such as theirs Scotland went on imagining itself as a nation and went on constituting itself as a national imagination

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin (trans. Harry Zohn): *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (1973, London: NLB), 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> Scaggs: *Crime Fiction* (2005).

in defiance of its attempted or apparent incorporation into a unitary British culture<sup>11</sup>

The modern authors Craig cites, however, are each very much associated with one particular place - Glasgow and the west coast for Gray, Kelman, Galloway and Kennedy, Edinburgh for Welsh - suggesting that, although there may exist literary traits that can be described as being uniquely Scottish, they belong to several separate regional or city-based traditions that cannot be read as speaking for the nation as a whole (for instance, there is no Highland representative in the authors cited by Craig). Certainly, on the few occasions that Rankin takes Rebus out of Edinburgh - most prominently upon reluctant sojourns to Glasgow and Aberdeen in *Black & Blue* (1997) - Rebus is distinctly disoriented and uneasy, the cities perhaps superficially similar but with contrasting sensibilities. Rankin's primary Scottish influences are Muriel Spark, Robert Louis Stevenson and James Hogg, all strongly associated with Edinburgh thanks to their novels *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) respectively. The recurrent fascinations of the Rebus novels - the intersection of history with the present, the contrast between a tourist-friendly façade and corruption underneath, the Calvinist notion of never being able to escape past sins - are shared with Stevenson and Spark in particular, and whilst not necessarily unique to Edinburgh individually, are certainly more apposite there than in any other Scottish city. In the Rebus novels, the exploration of these themes runs alongside a continuing study of the physical development of Edinburgh. Though Rankin may touch upon issues of national importance - the reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament in *Set in Darkness* (2000), for example - it is always from the perspective of Edinburgh, never mentioning how differently these issues may be received in the rest of the country. Rankin makes a strong case throughout the series for Edinburgh being a unique city within Scotland, and as such that the existing notion of a unified national tradition is redundant, Edinburgh ultimately no more like Glasgow than it is like London, New York or Paris.

There is also a clear imbalance in the modern authors Craig cites regarding the city, with all but Welsh representing Glasgow. This is the case with much contemporary criticism of Scottish urban writing: Moira Burgess's *Imagine A City: Glasgow In Fiction* (1998) has no east-coast counterpart; a chapter on Scottish fiction since 1945 in Gifford, Dunnigan and MacGillivray's *Scottish Literature* (2002) contains three subsections headed 'Blighted nation, blighted cities' that might more accurately be called 'Blighted nation, blighted city' as, as in Craig, the only non-Glaswegian author discussed in any significant

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<sup>11</sup> Cairns Craig: *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (1999, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 36.

detail in these sections is Irvine Welsh;<sup>12</sup> the index to Matt McGuire's *Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2009) contains page references under the heading 'Glasgow fiction' but has no such entry for 'Edinburgh fiction'.<sup>13</sup> For the majority of the twentieth century in Scotland, 'urban fiction' can, for the most part, be read as 'Glasgow fiction', with little fictive work written about or set in Edinburgh between the publication of *Miss Jean Brodie* in 1961 (which actually deals primarily with the 1930s) and the first Rebus novel in 1987, meaning anywhere between a quarter and half a century of Edinburgh life goes essentially undocumented in fiction. Rankin's seventeen Rebus novels go some way toward redressing this balance, and it is instructive to note that by the time Welsh publishes *Trainspotting* in 1993 and effectively re-legitimises Edinburgh as a fictional space to a mass audience, Rankin has already published five novels and a book of short stories all featuring Rebus, all but one of which (the aforementioned *Tooth & Nail*) centres around Edinburgh.

### **Influence and intent: the origins of Rebus**

Rankin's understanding of Edinburgh is, for the most part, informed by his reading about the city as much as his own direct experience of it. His literary influences are clear from the very beginning of the series, and self-admitted. In his introduction to a collected volume of the first three Rebus novels, Rankin makes quite plain the intentions he had in mind for *Knots & Crosses*:

I wanted to update *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* to 1980s Edinburgh. My idea was: cop as good guy (Jekyll), villain as bad guy (Hyde). So I wrote *Knots & Crosses*. I was living in a room in a ground-floor flat in Arden Street, so my hero, John Rebus, had to live across the road. When the book was published, I found to my astonishment that everyone was saying I'd written a whodunnit, a crime novel.<sup>14</sup>

That he feels the need to 'update' Robert Louis Stevenson's novel of man's capacity for both good and evil suggests that Rankin still views it as relevant to contemporary Edinburgh when he begins to write the Rebus novels. He may be changing the environment from nineteenth-century London (albeit one modelled upon the Edinburgh of this time) to twentieth-century Edinburgh, but, as he says above, the basic conflict of good and evil remains, simply transferred from a scientist and the physical embodiment of his darkest desires onto a policeman and a criminal. His conception of the city has clearly been

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<sup>12</sup> Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan McGillivray (eds.): *Scottish Literature* (2002, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 870-888.

<sup>13</sup> Matt McGuire: *Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2009, Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan), 193-194.

<sup>14</sup> Rankin: "Exile on Princes Street" (1999), vii.

shaped by reading Stevenson, and his writing reflects this; to Rankin, *Knots & Crosses* is a book written in the traditions of Scottish literature rather than the wider, and international, framework of crime fiction. Although *Knots & Crosses* was, as Rankin admits, received as a crime novel, to his mind he had things to say about Edinburgh that were bigger than the genre would seemingly allow:

In my early books especially I was keen to point out parallels between my work and predecessors such as *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. I was an English Literature postgraduate after all, teaching classes of *Ulysses* in my spare time and dreaming of a future professorship - I wanted to be taken seriously as a writer. Living as I had done in a succession of dreary flats, motels and high-rise blocks, yet researching towards my PhD each day in the grand surroundings of the National Library and Central Library, Edinburgh really did seem a divided city.<sup>15</sup>

It takes a certain degree of self-assurance to describe Stevenson and Hogg as ‘predecessors’ as Rankin does here, and, in *Knots & Crosses* and *Hide & Seek*, he makes frequent, explicit reference to both texts, seemingly seeking validation for the worth of his own novels by aligning himself with such landmark works of Scottish literature. Indeed, so convinced in these early novels is Rankin that he is writing in a predominantly Scottish mode that any concessions to the generic hard-boiled template - or the police procedural, another notable subgenre of crime fiction that Rankin incorporates into his writing, merging it with Rebus’s hard-boiled, solitary tendencies - seem almost accidental. This, though, only serves to establish what will become increasingly clear as the series progresses: that Scottish writing shares many themes and proclivities with American hard-boiled fiction. However inadvertently, Rankin demonstrates through his work that duality, civic hypocrisy and the scars wrought by the past upon the present are by no means the exclusive domain of Scottish writers, as suggested by such proponents of the infamous ‘Caledonian antisyzygy’ as G. Gregory Smith in his *Scottish Literature: Character and Influence* (1919). The early Rebus novels, in particular, prove the existence of startling thematic similarities between Scottish literature and hard-boiled American crime fiction of the type produced by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett, particularly as regards treatment of the city. As the series progresses, Rankin becomes increasingly aware of these similarities, and as his awareness grows so does his confidence and skill at combining the two traditions into a seamless, cohesive whole.

The novels that immediately follow *Knots & Crosses* and *Hide & Seek*, however, cross too far over into generically superficial crime fiction, with little of meaning to say about Edinburgh or even Scotland as a whole. Having been told he is writing crime fiction rather than Scottish literature after the publication of the first two Rebus novels, Rankin

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<sup>15</sup> Ian Rankin: *Rebus’s Scotland: A Personal Journey* (2006, London: Orion), 85-86.

seems to concede as much in *Tooth & Nail* (1992) by having Rebus leave Edinburgh to work on a case in London. Although there is some concession to Anglo-Scot tensions - Rebus's recurring motto throughout the novel when dealing with the English is 'Fuck You Too Pal' - it is a largely insular work, more concerned with the intricacies and psychology of the case at hand than what the case might say about the city as a whole, be it London or Edinburgh. The same template is followed as Rebus returns home in *Strip Jack* (1992) and *The Black Book* (1993); the cases investigated in these books play out more like drawing-room mysteries than as city-spanning indictments of corruption, with relatively contained casts of characters and locations (*Strip Jack*, like *Tooth & Nail*, often ventures outside of Edinburgh, much of the action taking place at an isolated holiday home). There is an overriding sense of Rankin perhaps trying to redress the balance of his first two novels: to prove that he can, on a basic level, write a detective novel that satisfies genre rules, more indebted to crime writers than to Scottish authors. There is also, in these novels, the clear influence of a more puzzle-oriented strand of crime writing, typified by the work of Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers. *Strip Jack* in particular, with its cast of affluent middle-class characters and secluded rural settings, seems more of a piece with the 'Golden Age' detective novels full of 'meaningless riddles', wilful artifice and an air of inconsequentiality.<sup>16</sup> It is a tradition of crime writing that seems to interest Rankin less and less as the series progresses, his innate interest in notions of city drawing him increasingly towards the influence of the hard-boiled and its perennial urban backdrop. To truly understand Rankin's vision of Edinburgh we need to examine the point at which he begins to fuse Scottish literature with very specifically American hard-boiled traditions in equal measure.

### **Combining traditions: Rebus comes of age**

From *Mortal Causes* (1994) onward, Rankin becomes increasingly confident and skilful in his combination of Scottish literary tradition, the generic requirements of crime fiction and commentary on the state of not just the nation, but Edinburgh in particular. Where in previous novels Rankin either explicitly aligns himself with Stevenson and Hogg's depictions of Edinburgh (as in the openly allusive *Knots & Crosses* and *Hide & Seek*) or seems content to play by the rules of a standard piece of crime fiction (as in the more generic novels from *Tooth & Nail* to *The Black Book*), *Mortal Causes* sees him begin to find a more comfortable middle ground between the two: using the crime at the centre of

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<sup>16</sup> Stephen Knight: "The golden age" in Martin Priestman (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion To Crime Fiction* (2003, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 82.

each novel to deal with a particular issue and, through the course of the novel, passing more subtle comment on how this issue affects Edinburgh, all the while charting, as the series progresses, the real-time, real-world changes (or lack thereof) taking place in the city.

*Mortal Causes* examines the relationship between Scotland and Northern Irish terrorism through the execution-style murder of the son of Rebus's nemesis, underworld kingpin 'Big Ger' Cafferty, and his links to sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. It also sees Rankin deploy a piece of Edinburgh history as a major plot point for the first time, with the body of Cafferty's son being found in Mary King's Close, a remnant of the old Edinburgh made subterranean when struck by plague in the seventeenth century. Subsequent novels *Let It Bleed* (1995), *The Hanging Garden* (1998) and *Dead Souls* (1999) use similar techniques to tackle such ripped-from-the-headlines topics as corrupt political systems, Eastern European sex trafficking and paedophilia respectively, taking the framework of hard-boiled crime fiction and applying it to cases that have potentially city-wide repercussions whilst providing counterpoints from relevant pieces of Edinburgh history and folklore. In this regard, Rankin becomes something of a Scottish equivalent to James Ellroy, both authors drawing inspiration from the city-wide rot of Chandler and Hammett's hard-boiled detective fiction as a means of investigating the origins and present conditions of their chosen cities: the crime novel as social indictment.

Rankin's most ambitious novel in this mode, at least in terms of scope, is *Black & Blue* (1997), which sets a damning investigation of the oil industry against the murders of a Bible John copycat killer and, affronted by the behaviour of this 'upstart', the re-emergence of Bible John himself, now working for an oil company. In widening Rebus's investigations beyond the city limits of Edinburgh to encompass Glasgow and Aberdeen too, Rankin effectively produces a 'state of the nation' novel, applying the techniques he has developed in previous work to not just a single city, but an entire country. Having successfully tackled Scotland as a whole in this single novel, Rankin then essentially confines Rebus to Edinburgh for the remnant of the series, confident that the city can now stand metonymically for the rest of the country without losing sight of his greater purpose, as he himself says:

If my original project had been a greater understanding of the city of Edinburgh, those parameters soon changed, once I'd discovered that Rebus was a tough enough creation to lead the reader into an investigation of Scotland itself: a small, proud and ancient country with a confused and fragile sense of its own identity. This is the landscape I inherited, with Detective Inspector John Rebus as my guide. Scotland has been called 'the arse of Europe' (by a Papal Legate in 1529) and a place of immense civilization (by Voltaire, no less). Betjeman and Walpole have sung the praises of Edinburgh, while others (including some of its most famed citizens) have decried the suffocating petty-mindedness of the place. A contradictory city makes a

good capital for a country of contradictions.<sup>17</sup>

That said, Rankin still treats Edinburgh as a unique city, markedly different from his depictions of, say, Glasgow and Aberdeen in *Black & Blue*; the metonymy is manifested through his being able to tackle issues that affect Scotland as a country without having to leave Edinburgh. The topics Rankin begins to deal with in his novels from *Mortal Causes* onward reverberate beyond Edinburgh's city limits, and beyond the self-contained world of crime fiction, whilst rarely taking Rebus away from his regular territory. Themes of national importance are broached, but having, with *Black & Blue*, applied his hard-boiled vision of Edinburgh to a broader, country-wide canvas, Rankin can henceforth infer wider relevance without ever losing focus on a single city.

Whilst *Black & Blue* may be his most ambitious novel in scope, his most successful novel in this regard is *Set In Darkness* (2000), which deals with the re-establishment of the Scottish Parliament after three hundred years by focusing on the development work springing up in Edinburgh in its wake. The novel is entirely located in Edinburgh, but the national import of the matter at hand is hard to overlook, especially when Rankin begins to parallel and integrate current events with grislier episodes of Edinburgh's history, allowing the reader to extrapolate from here the eventual fate of a parliament built on such foundations. Conversely, the intrusion of the wider world on Edinburgh brings an increased sense of scrutiny to the city in considering how it deals with the changes wrought by forces beyond its control, resulting in a novel at once inward and outward looking. Rankin presents the reader with the paradoxical juxtaposition of forces of globalisation and a world heritage site. The novel ultimately becomes as much an interrogation of the capacity of Edinburgh ever to make real progress as an exposé of the corruption underlying and undermining the idealists seeking independence. Rankin's Edinburgh functions equally well as both a microcosm of Scotland as a whole and as its own unique ecosystem, its status as capital city setting it apart from the rest of the country as much as it comes to represent it.

### **Noir; Tartan; Tartan Noir**

This thesis is divided into three chapters, each centred on the primary focus of notions of city, and how they inform Rankin's work. In the first, I will investigate the debt owed by Rankin to traditions of hard-boiled crime fiction, exemplified by close study of Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep*. Chandler's novels based around Philip Marlowe epitomise the characteristics of the first wave of American hard-boiled fiction. Marlowe, the private eye

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<sup>17</sup> Rankin: *Rebus's Scotland* (2006), 18.

protagonist, is an incorruptible figure in a corrupt world, what Lee Horsley describes as ‘a tough, independent, often solitary figure, a descendant of the frontier hero and cowboy but, as reimagined in the 1920s, a cynical city-dweller’.<sup>18</sup> He is a clear model for Rebus, another detective with a clear moral compass who can nevertheless defend himself appropriately in his treacherous surroundings.

Those surroundings are no longer the country manors and similarly isolated, self-contained locales of ‘Golden Age’ detective fiction of the kind written by Agatha Christie and her acolytes, but detailed, realist urban environments. In these environments, the figure of the detective is not necessarily in complete, direct control of the case at hand. Numerous issues must be considered that would not be of concern to Christie’s Miss Marple: corrupt governance, gangsterism, alienation, solitude and a disintegrating sense of community amongst them. There are larger factors at play than a simple detective-versus-criminal face-off. Chandler chronicles the rot underlying the fabled American Dream, represented in his Marlowe novels by both the oil trade (echoed in Rankin by *Black & Blue*) and Hollywood’s central importance to Los Angeles. John Scaggs describes the hard-boiled city as ‘an insubstantial environment lacking in depth, and populated by various fakers, frauds, and charlatans as hollow as the city in which they live’,<sup>19</sup> and it is a description borne out by the artifice on display in Chandler’s world. Every character in Chandler is, in some sense, an actor, be they disguising their own misdeeds under a respectable façade, or, like Marlowe, putting on a tough front to mask the sensitive soul beneath. Marlowe excepted, there is no absolute good or evil; just shades of gray.

It is a vision of the city that provides obvious inspiration for Rankin’s conception of Edinburgh, the tourist industry taking the role played by Hollywood in Chandler: a non-threatening surface which disguises the city’s more dangerous criminal element, one that goes unseen by the majority of outsiders. Like Rankin, the crimes at the heart of Chandler’s novels often go beyond the interpersonal into the realms of the societal, the crime for which Marlowe is initially contracted symptomatic of a wider problem for the city. In this regard, the role of the hard-boiled detective can ultimately seem futile. The case at hand may be solved but, single-handedly, he cannot redeem the society that spawned it. The likes of Marlowe ‘can achieve a degree of control,’ says Horsley, ‘but, unlike the classic Holmesian detective, [they] cannot restore order and set all to rights.’<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Lee Horsley: *The Noir Thriller* (2001: Houndmills, Palgrave), 19.

<sup>19</sup> Scaggs: *Crime Fiction* (2005), 72.

<sup>20</sup> Lee Horsley: “American Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction, 1920s-1940s” (2002, from <http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Hard-Boiled.html>, last accessed 21/11/08).

So it is with Rebus: more than fifty years later and thousands of miles away, Rankin maps similar moral territory in his vision of Edinburgh.

In the second chapter, I will examine the other major influence upon the Rebus novels: depictions of Edinburgh within the Scottish literary tradition, particularly that of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, two of Rankin's clearest literary inspirations. Though Stevenson's novella is ostensibly set in London, it is a London that is clearly informed by Edinburgh, both in the stark divide between the environs of the 'good' rich and those of the 'corrupt' lower classes - for which read New Town and Old Town - and the air of Calvinist morality that permeates the ever-present fog. Rankin makes explicit reference to *Jekyll and Hyde* on several occasions - most prominently in *Knots & Crosses* and *Hide & Seek*, the title of the latter punning on that of the Stevenson - but the influence of Stevenson is evident even without such overt intertextuality. The Edinburgh of the Rebus novels remains one of duality: respectable members of society covertly employ the services of rent boys; the foundations of the reinstated Scottish parliament are both figuratively and literally lined with bodies; the same kinds of corruption that exist in cities the world over are kept hemmed in by a surface sheen of stuffy, middle-class propriety and repression. Stevenson's influence is as much one of attitude as of a physical depiction of the city, this very repression an integral part of Edinburgh's character; one that damages the populace even as it defines them.

Spark, too, depicts the damaging effects of this stultifying need for public decorum in her study of Miss Jean Brodie. Rankin was in the midst of doctoral study on Spark when he began his career writing fiction and, like Stevenson, her influence looms large over the Rebus novels.<sup>21</sup> There remains a sense of overwhelming civic hypocrisy about Brodie carried over from Stevenson, a woman who will not carry out her romantic affairs within the confines of the city but will instead attempt to shield them from prying eyes at all costs. Also shared with Stevenson is the historical influence of William 'Deacon' Brodie, the infamous Edinburgh criminal who maintained respectable appearances by day whilst fashioning a career as a robber by night. From both novelists, Rankin borrows this sense of an Edinburgh mindset, of outward appearances being more important to its citizens than whatever behaviour such appearances shield.

It is also instructive to realise that both *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* share crime fiction plots based around the solving

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<sup>21</sup> Clayton Moore: "An Interview with Ian Rankin" (2005, from [http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005\\_04\\_005009.php](http://www.bookslut.com/features/2005_04_005009.php), last accessed 06/08/09).

of a central mystery: the identity of Miss Brodie's betrayer and the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde, respectively. The Scottish novels through which Rankin filters his view of Edinburgh contain striking thematic similarities to Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and other works of hard-boiled fiction. This implies that to think of literature as belonging to traditions defined by nationality alone is limiting at best: the same themes are being explored and transmitted the world over, applied to different cities with different personalities but with the same basic messages underneath. Cairns Craig certainly suggests as much in *The Modern Scottish Novel*:

The nature of a national imagination, like a language, is an unending series of interactions between different strands of tradition, between influences from within and without, between the impact of new experiences and the reinterpretation of past experiences: the nation is a series of ongoing debates, founded in institutions and patterns of life, whose elements are continually changing but which constitute, by the nature of the issues which they foreground, and by their reiteration of elements of the past, a dialogue which is unique to that particular place.<sup>22</sup>

Craig defines a national tradition not in terms of exclusivity or history, but in terms of recurring fascinations and interwoven threads; tradition comes not from sole ownership of these persistent themes, but of the unique emphasis given to them by this specific geographic space. In keeping with this spirit, Rankin clearly has not limited himself to reading solely Scottish authors, and the range of his reading is manifested in his work. This external influence, as Craig rightly says above, in no way diminishes his right to claim his work as being part of a Scottish tradition. By juxtaposing his Scottish setting and precursors in writing about Edinburgh with clear influences from abroad, he recontextualises preconceived notions of 'Scottish Literature', aligning Scottish traditions with perhaps unexpected counterparts and expanding the possibilities of what we regard as belonging to a Scottish tradition. His treatment of the city, combining ideas about Edinburgh from Spark and Stevenson with the generic form of hard-boiled fiction into a cohesive, identifiably Scottish whole, is a clear demonstration of his technique in this regard, and one that allows for just such a non-exclusivist reading.

In the third chapter, I will demonstrate how Rankin combines notions of the city as portrayed in both the hard-boiled and Scottish literary traditions to produce his own unique vision of Edinburgh in the Rebus novels, through close study of three novels spanning the length of the series that are representative of Rankin's techniques, themes and aims throughout: *Hide & Seek* (1990), *Set in Darkness* (2000) and *Exit Music* (2007).

*Hide & Seek* is the second novel in the series, and is the most overtly influenced by Stevenson. Several direct references are made to *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr*

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<sup>22</sup> Craig: *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999), 31.

*Hyde* throughout: characters share names with those of Stevenson (Poole, Carew, Lanyon), a gentleman's club at the heart of Rebus's investigation is named 'Hyde's' and Rankin even goes so far as to have Rebus read the Stevenson novel. It is the height of Rankin's attempts to self-consciously align himself with some sort of Scottish literary tradition, before, as discussed above, he came to view himself as an author of crime fiction. Taking *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as a starting point, Rankin proceeds to map Stevenson's portrait of a man struggling with his baser instincts onto the city as a whole, defining, as he does so, a psycho-geographic vision of Edinburgh that he will return to throughout the series, building on top of this basic notion on an increasingly grand scale. It is also an early indicator of the strength in the parallels to be found between Rankin's chosen inspirations from divergent sources, the themes of Stevenson fitting easily into the generic conventions laid down for hard-boiled detective fiction by Chandler.

*Set in Darkness* is the twelfth novel in the series, and is emblematic of the ambition of mid-period Rebus novels. As with several of the Rebus novels from *Mortal Causes* onward, the plot is directly related to an especially topical issue, in this case the reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh after a three-century absence. In depicting an Edinburgh seemingly on the cusp of such a major change, it makes the strongest case of any book in the series for Edinburgh as a place where nothing can ever really change, the post-devolution landscape much the same as that pre-devolution, unable to shake off the past and presenting Rebus with the same kinds of corrupt, convoluted crimes to solve. Rankin presents Rebus with three bodies, each from a different era of Scottish political turmoil - one from the night of the Act of Union in 1707, one from the time of the failed Devolution Referendum of 1979, and a contemporary MSP - but each found in Queensberry House, chosen as the site of the new Scottish Parliament. The ensuing investigation intertwines the three cases, the first a grisly piece of Edinburgh history that haunts and informs the present, the latter two part of a wider web of corruption underlying a hopeful new era. At this point in the series, Rankin is clearly more comfortable in his employment of something approaching standard crime fiction forms - the structure provided by the investigation, the red herrings, the final revelation and denouement, the recurring nemesis in the form of 'Big Ger' Cafferty - in order to tackle, in an accessible manner, similar themes to those handled by Stevenson and Spark without the overt imitation of his earlier novels. *Set in Darkness* is a serious book about serious issues affecting Scotland as a nation; that it comes packaged within the tropes of crime fiction almost seems incidental by the grim finale, as Rebus discovers the extent of the corruption quite literally lining the foundations of the 'new' Edinburgh.

*Exit Music* is the seventeenth and final Rebus novel. It is demonstrative of the confidence with which Rankin now feels able to depict Edinburgh, incorporating elements of postmodernism into a relatively stylised portrait of the city. Edinburgh is made cinematic from the title down, the influence of films noir as clear as the influence of crime fiction, and the realism of previous novels replaced by a kind of hyper-realism and self-awareness. Here, more than ever, Rankin also foregrounds Edinburgh's status as a literary city, taking the death of a literary figure as the central mystery and paying frequent visits to the Scottish Poetry Library. It is a celebratory eulogy for the city, emphasising its storytelling potential whilst acknowledging it as a place in which Rebus no longer belongs. Rankin simultaneously summates the concerns of the prior sixteen novels whilst suggesting future possibilities for depictions of Edinburgh in fiction.

His body of work raises a number of questions: can a city so determined to keep hold of its past ever really change? Can we speak of a 'national' Scottish literary tradition when the fiction of individual cities is so distinctive? What is the nature of the relationship between hard-boiled fiction and Scottish literature? Are the two mutually exclusive? And how does Rankin fit into both?

## ***Chapter One: Noir - The City in Hard-Boiled Fiction***

In his *The Modern Scottish Novel* (1999), Cairns Craig discusses the necessity of a Scottish literary tradition based upon inclusion as opposed to one of exclusion; of looking at how certain elements combine to form something recognisably ‘Scottish’, as opposed to disavowing anything that appears to bear traces of un-Scottish influences:

The nature of a national imagination, like a language, is an unending series of interactions between different strands of tradition, between influences from within and without, between the impact of new experiences and the reinterpretation of past experiences: the nation is a series of ongoing debates, founded in institutions and patterns of life, whose elements are continually changing but which constitute, by the nature of the issues which they foreground, and by their reiteration of elements of the past, a dialogue which is unique to that particular place. The national imagination is not some transcendental identity which either survives or is erased: it is a space in which a dialogue is in process between the various pressures and inheritances that constitute the particularity of human experience in a territory whose boundaries might have been otherwise, but whose borders define the limits within which certain voices, past and present, with all their centripetal and centrifugal implications, are listened for, and others resisted, no matter how loud they may be.<sup>1</sup>

The key phrase here, especially as pertains to the work of Ian Rankin, is ‘influences from within and without’. Now more than ever, in an age of globalisation, there is no practicable or, frankly, desirable way for a Scottish author to block out any kind of external influence, or achieve some kind of ‘purely’ Scottish writing style. Instead, the author takes these influences and recontextualises them within a Scottish framework, certain elements coming to the fore as being of particular local relevance and parallels drawn with other national traditions from around the world. The ‘Scottish tradition’ is simply the ways in which Scottish authors react to issues of local relevance, be they internal or external in origin.

This is particularly true of Rankin’s work. The Rebus novels draw at least as much from traditions of American crime fiction, especially the ‘hard-boiled’ mode epitomised by the work of Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler, as from the work of other Scottish authors, and gain much of their interest from the ways in which Rankin draws attention to the parallels between the two seemingly disparate modes. Such is the strength to be found in these parallels that Rankin all but ignores the ‘clue-puzzle’ conventions of traditional British (or, more usually, English) detective fiction, despite the closer geographical proximity of these works. Key to Rankin’s assimilation of this hybrid Scottish/American style is his placing of Rebus’s urban environment - namely, Edinburgh - as being of central

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<sup>1</sup> Cairns Craig: *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (1999, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 31.

importance to the series as a whole, and in order to fully understand what he attempts with the Rebus novels we must first investigate the ways in which both authors of crime fiction and Scottish authors have traditionally used notions of city in their work. This chapter examines the debt Rankin owes American hard-boiled detective fiction, in particular the work of Raymond Chandler.

### **Setting as mode: urban versus rural**

Both the traditional American crime novel and the traditional British crime novel can be defined roughly along lines of setting, as John Scaggs describes in his *Crime Fiction* (2005):

The broad, rule-of-thumb divisions between British and American Golden Age fiction, and between the clue-puzzle form and the hard-boiled mode, can also be identified in their characteristic settings. The modern city is generally recognised as the normal setting for hard-boiled fiction, while Golden Age fiction, at least in its British version, often features a rural or semi-rural setting.<sup>2</sup>

The generic inheritance of the British crime writer stands as one of the safe (or, beyond the initial crime, at least relatively safe), the enclosed, the pastoral, the inconsequential: an inheritance Gill Plain describes as one of ‘cosy ‘English’ narratives, indelibly tarnished by association with women writers such as Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers’.<sup>3</sup>

It stands in contrast to the character-driven, atmospheric and - tellingly - largely city-based work of the genre’s great (Scottish) progenitor, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes. Even though Holmes’s investigations may take him out of the city on occasion - most famously in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), set largely on the moors of Dartmoor - his is an essentially metropolitan mindset, and London remains a constant throughout the series, the detective’s detours to the countryside leaving him a Holmes away from home. Scott McCracken asserts that ‘Holmes, like [Edgar Allan Poe’s detective] Dupin, is an urban individual and part of his identity is created through the ambience of his rooms in Baker Street, a bachelor pad in the centre of the capital.’<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Holmes’ Baker Street flat serves a similar purpose to Rebus’s quarters in Marchmont a hundred years later: as both retreat from the world and base of operations, a place where he is equally comfortable relaxing with pipe in hand as discussing business with clients, and as a centre

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<sup>2</sup> John Scaggs: *Crime Fiction* (2005, Oxon: Routledge), 50.

<sup>3</sup> Gill Plain: “Concepts of Corruption: Crime Fiction and the Scottish ‘State’” in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (2007, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 132.

<sup>4</sup> Scott McCracken: *Pulp: Reading popular fiction* (1998, Manchester: Manchester University Press), 61.

of gravity to even the most far-fetched cases. For all its rural environs and gestures towards gothic horror as the case progresses, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* nevertheless begins with Dr Mortimer having travelled to Baker Street to appeal directly to Holmes and Watson for help, and it is here that the fundamentals of the central mystery are outlined. The implication is that the superstitious country folk must rely upon Holmes' essentially urban, urbane sense of rationality to defeat the mythic 'Hound', an implication that is borne out when Holmes uncovers the supernatural beast as a normal (if uncommonly large) dog that can be (and is) slain like any other, and more importantly as a front for the murderous schemes of the villainous Stapleton. The city is painted as a place of progressive ideas, of reason, possibility and discovery; the countryside as reactionary, credulous and isolationist, operating by its own logic and removed from the rest of the world. The former clearly makes more sense as the natural habitat of a detective possessed of an inquisitive mind. John Rignall takes up Benjamin's notion of the detective as *flâneur*, as discussed above, to describe the thought process of the detective:

If *flânerie* suggests the wide range and encompassing ambition of nineteenth-century realist fiction, the writer's ability to penetrate the surface of metropolitan life and reveal patterns of causation and underlying connection is best represented by the figure of the detective. Fictional detectives, whether amateur or professional, play a prominent part in the work of both Balzac and Dickens as reflexive images of the novelist's own practice. Detective and *flâneur* are thus closely related expressions of the same impulse to master and make sense of the modern metropolitan world. Frequently merging with each other, they imply the power of the individual mind to understand and render intelligible the bewildering diversity of big city life.<sup>5</sup>

Though Rignall later questions whether or not Holmes belongs to this group - especially given Holmes' propensity for the purposeful stride as opposed to the leisurely gait of the *flâneur*, and the reduced visibility of Conan Doyle's fog-masked London streets<sup>6</sup> - there is nevertheless a clear connection between the obsessive eye for detail and desire to make sense of the world of the detective and the similar traits of the *flâneur*, borne out in Rankin by Rebus's own knowledge of and familiarity with the streets he patrols, be it the Royal Mile or a back alley in Leith. The British authors who follow Conan Doyle into the 'Golden Age', however, consistently favour the rural over the urban as their setting of choice.

The influence of the Sherlock Holmes novels on subsequent Golden Age British

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<sup>5</sup> John Rignall: "From City Streets to Country Houses: The Detective as Flâneur" in H Gustav Klaus/Stephen Knight (eds.): *The Art of Murder: New Essays on Detective Fiction* (1998, Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag), 68.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

detective novels, then, is superficial at best: the majority of such narratives display little interest in anything beyond the ingenuity of their own construction, each individual clue falling into place like clockwork to provide a precision-tooled whole, the rural setting only important in that it provides a secluded playing field for a necessarily limited cast of characters to go through their motions. By removing their convoluted narratives from the modern metropolis, with its citizens from any number of social backgrounds and realms of experience, the authors of Golden Age detective fiction increasingly limit the relevance of their work to those who, like their characters, live in the rarefied seclusion of the bucolic English countryside. Stephen Knight suggests that whilst the detective novel may have begun life as a fairly democratic form, providing a panoramic view of the urban landscape through the eyes of a central figure whose very job is to traverse the various strata of society in search of the truth, the Golden Age novelists consistently pushed towards a more exclusive, more private realm:

The setting of the crime is enclosed in some way. G.K. Chesterton's concept from 1902 that the detective story is the romance of the modern city does not prove true; though more stories were set in the city than is often realised, it would still be in a sequestered area, an apartment or at most a few streets, and the archetypal setting of the English novels (unlike most of the American ones) was a more or less secluded country house - indeed, Raymond Williams sees the detective novel as an evolution of the country-house literary tradition, though a house based on capital riches, not landed wealth.<sup>7</sup>

The British detective novel becomes the domain of the idle rich, those who can afford to engage in crime and detection for sport and amusement rather than necessity, and for the most part, their playground is the countryside. The influence of the Sherlock Holmes books is more readily apparent in complexity of plot than in complexity of character, theme or thought, Conan Doyle's followers concerned with the central mystery in and of itself and not in writing a novel that, in the words of Raymond Chandler, 'you would read even if you knew somebody had torn out the last chapter'.<sup>8</sup> Genre historian Julian Symons describes the difference between influence and influenced thusly:

In writing about most of Sherlock Holmes's immediate successors one has to make a change of gear. The interest of their work lies in the cleverness with which problems are propounded and solved, rather than in their ability to create characters or to write stories interesting as tales rather than as puzzles. The amount of talent at work in this period gives it a good claim to be called the first Golden Age of the crime story, but it should be recognized that the metal is nine-carat quality, whereas the best of the Holmes stories are almost pure gold.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stephen Knight: "The golden age" in Martin Priestman (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion To Crime Fiction* (2003, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 77-78.

<sup>8</sup> Tobias Jones: "Getting away with murder" in *The Observer: Review*, 08/03/09, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Symons, quoted in Anonymous: "Classic Detective Fiction - A Brief Introduction" (from

Conan Doyle's influence is felt to an extent in the Rebus novels: Rankin acknowledges the debt he owes the Holmes stories in perhaps the Rebus series' most explicit nod to its generic roots, the naming of Rebus's first sidekick as Brian Holmes and his Chief Inspector (for the majority of the series) as 'Farmer' Watson. The relationship of grudging mutual respect shared by Rebus and his perpetual nemesis, underworld kingpin 'Big Ger' Cafferty, also parallels (albeit more obliquely) the similar relationship of Holmes to his own *bête noire*, the criminal overlord Professor Moriarty. To claim Rebus as belonging to this same British tradition as the followers of Holmes, however, is to align him mistakenly with the heroes of such novels as those described above by Symons, living in hermetically sealed worlds whose creators are largely preoccupied with the intricacies of their own puzzle-box plots. The Rebus series is occasionally prone to this kind of game-playing - Rebus himself is named for a picture-puzzle, and the first two Rebus novels are named for children's games, *Knots & Crosses* (1987) and *Hide & Seek* (1990), with the former particularly reliant on the notion of the central mystery as a puzzle to be solved. Rankin, however, is ultimately too concerned with the world around him to allow himself to become this self-absorbed, this myopic in his writing; his appropriation of detective fiction as a generic mode is a means to an end - namely, 'in order to make sense of Edinburgh, my adopted home'.<sup>10</sup> Rankin may display some interest in puzzles and games in his writing, but his ultimate concern lies more with place. In writing Rebus as a character ultimately inseparable from his urban environment Rankin actually hews closer to the spirit of Holmes than many of Conan Doyle's Golden Age followers, making a strong case for critical readings of fiction based around the association between city and genre.

### **Re-writing the Western: the emergence of hard-boiled fiction**

In order to discover Rebus's true progenitors, we must look between ten and twenty years later than, and a few thousand miles west of, the 'Golden Age' of British detective fiction, to the emergent American 'hard-boiled' tradition of the 1930s and '40s. Unlike the pastoral settings of the British tradition, hard-boiled fiction takes place in decidedly less than salubrious surroundings, as described by Scaggs:

Hard-boiled fiction translated the romanticism of the Western into a modern urban setting, and this movement from the Western frontier to a hostile urban environment was accompanied by an abrupt shift from the artificial gentility of the classical detective story to the creation of a fictional world of social corruption and 'real'

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<http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Classic%20Detective%20Fiction.html>, accessed 07/11/08).

<sup>10</sup> Ian Rankin: *Rebus's Scotland: A Personal Journey* (2006, London: Orion), 7.

crime.<sup>11</sup>

The debt owed Westerns by hard-boiled fiction is, incidentally, acknowledged throughout the Rebus series by Rankin: by the central importance of a country-and-western bar to *Mortal Causes* (1994), to name one example; by a besieged police station referred to as 'Fort Apache, the Bronx' in *Black & Blue* (1997) - a reference to the 1981 Paul Newman-starring police drama of the same name that itself references John Ford's western *Fort Apache* (1948) - to name another; and, more generally, by the appropriation of the recurring Western theme of a country trying to forge an identity for itself, with the Western dealing with the formation of the USA where Rankin deals with an immediately pre- and post-devolution Scotland.

The suggestion, then, is that the modern city, with all its danger, its ever-imminent violence and its criminals operating without fear of reprisal, is the frontier town of the twentieth century; the detective, its sheriff, single-minded in his quest to clean up the streets. Raymond Chandler frequently implies in his fiction that the Los Angeles police force is largely ineffectual, and that the city's criminal element has free rei(g)n, leaving the metropolis of the 1930s as effectively uncontrollable as the desert outpost of the 1870s. In his debut novel, *The Big Sleep* (1939), Chandler's private eye protagonist Philip Marlowe revisits the scene of a murder soon after said murder occurs, only to discover that the body has been moved. In deciding upon the culprit, he comes to one very definite conclusion:

It wasn't the law. They would have been there still, just about getting warmed up with their pieces of string and chalk and their cameras and dusting powders and their nickel cigars.<sup>12</sup>

There is palpable contempt in Marlowe's tone for the slow-moving procedures of the police - for all their deliberations and due process, they lack the crucial element of speed that would enable them to gain some element of control over those who care not for such niceties; in the time it takes for them to get 'warmed up', a criminal has broken into a house, moved a body, covered his own tracks and escaped unseen. Without the backing of a truly effective police force, Marlowe, like the pioneers who founded the city through which he now moves and like Rebus, thousands of miles away at the end of the century (ironically himself a cop, albeit one with little time for his colleagues), can only rely on his own ingenuity to get results and maintain some semblance of control over the city's criminal element: 'it is this independence and self-sufficiency, inherited from the frontier hero, that contributes to the hostility that the private eye typically displays for the forces of

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<sup>11</sup> Scaggs (2005), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Raymond Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939) in *The Big Sleep and Other Novels* (2003, London: Penguin), 30.

law and order',<sup>13</sup> suggests Scaggs. Caught in the grey area between law and disorder, operating, like the archetypal western anti-hero, for civilising forces without ever achieving any truly official capacity, the only thing separating Marlowe and the hard-boiled city from the Western frontier town, it would seem, is an increase in both buildings and population.

This sense of anarchic lawlessness in ostensibly settled surroundings is hard-boiled fiction's greatest generic debt to the Western, and as in the Western, it can be deployed in two ways: either to spur a morality play against a relatively anonymous, generic backdrop, or to pass more specific comment on the place in which said lawlessness occurs. Chandler does both. On a very basic level, *The Big Sleep* could take place in any city, street names and other locations changed to suit the author's needs but otherwise essentially the same story: Marlowe called to an anonymous mansion, murder in a suburb, a climactic confrontation with the culprit, all told without necessarily losing any of its fundamental power and similarly concluding that unchecked wealth corrupts.

It is, however, a straightforward morality play that, on a more subtle level, Chandler links almost inextricably to Los Angeles as a city. The climactic confrontation with the duplicitous, wannabe *femme fatale* Carmen Sternwood takes place at an isolated, derelict oil derrick owned by her father, one of many upon which her family's fortune rests:

I followed the ruts along and the noise of city traffic grew curiously and quickly faint, as if this was not in the city at all, but far away in a daydream land. Then the oil-stained, motionless walking-beam of a squat wooden derrick stuck up over a branch. I could see the rusty old steel cable that connected this walking-beam with half a dozen others. The beams didn't move, probably hadn't moved for a year. The wells were no longer pumping. There was a pile of rusted pipe, a loading platform that sagged at one end, half a dozen empty oil drums lying in a ragged pile. There was the stagnant, oil-scummed water of an old sump iridescent in the sunlight.

'Are they going to make a park of all this?' I asked.<sup>14</sup>

Chandler implicitly connects the moral corruption of the Sternwoods that is the spur for the entire novel to the physical decay of the business upon which their fortune - and, by extension, that of Los Angeles - is based. As Marlowe moves away from the city towards the oil fields, so the veneer of civilisation is removed and the ugly reality of the city's foundations made clear, kept far away from the glamour of Hollywood but, like the Sternwoods and their position in high society, soon to be given a sheen of respectability by its transformation into a park. The sump is also where the body of missing Sternwood in-law Rusty Regan is found, Chandler passing grim comment on what truly lies at the

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<sup>13</sup> Scaggs (2005), 60.

<sup>14</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 155.

foundation of Los Angeles' system of capitalism: the violence, double-crossing and even death that is the dark heart of the American Dream (and 'dark heart' seems to be an apt description of Chandler's Los Angeles, his naming of Marlowe a clear reference to Joseph Conrad's protagonist of the same name in his *Heart Of Darkness* (1902), which can be read as a savage critique of the corruption and madness underlying the prosperous facade of colonialism). Rankin later makes a similar point in his *Set In Darkness* (2000) (a title which, itself, echoes that of Conrad): the location shifts from Los Angeles to Edinburgh, and the oil fields become sites of property development, including the new Scottish Parliament; but the bodies lining the foundations remain.

In his celebrated essay "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944), Chandler makes clear his views of how the city really operates:

The realist in murder writes of a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the finger man for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket; a world where a judge with a cellar full of bootleg liquor can send a man to jail for having a pint in his pocket, where the mayor of your town may have condoned murder as an instrument of money-making, where no man can walk down a dark street in safety because law and order are things we talk about but refrain from practicing.<sup>15</sup>

Chandler takes the basic morality play of corruption amongst the rich and applies it to the specific history of a whole city; just as Westerns show how America, as a country in its infancy, was forged in violence, so Chandler and his hard-boiled peers reveal how little changed in the transition from desert outpost to 'civilised' metropolis. Where the crimes committed in Westerns are a product of a system of law in its infancy, those of urban crime fiction go unpunished because of the anonymity afforded by the massive population of the city: in a sea of faces it is impossible for everyone to know everybody else. Whilst a Western outpost might conceivably be small enough that a stranger in town would be noted instantly, there is no such hope in the city. Personality can become a construct, names can be changed, disguises affected, crimes covered up. The loss of community engendered by the shift from small town to big city is inherent to the pursuit of crime.

The key difference between the frontier hero and the modern detective, however, is that only the frontiersman lives in a society whose laws are still being formed, watched over by the solitary righteous figure of the sheriff: despite their own objections, the detectives' cities are governed by laws and regulations, watched over by the full force of the police department, drawing a fine line in their own quests between justice and

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond Chandler: "The Simple Art of Murder" (1944), from *The Simple Art of Murder* (1988, New York: Vintage), 17.

vigilantism. Where a Western might paint such a figure as a hero to an isolated outpost in the American deserts, the hard-boiled detective is often a much more ambiguous character, pursuing his own sense of right and wrong at the expense of the due process that has been put in place in his surroundings.

### **The hard-boiled city as existential wasteland**

The hard-boiled city is described by Ralph Willett as ‘a wasteland devastated by drugs, violence, pollution, garbage and a decaying physical infrastructure’<sup>16</sup>. It is a setting that, though stylised to an extent, depicts a reality recognisable to a greater number of people - i.e. the ever expanding urban populace of the twentieth century, as opposed to the exclusive realm inhabited by the upper-class country set - than the living Cluedo boards populated by Miss Marple and Lord Peter Wimsey, and one whose generic traits Rankin combines with highly detailed local knowledge to produce Rebus’s Edinburgh. This shift from a rural to an urban setting is often characterised by an attendant shift in the tone of the writing and the nature of the crimes being committed, as Lee Horsley argues:

[T]he anxious sense of fatality is usually attached to a pessimistic conviction that economic and socio-political circumstances will deprive people of control over their lives by destroying their hopes and by creating in them the weaknesses of character that turn them into transgressors or mark them out as victims.<sup>17</sup>

Various factors of city life - decisions made by civic leaders, (un)available jobs, the alienation that comes with being one face amongst millions - combine to make its residents feel as though their daily lives are ultimately meaningless. In other words, the crime fits the clime: rather than games played by the bored upper-classes, the inciting incidents of hard-boiled fiction are often the desperate acts of desperate people, last-ditch attempts to survive in an overwhelming, uncaring environment.

Chandler himself describes this as giving ‘murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse’,<sup>18</sup> and says of the police force:

The boys with their feet on the desks know that the easiest murder case in the world to break is the one somebody tried to get very cute with; the one that really bothers them is the murder somebody thought of only two minutes before he pulled it off.<sup>19</sup>

The murders of the city are of-the-moment, crimes of passion, necessity and temporary

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<sup>16</sup> Ralph Willett: *Hard-Boiled Detective Fiction* (1992, Staffordshire: British Association for American Studies), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Lee Horsley: “American Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction, 1920s-1940s” (2002, from <http://www.crimeculture.com/Contents/Hard-Boiled.html>, accessed 07/11/08).

<sup>18</sup> Chandler (1944), 14.

<sup>19</sup> Chandler (1944), 11.

madness, decided upon in an instant when it seems there is no alternative and, to other eyes, seemingly little motivation. If the city is a place of chance ‘encounters, contingencies and seductions’,<sup>20</sup> as in the line of thought adopted by Walter Benjamin and his followers, it is also a place of opportunistic crimes, crimes brought about by being in the right place at the right time.

This, combined with a sense of continual competition for resources (jobs, houses, money), can lead a citizen to conclude that human life is ultimately worthless; or, at least, that the lives of others are worthless, self-preservation becoming more of a priority than in an environment more rooted in a sense of community. In *The Big Sleep*, Carmen Sternwood attempts to kill Marlowe, and succeeds in killing her brother-in-law, Rusty Regan, simply for spurning her advances:

Night before last when I got home she was in my apartment. She’d kidded the manager into letting her in to wait for me. She was in my bed - naked. I threw her out on her ear. I guess maybe Regan did the same thing to her some time. But you can’t do that to Carmen.<sup>21</sup>

Her sister Vivian - Rusty’s wife - dumps the body in the oil sump to ensure their father never finds out, telling Marlowe, ‘He just didn’t mean anything to me, one way or another, alive or dead, compared with keeping it from dad’.<sup>22</sup> Carol Lundgren, homosexual lover of the pornographer Geiger, kills the blackmailer who instigates Marlowe’s investigation, Joe Brody, in the belief that Brody killed Geiger to take over his racket. None of these crimes are elaborate or elegantly planned. They are entirely of the moment; their perpetrators feel able to commit them without thought of serious repercussions, assuming that nobody will care enough about the victim - at least, nobody who cannot be bought off - to pursue an investigation. There is no trail of clues left behind by the killer, making a game out of the pursuit; Marlowe must instead hypothesise, cajole, confront and, when necessary, use brute force himself to get results. The city is presented as nurturing the alienation of the individual from the rest of humanity, alienation that builds to produce such casual murder. In this regard, the figure of the detective almost becomes an anti-city force, Marlowe alone caring for the fates of those who would otherwise be forgotten, determined to find closure for the lives of the previously dispensable and ignored.

Such is the callous, unfeeling cruelty of the modern city that it engenders existential crises in its denizens, none more so than in the detective himself (and it is, more often than

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<sup>20</sup> Graeme Gilloch: *Myth and Metropolis: Walter Benjamin and the City* (1996, Cambridge: Polity Press), 94.

<sup>21</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 161.

<sup>22</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 163.

not, *him-* rather than *herself*). Where the Golden Age detectives invariably restore order where there is chaos, Horsley tells us that the most the hard-boiled hero can hope to achieve is some measure of control over his own ultimate fate:

Characters suffer either from failures of agency (powerlessness, immobilising uncertainty) or from loss of community (isolation, betrayal). Obsessed, alienated, vulnerable, pursued or paranoid, they struggle with fatality, suffering existential despair as they act out narratives that raise the question of whether they are making their own choices or following a course dictated by fate. The forces affecting the protagonist can be perceived as a manifestation of the world's randomness and absurdity. But the historical dimension of noir fatality is strong. The protagonist feels his course to be shaped by society's injustices, failures, prejudices or pressures, and this historical specificity accounts for marked changes over time in the nature of the noir narrative. The forces controlling the lives of the characters are conceived in terms of the dominant conceptions of social-political determinants.<sup>23</sup>

The suggestion, then, is that to live in the city is to surrender, to an extent, free will and individual agency. The city becomes an entity unto itself, one that will not alter its trajectory to benefit one of its residents, one whose own interests will ultimately prevail over the needs of the individual. There is something almost Kafkaesque about hard-boiled fiction, in the sense of a single man trying to take on and bring down forces bigger than himself; *The Castle* (1926), in particular, in its depiction of K.'s futile struggle against bureaucracy, seems a particular influence on the genre.

This ultimate helplessness on the part of the characters is made manifest in Chandler by the complexity of his plotting; famously, even Chandler himself could not figure out who had killed the Sternwoods' chauffeur Owen Taylor when asked by William Faulkner and Howard Hawks, at work on the film adaptation of *The Big Sleep*.<sup>24</sup> Death is virtually arbitrary in the novel, a means of advancing the plot that can be visited upon any character at any time. Marlowe is almost comically unable to control the situation. He spends his investigation, for the most part, alternately trying to figure out exactly what is happening and making deadpan quips at his own expense in a funhouse mirror reflection of modern urban experience, one in which feelings of inadequacy and failure to comprehend fully can be excused by quick, sharp wit:

The camera was there all right, set inside it, but there was no placeholder in the camera. I looked around on the floor, thinking he might have got it out before he was shot. No placeholder. I took hold of his limp chilling hand and rolled him a little. No placeholder. I didn't like this development.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Lee Horsley: *The Noir Thriller* (2001, Houndmills: Palgrave), 11.

<sup>24</sup> "Trivia for *The Big Sleep*", from <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0038355/trivia>, accessed 06/05/09.

<sup>25</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 27.

Marlowe ‘doesn’t like this development’ precisely because there is no clue leading him to a possible culprit - there is nothing to tell him what to do next, only a dead body and his own ingenuity. Unlike the Golden Age detectives, he is left completely adrift and directionless, and yet is somehow pulled through the case regardless, as if these events will transpire regardless of how he reacts to them; once again, the real running of the city takes place on a level beyond the reach of Marlowe. Rankin also nods to this sense of urban fatalism, setting up a recurring contrast with the emblematic figure of the Golden Age: where Sherlock Holmes famously relaxes by playing his violin, able to bend the music to his own sense of rhythm and texture, Rebus is invariably left to listen to music made by others, nursing a whisky in a comfortable chair beside his hi-fi; where Holmes and the Golden Age detectives are firmly in charge, Rebus, Marlowe and their hard-boiled counterparts can only go where others lead them.

Unfeeling and seemingly aleatory in nature, steering its denizens towards unknown and unforeseeable fates, the city of hard-boiled fiction is ultimately comparable to the hell of T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (1922). Scaggs argues that the genre paints the urban landscape as a modernist space, one that rejects grand narratives and any sense of assurance, or even reality, for a fractured imitation of life:

In *The Waste Land*, the modern industrial city is depicted as a hell whose inhabitants have been ‘undone’ by a kind of death that is not physical, but spiritual and emotional. They are ‘human engines’ leading empty lives without meaning or significance, trapped in a city that is both London in 1922 and all modern cities. Eliot’s fascination with detective fiction has been well documented (Priestman 1990: 204), and his depiction of the ‘Unreal City’ of modern existence clearly parallels the ‘unreality’ of Chandler’s Los Angeles and Hammett’s San Francisco, which are characterised by imitation, artifice, insubstantiality, fakery, and façades.<sup>26</sup>

This is particularly true of Chandler’s work, set as it is in Los Angeles, home to the American film industry and as such raising questions of surface versus reality (Rankin’s Edinburgh inherits some of this inherent artificiality, the film industry replaced by the face the city presents to tourists enamoured of tartanry). The city’s inhabitants are often presented as either morally bankrupt and doing whatever they need to do to survive - like Joe Brody and his lover’s desperate attempts to take over Geiger’s racket - or as presenting a false image of themselves to the world, as is the case with Carmen Sternwood: the spoiled little rich girl who descends from her family’s mansion into the netherworld of Los Angeles to shed her socially-acceptable image and indulge her nymphomania and murderous impulses. Sometimes they do both, like Geiger himself, operating a lucrative pornography ring behind the respectable front of a bookshop on a busy street in the centre of the city.

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<sup>26</sup> Scaggs (2005), 70-71.

There is no higher purpose beyond personal gain, the streets of Los Angeles reverberating with what Lee Horsley calls ‘a modernist sense of urban anomie and moral disintegration’.<sup>27</sup>

Only the reluctantly heroic Marlowe seems determined to cling to some kind of ethical code, revealing in this self-ironising monologue that even his tough, flippant exterior is just another piece of play-acting:

I haven't a feeling or a scruple in the world. All I have the itch for is money. I am so money greedy that for twenty-five bucks a day and expenses, mostly gasolene and whisky, I do my thinking myself, what there is of it: I risk my whole future, the hatred of the cops and of Eddie Mars and his pals, I dodge bullets and eat saps, and say thank you very much, if you have any more trouble I hope you'll think of me, I'll just leave one of my cards in case anything comes up. I do all this for twenty-five bucks a day - and maybe just a little to protect what little pride a broken and sick old man has left in his blood, in the thought that his blood is not poison, and that although his two little girls are a trifle wild, as many nice girls are these days, they are not perverts or killers. And that makes me a son of a bitch. All right. I don't care anything about that.<sup>28</sup>

This monologue, thick with irony, is the closest Marlowe ever comes to a declaration of purpose, ridiculing the notion that his only concern is money by listing the hardships he has already had to face for his twenty-five dollars a day pay. Marlowe is committed to seeing a job through to the end for meagre pay and at great personal risk, seemingly the only remaining citizen of Los Angeles who has not died Eliot's spiritual and moral death. For all his street smarts and tough-guy patina, Marlowe has more in common with the knights of romance than those he interacts with on a daily basis, famously castigating a stained-glass knight because ‘He didn't seem to be really trying’.<sup>29</sup> In paralleling Marlowe with the knight (the image is returned to throughout the novel), Chandler suggests a figure who pre-dates the rise of the uniquely urban capitalism that is so gaudily endorsed by the other characters of the novel; he contextualises a man clearly out of step with this resolutely un-chivalric world by hinting that his true moral peers are the heroes of romance rather than anyone to be found in the modern city.

Dennis Porter suggests that, with his disregard for material goods, Marlowe becomes something of a working-class hero, seemingly the only decent person remaining in a Los Angeles otherwise filled with corrupt capitalists:

Marlowe works in a service industry where he does what it takes to make an honest living. His hourly fee plus expenses are the means by which he supports his loner's

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<sup>27</sup> Horsley (2001), 37.

<sup>28</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 161-162.

<sup>29</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 3.

marginal but honourable life. Ideologically then, he is an anti-elitist and even populist hero. Formed by the new, Californian West, he expresses little respect for the Eastern Seaboard and its establishment values. In many ways he shares the attitudes and values of ordinary working Americans towards the rich and the powerful in business or government, who seemed to have failed them so badly during the inter-war years. Thus if modest circumstances are not always a sign of moral rectitude, to be rich in Chandler's fiction takes a lot of explaining.<sup>30</sup>

Rebus could be described in similar terms. Though the economic circumstances of twentieth-into-twenty-first-century Edinburgh are less severe than Chandler's post-Depression Los Angeles of the 1930s, Rankin's protagonist possesses a similar distrust of the ostentatiously wealthy and those who claim power over the masses, acknowledging in *Exit Music* (2007) - the final Rebus novel - that very little can be done to change this:

He'd met plenty of politicians since - Megan Macfarlane and Jim Bakewell were merely the latest examples - but reckoned half the regulars in the Ox would make better legislators. The likes of Bakewell and Macfarlane were a constant, and though Stuart Janney would go to prison, Rebus doubted it would have any effect on First Albannach. They would continue to work with people like Sergei Andropov and Morris Gerald Cafferty, continue to rake in the bad money with the good. Jobs and prosperity: the majority didn't care how they came into being or were sustained. Edinburgh had been built on the invisible industries of banking and insurance. Who cared if a few bribes oiled the wheels?<sup>31</sup>

Rebus is positioning himself as one of the few who *does* care 'if a few bribes oiled the wheels' on behalf of those who cannot afford to ask too many questions about where their next paycheque is coming from. He aligns himself firmly with the disenfranchised working classes, particularly in his endorsement of the wisdom of his cohorts in the Oxford Bar (his drinking there, a working man's pub, itself an overt rejection of the style bars that emerge across the city in the course of the series' twenty years) over that of politicians disconnected from the needs of their constituents. Like Marlowe, he views his job as much a moral obligation as a source of income, often going above and beyond the call of duty; be it his 'wanting loose ends tied'<sup>32</sup> by going over unsolved cases in the days leading up to his impending retirement, or his off-duty drunken return to a missing woman's flat for reasons he himself cannot explain in *The Falls* (2001). These cases consume Rebus and Marlowe's lives, going beyond a mere job for both men and commandeering their very existences until justice is done. They become the moral standard-bearers in cities where nobody else can be trusted.

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<sup>30</sup> Dennis Porter: "The private eye" in Martin Priestman (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion To Crime Fiction* (2003, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 106.

<sup>31</sup> Ian Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008, London: Orion), 442-443.

<sup>32</sup> Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008), 7.

For Marlowe, the duplicitous nature of the characters with whom he interacts is extended to encompass the entirety of Los Angeles itself, which comes to fully represent the ‘unreality’ of Eliot’s modern city as described above: Chandler depicts it as something akin to a city-sized film set. Marlowe is first apprised of the details of his investigation in General Sternwood’s tropical greenhouse, faced with surreal juxtapositions like the butler ‘pushing back through the jungle with a tea-wagon’ before going ‘softly away among the orchids’,<sup>33</sup> the whole scene bathed in light that ‘had an unreal greenish colour, like light filtered through an aquarium tank’<sup>34</sup> (this opening episode could be read as another overt reference to Conrad’s largely jungle-bound *Heart of Darkness*, itself a work of proto-modernism that begins with its protagonist receiving instructions of a mission from his mysterious employer).

Perhaps the clearest indication of the unreality of Chandler’s Los Angeles is Marlowe’s description of the unkempt exterior of Eddie Mars’ nightclub:

The Cypress Club was at the far end of town, a rambling frame mansion that had once been the summer residence of a rich man named De Cazens, and later had been a hotel. It was now a big dark outwardly shabby place in a thick grove of wind-twisted Monterey cypresses, which gave it its name. It had enormous scrolled porches, turrets all over the place, stained-glass trims around the big windows, big empty stables at the back, a general air of nostalgic decay. Eddie Mars had left the outside much as he had found it, instead of making it over to look like an MGM set.<sup>35</sup>

The implication is, of course, that every other nightclub in the city *has* been made over to look like a film set, reality becoming fiction and vice versa. That Marlowe feels there is something unique about the general air of disrepair into which the exterior has fallen suggests that the entire city has airbrushed the past out of existence in a state of perpetual forward motion, keen to ignore what has gone before in a fixation with surface and outward appearance (Marlowe later dismisses ‘the pseudo-modernistic circus of the typical Hollywood night trap’<sup>36</sup>); only Mars’ club is as decayed externally as its owner is internally, a rare example of architectural honesty. The city becomes a metaphor for its citizens, the exterior pulchritude hiding interior multitudes of sin and decay. Only Marlowe, like Eddie Mars’ nightclub, reverses this trend, projecting an image of shabby ineptitude that disguises his chivalric values, whilst the city’s attempted architectural

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<sup>33</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 6.

<sup>35</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 93.

<sup>36</sup> Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939), 96.

futurism is lost to its citizens' moral murk.

Rankin uses a similar technique to comment upon Edinburgh and Rebus, replacing Chandler's Hollywood with Edinburgh's tourism industry. Grim pieces of history are neutralised and sanitised, co-opted into a fictionalised version of an Edinburgh overwhelmingly concerned with how it is perceived by outsiders:

Grassmarket was an odd little world all of its own. Centuries back, they'd held executions here, a fact commemorated by the name of one of the pubs: The Last Drop. Until the 1970s, the area had borne the reputation of being a haven for the destitute and the wandering. But then gentrification became the model. Small specialist shops opened, the bars were spruced up, and tourists began their hesitant, steep descent down Victoria Street and Candlemaker Row.<sup>37</sup>

Like Spark's Miss Jean Brodie, Stevenson's Doctor Henry Jekyll, or many of Chandler's cast of grotesques, the city is hiding its true self from prying eyes. The Grassmarket, once held to be a dangerous part of the city by a variety of people for various reasons - whether the criminals who would be put to death there, or those intimidated by the prevalence of homeless people who would gather there - is now ostensibly 'safe', its default mode sacrificed to a tourist-friendly distortion of history. Whilst this gentrification may attract tourists, it only serves to alienate Rebus, who, as one of the few residents of the city who seems physically incapable of assuming a fraudulent front, feels more at home with the stranger characteristics of the 'real' Edinburgh:

Bedlam Theatre stood at the junction of two diagonals - Forrest Road and Bristo Place - and facing the wider expanse of George IV Bridge. Years back, this had been Rebus's favourite part of town, with its weird bookshops and second-hand record market. Now Subway and Starbucks had moved in and the record market was a theme bar.<sup>38</sup>

There is a sense of concern here that Edinburgh's more endearingly scruffy side is being airbrushed by the forces of globalisation, the odd, idiosyncratic nooks and crannies replaced by the reassuring familiarity of franchised businesses. Instead of telling tourists to accept it for what it is, the city is attempting to remould itself in an attempt to garner their approval. Rankin's Edinburgh and Chandler's Los Angeles, then, both ultimately reveal themselves to be largely concerned with external appearances and superficialities, whether the attempt to live up to the hyper-reality of Hollywood (and creating a feedback loop in the process, with the real reflecting the fictional reflecting the real into infinity) or the desire to hide one's true self beneath a more palatable charade.

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<sup>37</sup> Ian Rankin: *Set In Darkness* (2005, London: Orion), 106.

<sup>38</sup> Ian Rankin: *Fleshmarket Close* (2005, London: Orion), 453.

**‘Down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean’**

Faced with this kind of malleable, ever-shifting reality, and with no firm ground upon which to stand, the hard-boiled detective is, like many of the Golden Age detectives, an outsider by nature. Unlike the Golden Age detectives, however, it is not by virtue of his own eccentricity; rather, like the sheriff in a Western, it is according to his own individual sense of justice, a product of his unwillingness to compromise his values in the face of the city’s overwhelming corruption (as illustrated by Marlowe’s self-ironising monologue quoted above, deliberately pointing out how much trouble he has been put through by the Sternwood case whilst never once asking for more than his meagre, pre-determined fee of twenty-five dollars per day). Chandler famously summated the hard-boiled detective’s predicament: ‘down these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid.’<sup>39</sup>

In Rankin’s novels, Rebus is a literal outsider to Edinburgh, having moved there from the small town of Cardenden in Fife. Like Marlowe, he often seems to be the sole creature of conscience in the city, and this is perhaps due to his outsider status: having been born and raised away from the centre of corruption that is the modern city, his moral code is established and strengthened to a sufficient degree that it cannot be undermined when he establishes himself in Edinburgh. In frequently placing Rebus in binary opposition to upper-middle-class villains - for example, the politicians of *Set In Darkness* (2000), the bankers and Russian oligarchs of *Exit Music* (2006) and the cross-section of Edinburgh’s civic leaders in *Hide & Seek* (1990) - Rankin also seems to suggest a sense of strong working-class values to be found in community: Cardenden is originally a mining town, and the implication is that the values instilled in Rebus by this sense of communal purpose are alien to city dwellers, whose disparate lives do not have this same centre of gravity. There is no central thread to the lives of Edinburgh’s citizens in the same way that Cardenden had its mine, nothing to connect one to another and as such, the implication stands, no reason for one to care about another beyond their immediate practical use. In Rankin’s Edinburgh, as in Chandler’s Los Angeles and throughout the history of hard-boiled fiction, human life is bulldozed by the expansion of the city itself, expendable in deference to the greater good; unfortunately, it is a greater good controlled by a privileged few, with nothing but their own self-preservation in mind.

The hard-boiled city, then, is one of alienation and fear, of dark streets and darker crimes; one of cover-ups, false surfaces and civic hypocrisy. It is also one with startling similarities to the Edinburgh portrayed in the work of Muriel Spark and Robert Louis

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<sup>39</sup> Chandler (1944), 18.

Stevenson, a connection Rankin makes in his own depiction of Edinburgh and which will be explored further in the following chapter.

## *Chapter Two: Tartan - The City in Edinburgh Fiction*

The Rebus novels exhibit the clear influence of American crime fiction, and, setting aside issues of nationality, quite easily inhabit what could be termed an international (or, given how pervasive an influence the likes of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett have proven to be, even simply an American) noir tradition. What makes them distinctive, however, is Rankin's equal awareness of traditions of city writing in Scottish literature, combining the two to create what James Ellroy famously termed 'tartan noir'<sup>1</sup> - a kind of Scottish crime fiction as in thrall to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) as to the work of Chandler and Hammett. By focusing on the manner in which Edinburgh is depicted in these novels, we begin to see the ways in which the psychological attributes of Stevenson and Spark's central characters come to mirror that of the city that birthed them, and how this legacy of repression and superficial propriety leads inexorably to the kind of crimes Rankin has Rebus investigate.

The implication that Edinburgh as both city and mindset can have an impact on the recurrent concerns of the authors it produces is one that is seized upon by Rankin. Talking about the formative influences of his early work - both his debut novel *The Flood* (1986) and the origins of the Rebus series - in the largely autobiographical *Rebus's Scotland: A Personal Journey* (2006), he admits to interests discovered in these three novels and subsumed into his own writing:

I was, however, interested in Scots Gothic and ballads, having been sidetracked slightly in my research by Muriel Spark's use of the supernatural and her borrowings from Scotland's dark history. I'd devoured *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. My novel *The Flood* had attempted to use some of these devices to make something mythic of my home town of Cardenden (renamed Carsden to reinforce the link with witchcraft). Now, I would be able to write about the darker side of Edinburgh, past and present, by using a detective as my hero.<sup>2</sup>

It is through his reading of Hogg and, especially, Spark and Stevenson, that Rankin feels able to delve into Edinburgh's less salubrious side. Furthermore, he is cited by Robert Crawford as arguing that 'Spark's obsession with appearance and reality may be set in a context that includes Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*, Hogg's *Justified Sinner* [...] and the

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Donald: "Out to make a killing", from *The Herald*, 03/05/99.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Rankin: *Rebus's Scotland: A Personal Journey* (2006, London: Orion), 9.

cityscape of Edinburgh itself.<sup>3</sup> It is these novels, more than any other written in or about Scotland and certainly more than any written in or about Edinburgh, that combine to inform the Scottish tenor of Rankin's writing and his own understanding of Edinburgh as a city that can itself be read as a text. In the clear importance of Edinburgh to Spark, Stevenson and Hogg, and the readily admitted influence these three authors have had upon his own vision of the city, we can see the strongest possible case for a reading of Rankin's work based around the central role played in the Rebus novels by Edinburgh itself. In order that we might recognise where Rankin fits in just such a localised literary tradition, however, we must first understand the ways in which his adopted home city of Edinburgh is imagined by his predecessors.

### **A Regional Tradition**

Rankin's continuing efforts to map the psychogeography of Edinburgh through the Rebus novels have clear roots in Chandler's similar treatment of Los Angeles in his Marlowe novels, and writing about the significance of an emergent strand of Scottish crime fiction since the 1980s, Gill Plain acknowledges that the work of writers like Rankin, Christopher Brookmyre and William McIlvanney 'owes more to American than English popular culture'<sup>4</sup> in its deployment of the noir trope of defining identity through opposition - i.e., the incorruptible figure of a working-class detective like Chandler's Marlowe set against the infinitely corrupt and wealthy powers that be, his essential goodness clear through contrast with the other inhabitants of the city, as discussed in the previous chapter. Plain also posits the shadow cast by American noir over contemporary Scottish crime writers, however, as running in tandem with a wider and inescapable appreciation of traditions of Scottish literature, as something apart from an American influence:

Scottish crime fiction, then, has had a clearly defined oppositional identity, but it is also shaped by a wider Scottish literary tradition. From James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) to R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) to Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), Scotland has produced a rich literature of duality, deceit, repression and hypocrisy. The recurrence of these themes is significant.<sup>5</sup>

Although none of these books would be classed as 'crime fiction' per se, they nevertheless

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Crawford: *Scotland's Books: The Penguin History of Scottish Literature* (2007, London: Penguin), 678.

<sup>4</sup> Gill Plain: "Concepts of Corruption: Crime Fiction and the Scottish 'State'" in *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*, ed. Berthold Schoene (2007, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 133.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

share many of the genre's characteristics: duplicity, murder, mayhem, betrayal, obfuscation of truth, characters drunk on power and self-righteousness. The suggestion, then, is that many of the generic traits of crime fiction are already present in Scottish literature, played out again and again with variations on the same basic theme of surface versus reality, just as crime writers adapt the same basic plot templates as those who came before them to suit their own purposes. This is not to say that *Jean Brodie* is the same book as *Jekyll and Hyde* is the same book as *Justified Sinner*, but there are undeniable similarities, persistent fascinations and clear thematic recurrences running through all three, and there is a direct line connecting this perennial subject matter to the Rebus novels: Edinburgh itself.

That each of the three works cited by Plain concern themselves, whether directly or indirectly, with Edinburgh is the most significant of the parallels between them, particularly as regards Rankin and Rebus. Edinburgh serves as a setting for Spark and Hogg, and as a clear source of inspiration for Stevenson. They provide three portraits of Edinburgh and its people as inextricable, the texts themselves becoming metonymic analogues to this most fittingly literary of cities.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, it appears at times as though the texts Plain cites above are inseparable not just from Edinburgh, but from each other. Carrying out a reading of these novels based around their depictions of Edinburgh, however, provides a specific focus and rationale for considering them collectively, as opposed to more general thematic similarities.

Cairns Craig argues in *The Modern Scottish Novel* that national tradition arises not out of something self-consciously imposed upon a people, but of communal living:

Nations *imagine*: not in the sense that they fictionally construct themselves but in the sense that a group of people living in a particular place live within a set of circumstances which has inheritances, limitations, possibilities.<sup>7</sup>

This is certainly true of these novels, each of which seems to have sprung from the same well of repression, self-loathing, social hypocrisy and religious fanaticism; but it is the very particularity of their setting which suggests that a *national* tradition may be too broad a label to apply. These are not the overriding concerns of books written about, for instance, Glasgow. Where the protagonists of Stevenson, Spark and Hogg are, for the most part, middle class, with concerns to match, those of Glaswegian fiction - from Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long's *No Mean City* (1935) to Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* (1981) and James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* (1994) via Archie Hind's *The Dear Green Place* (1966) - are more commonly working-class, and this is reflected in the themes they

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<sup>6</sup> Alan Bold: *Scotland: A Literary Guide* (1989, London: Routledge), 87.

<sup>7</sup> Cairns Craig: *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (1999, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 31-32.

explore. Social issues, for example - unemployment, housing problems, poverty and other sources of deprivation - figure far more prominently in the fiction of the west coast than that of the east, at least until the publication of Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993), and for much of the twentieth century we find few Glaswegian counterparts to the likes of Jean Brodie and Henry Jekyll. Craig is right to suggest that it is shared circumstances and particularity of place that form traditions; in grouping together such disparate cities (to say nothing of the rest of the country) under the broad umbrella of a national tradition, however, he undermines his point. The circumstances shared by Hogg, Stevenson and Spark are more specific than that of a national tradition: they are, instead, that of a *regional* tradition, one focused upon the unique circumstances of Edinburgh.

N.B.: Although all three novels prove influential to Rankin's work, Hogg proves so on a more broadly thematic level than in the specific psychogeographic cityscapes of Spark and Stevenson, and so due to constraints of space it is Spark and Stevenson whose influence upon Rankin's vision of Edinburgh will be examined here.

### **Robert Louis Stevenson and the psychogeography of Edinburgh**

The influence of the notorious eighteenth century Edinburgher William 'Deacon' Brodie (1741-1788) - who burgled by night to fund a gambling habit, whilst keeping up appearances by day as a respectable, and respected, cabinet-maker and councillor - hangs heavy over Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and Rankin's Rebus novels, and goes some way toward explaining why both often seem inseparable from another definitive literary treatment of Edinburgh: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). As Spark does for her own similarly-named titular character, Stevenson draws inspiration from Brodie for his Jekyll, not so much with regards to the crimes committed - Hyde is violent and foul-tempered but he is not a robber - but with the recurrent Edinburgh dichotomy of respectable exteriors and corrupt interiors; with what Stevenson himself termed, in the title of his 1880 play about Brodie written with W.E. Henley, 'the double life'. As an evocative biographical aside, it is perhaps instructive to realise that one of only two known surviving cabinets made by Brodie could be found in Stevenson's childhood bedroom, and is now on display in Edinburgh's Writers' Museum; Brodie's legacy literally loomed large over the young Stevenson. To this notion of Brodie as upstanding citizen and degenerate criminal simultaneously, Stevenson added the influence of Dr James Young Simpson's self-experimentation with anaesthetics to create his model for Dr Henry Jekyll,<sup>8</sup> just as Spark would later combine Brodie with a teacher

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<sup>8</sup> Crawford (2007), 501.

from her own youth, Christina Kay, to create a model for Miss Jean Brodie.

It is important to note the influence of these Edinburghers on the construction of Stevenson's book when discussing it as a product of that city, because for all its resonance with Edinburgh-based fiction like *Jean Brodie* and *Justified Sinner*, its physical setting is ostensibly Victorian London; to Stevenson, much like Spark and Rankin after him, Edinburgh is as much a state of mind as a concrete locale, as Roderick Watson discusses:

[T]his novel's interest in the unconscious and interior nature of good and evil give it a more serious moral dimension, just as it also symbolises a social truth about Victorian society and the anonymity of its great cities, where depravity and respectability rub shoulders. Although the tale is set in London, it has deeply Scottish roots, and true to the ethos of the *Justified Sinner* it shows the principle of evil as a kind of double being that threatens the upright personality from within. Jekyll's experiments were originally intended to remove this unworthy self, but they released him instead, and it is the experience of pleasure that subverts the doctor's Calvinist ideal of 'a life of effort, virtue and control'.<sup>9</sup>

Stevenson may have set his novel in London, but there is nothing about it that makes it an exclusively 'London' novel in the manner of *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*'s direct relationship with Edinburgh or *The Big Sleep*'s relationship to Los Angeles. Relatively little attention is paid to geographical specificity, with the interiors far more important than the exteriors; but, as Kurt Wittig argues, 'his work was thoroughly Scottish, and it cannot be fully appreciated apart from its Scottish background.'<sup>10</sup> Stevenson demonstrates, in a manner later developed by Spark and Rankin, that the notion of city can have as much to do with a particular attitude or state of mind as it can with a tangible setting. As Watson points out above, London in the novel exists as an arena for anonymity, a place in which bad behaviour can be indulged with little consequence, and in which a person can disappear without trace and reappear without question.

There is a case to be made with the space provided by this lack of specificity for a reading of Stevenson's vision of London in the novel as, in actuality, Stevenson's vision of Victorian Edinburgh: from the references to Deacon Brodie discussed above to Rankin's suggestion that Jekyll's experiences are based upon Stevenson's own time in the city, escaping his rigid New Town family life as a young man to indulge himself in the decadent chaos of the Old Town.<sup>11</sup> His choice of London over Edinburgh as setting most likely has as much to do with conventions of the time of writing than with any intimate knowledge of

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<sup>9</sup> Roderick Watson: *The Literature of Scotland: The Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century (Second Edition)* (1984, 2007, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan), 324.

<sup>10</sup> Kurt Wittig: *The Scottish Tradition in Literature* (1958, Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd), 257.

<sup>11</sup> Rankin (2006), 66-67.

the city, and, as Richard Dury makes clear, with the wider relevance the British capital was held to have for the rest of the world: ‘making the setting London allows it to take on a clear symbolic role for the whole of civilization (London being seen as the centre of the world at that time).’<sup>12</sup> London in the book is ‘London’ in name alone, identified as such for purely symbolic reasons, suggesting the corruption at the figurative heart of the British Empire and, by extension, of humanity itself (a further parallel, as in Raymond Chandler, to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart Of Darkness*, 1902).

Beyond this, however, lies a city that is essentially Edinburgh in its construction: justification for such claims has been found in aspects of the book as specific as the layout of Jekyll and Hyde’s Soho - with Dury suggesting that ‘the urban texture seems reminiscent of the Old Town of Edinburgh (the irregular agglomeration of houses and courtyards, with respectable and disrespectable houses closely mixed)’<sup>13</sup> - and as abstract as the perpetual gloom, both literal and metaphorical, that swaddles the city in Moray McLaren’s reading:

Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde’s town *is* Edinburgh. The dark contrast between the dark evil and the almost equally ill-lit virtue is pure Edinburgh. The black old streets in which Hyde slinks on his evil path amidst carefully undescribed squalor and committing, for the most part, carefully unspecified sins, are Edinburgh streets. The heavily furnished, lamp-shaded interior of Dr. Jekyll’s unostentatiously prosperous house is the inside of any well-to-do professional man’s home in the New Town of Edinburgh. The contrast is not so much between black evil and golden goodness as between dark dirt and gloomy respectability. The stage throughout is only half lit. It is an Edinburgh Winter’s Night tale.<sup>14</sup>

The divide between Jekyll and Hyde is distinctly that of Edinburgh’s Old and New Towns: Jekyll the repressed, morally upright citizen of the New Town, Hyde patrolling the streets of what Rankin refers to as ‘a slough of despond at that time, it was a place where only the poorest of the poor would live [...] this Old Town that was full of these sleazy bars where prostitutes and poets would hang out and carouse.’<sup>15</sup> Where Jekyll, Utterson and their cohorts reside in stately town houses - Utterson’s ‘conveniently near’ a church, as if by way of emphasis<sup>16</sup> - Hyde skulks in and out of more downmarket quarters, on a street otherwise noted for its ‘general cleanliness and gaiety of note’:

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Dury: *The Annotated Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (Second Edition, Revised and Updated)* (2005, Genova: ECIG), 62-63.

<sup>13</sup> Dury (2005), 62.

<sup>14</sup> Moray McLaren: *Stevenson and Edinburgh: A Centenary Study* (1950, London: Chapman & Hall), 157-158.

<sup>15</sup> Ian Rankin, interviewed in *The Adventures of Robert Louis Stevenson* (dir: Andrew Thompson, 2005).

<sup>16</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde and Weir of Hermiston* (1998, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 16.

Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east, the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point, a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two storeys high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature, the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence.<sup>17</sup>

Here we see the mixture of respectable and disrespectable referred to by Dury as indicative of Edinburgh's Old Town, but more importantly we see a literal physical distancing of Jekyll's 'good' and 'bad' sides: when Jekyll becomes Hyde, he forces himself to leave the reputable, moralistic and ordered surroundings of his social circle (the New Town) for a place where nobody cares about dirt and disrepair, where chaos reigns and where he can indulge himself without question or undue attention. The city is presented as one of two distinct halves - high and low, good and bad (or, perhaps more accurately, respectable and disrespectable) - and it is this more than any other trait that suggests Edinburgh above London.

Crucially, the 'good' half remains good simply because its citizens are so repressed that they feel they can only indulge their darker desires in the 'bad' half: portions of the city are assigned specific moral representations, but the people who live in each cannot be categorised as 'good' or 'bad' quite so easily, as, like Jekyll/Hyde, they must go between each. Sir Danvers Carew, for instance, may appear to be a morally upstanding pillar of the community, but questions remain over the circumstances of his death: why was he walking through the streets of the city, alone, in a lane 'not far from the river' so late at night?<sup>18</sup> What did he ask of Hyde to provoke him into such a murderous frenzy? The maid who witnesses the attack may romanticise the victim, but this does not mean he was as 'beautiful' a person in reality as in her 'dream of musing', and there is a strong insinuation that he was pursuing the kind of secretive activity that, to the Victorian sensibility, demanded the cover of night (or, were he a character in Rankin a century later, may have found him amongst the resoundingly middle-class clientele of 'Hyde's' underground gentleman's club as depicted in *Hide & Seek*, 1990). Like Jekyll, his darker desires can only be met at a safe distance from his usual surroundings; the only difference is that Carew is still Carew when he indulges them, physically manifesting his transition from 'good' to 'bad' only by moving between the similarly labelled areas of the city. Stevenson sees address within the city as ultimately irrelevant to the human condition: everyone, sooner or later, drifts into the Old Town and all that it stands for. The social niceties of the upper-middle classes in the New Town are a façade, just like the houses they live in, the recurring

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<sup>17</sup> Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), 25.

Edinburgh dichotomy between surface and reality of central importance once again: as it is in Spark with Jean Brodie, as it is in Rankin with the social-climbing gangster Cafferty and his ilk. All the imposed order of the New Town, with its grid-like structure and neo-classical architecture, cannot alter the continued existence of the Old Town, permanently lurking in the shadows on the other side of Castle Rock in a mess of winding closes and anonymous encounters.

At the root of this interpretation of London-as-Edinburgh, as Roderick Watson suggests above, is an all-pervasive air of Calvinism, just as there is throughout *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and the entirety of the Rebus series. From the opening page we are told that Utterson's personal philosophy is to 'incline to Cain's heresy [...] I let my brother go to the devil in his own way',<sup>19</sup> instantly presenting the reader with an image of pre-determined fate: even though a person might go 'his own way', it is only a variation on the journey to the same destination as everybody else, upon which nothing can intervene (a striking parallel to the fatalism of noir). Whilst Utterson's own expression of this philosophy resonates with the wider Edinburgh desire to 'walk past quietly' exemplified below by Miss Jean Brodie, ignoring issues of real importance in favour of superficial propriety, it is nevertheless telling that the sole witness to the novel's only confirmed murder - that of Sir Danvers Carew, as seen by the maid looking out from her window above street level - is powerless to prevent it, and must instead let Sir Danvers 'go to the devil in his own way':

The old gentleman took a step back, with the air of one very much surprised and a trifle hurt; and at that Mr Hyde broke out of all bounds and clubbed him to the earth. And next moment, with ape-like fury, he was trampling his victim under foot, and hailing down a storm of blows, under which the bones were audibly shattered and the body jumped upon the roadway. At the horror of these sights and sounds, the maid fainted.<sup>20</sup>

Not only is the maid physically distanced from the activity by the window and the space between it and the lane below, but she is further prevented from intervening by her fainting. Calvinism is almost ingrained in the very fabric of the city, to the extent that any attempt to alter pre-determined fate is blocked by any means necessary. This whole set-piece strongly echoes a similar incident in Hogg's *Justified Sinner* - itself a total, inescapable product of Calvinism - when the murder of George Colwan is witnessed, again from a window above the street, by the prostitute Arabella Calvert who, like the maid in *Jekyll and Hyde* is powerless to stop what takes place, not only because of her physical distance from the

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<sup>19</sup> Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), 25-26.

incident but also because of her low social standing: despite realizing the truth of the matter - that one of the murderers is not the recently departed Thomas Drummond but is, in fact, 'some spirit, or demon, in his likeness'<sup>21</sup> - she, as a mere prostitute, cannot convince the man she is with of this before it is too late. There is an element in both of these scenes of the city somehow conspiring to rob its citizens of any degree of control, by placing a variety of obstacles - physical distance, lowly social standing, a fainting spell - between them and any kind of meaningful intervention. In the face of Edinburgh's Calvinist predestination, the best any person can hope for is a view from the window; a realisation that echoes the ultimate helplessness of Chandler's unfortunate characters, lost to plots against their lives of staggering complexity, as discussed in the previous chapter.

For Rankin, security cameras come to take the place of these distant windows, representing a kind of futile voyeurism in the present day, his protagonist helplessly watching people stumble blindly towards their predestined fates but ultimately unable to change what happens to them. Although Rebus is able to review evidence for several cases throughout the series using camera footage - the disappearance of the son of school friends in *Dead Souls* (1999), his last known whereabouts caught on a nightclub's CCTV system; a Russian poet's final moments analysed via a nearby car park's security system in *Exit Music* (2007); both the assault of partner Siobhan Clarke's mother during a protest gone wrong and the minutes before an MP's fatal fall from the walls of Edinburgh castle captured in photographs in *The Naming of the Dead* (2005) - he is nevertheless doing so at too late a stage to alter their outcomes. His job at this remove is simply to attempt to understand how and why these things happened, not to prevent them. The crimes committed would have happened regardless of their being caught on film, the security cameras a policing technique less concerned with prevention of crime or direct intervention in the machinations of fate than with punishment - a suitably Calvinistic way of working, placing less emphasis on the ability to change a person's fate than on passing judgement on the accused.

This sense of Calvinism as being a part of the very fabric of Edinburgh is made manifest in Stevenson not only in the sense of fatalism hanging over its inhabitants, and in the clear divide between the respectably staid town houses representing the New Town and the dingy, dark back streets standing in for the Old Town, but also directly through the actions (or lack thereof) of the characters. The repression of desire in favour of polite respectability displayed by the circle of friends surrounding Jekyll and Utterson is a direct

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<sup>21</sup> James Hogg: *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1999, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 74.

product of the Calvinist mindset, echoed through the years by Miss Jean Brodie and several of the civic leaders who come into contact with Rebus. McLaren suggests that Stevenson's central figure is ultimately unhappy as both Jekyll and Hyde:

[The split between Jekyll and Hyde] is how a young man of imagination might view, in the abstract, the difference between an Edinburgh slum and an Edinburgh Christian merchant's home. There is no joy, fun or intoxication in either alternative, only a frenzied lust in the one and the dour satisfaction of an entrenched rectitude in the other. Along with the *Memoirs of a Justified Sinner* [sic] by Hogg (another writer who drew much of his inspiration from Edinburgh) it is one of the most savagely puritan, the most completely Calvinist products of the Scottish imaginative genius. And its background is Edinburgh<sup>22</sup>

Edinburgh is presented as a city where the Calvinist mindset has taken hold to such a degree that it has effectively moved from religious tenet to social normalcy. It is grey not only in the co-mingling of good and evil to be found in each of its citizens, but in the reluctance to reach either extreme of purest black or white: the good take no pleasure from their actions, doing what they do merely to keep up appearances; whilst the bad prove the ultimate banality of their evil. As in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, natural human emotions - lust, anger, ecstasy, jealousy - are subdued by rigorous social conventions, the desire to do wrong constantly tempered by the thought of what the neighbours and, more pertinently, God might think: in a religion where everyone is damned until proven otherwise, there is distinct distrust of those who might take pleasure from such knowledge.

This is ultimately why Hyde poses such a threat to the city, and what Jekyll means by his famous declaration: 'My devil had been long caged, he came out roaring'.<sup>23</sup> The city seemingly operates on the understanding that its civic leaders must do their utmost to repress their desires. There is nothing wrong with possessing these desires, per se, so long as they are not made public, another demonstration of the particularly Edinburgh notion of respectable appearances shielding less reputable inner behaviour (and once again prefiguring Rankin a century later: several of the Rebus novels centre around politicians and others of high social standing secretly indulging in disreputable behaviour, notably *Hide & Seek*, 1990; *Strip Jack*, 1992; and *Exit Music*, 2007). Hyde, however, is so completely divorced from the 'good' part of Jekyll that he feels no compunction in satisfying every urge that has been held back from public view for so long, these needs intensified by the length of time for which they have been denied:

The pleasures which I made haste to seek in my disguise were, as I have said, undignified; I would scarce use a harder term. But in the hands of Edward Hyde,

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<sup>22</sup> McLaren (1950), 158.

<sup>23</sup> Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), 69.

they soon began to take a turn towards the monstrous. When I would come back from these excursions, I was often plunged into a kind of wonder at my vicarious depravity. This familiar that I called out of my own soul, and sent forth alone to do his good pleasure, was a being inherently malign and villainous; his every act and thought centred on self; drinking pleasure with bestial avidity from any degree of torture to another; relentless like a man of stone. Henry Jekyll stood at times aghast before the acts of Edward Hyde; but the situation was apart from ordinary laws, and insidiously relaxed the grip of conscience.<sup>24</sup>

In aiming to restrict the evil done in the city, the Calvinist ideals held by Stevenson's vision of London-as-Edinburgh instead make that which inevitably escapes that much worse. The sins in which Hyde indulges with 'every act and thought centred on self' only prove so abhorrent because Jekyll's every act and thought is centred on how he will be perceived by his peers, by those lower down the social ladder than he, and ultimately by God. The balance in Edinburgh between good and bad is so skewed towards outward displays of good at the neglect of what lies beneath - towards superficial niceties over true feelings - and the judgemental tenets of Calvinism so inscribed in the minds of its inhabitants that pillars of society like Jekyll feel the need to indulge their darker desires secretly, if at all, until they cannot be contained any longer and begin to do some real damage. The suggestion, then, is that Edinburgh is an environment in which sin goes unacknowledged and wilfully ignored, until it is too late to make any difference; politeness, quiet restraint and decorum valued above honesty and a healthy balance between the good and the bad.

### **'Walk past quietly': *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* and 'Edinburgh' as adjective**

Stevenson's depiction of Edinburgh as a city in thrall to outward displays of social propriety is further developed by Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961). Edinburgh, and the way of thinking it comes to represent, is crucial to the novel, so much so that it is hard to conceive of its being set in any other city. From the novel's outset, the very proper language and barely-concealed judgemental attitudes of the city's educated middle classes, embodied by Miss Brodie herself, find the ideal vehicle in the 'mordant irony'<sup>25</sup> of Spark's narrator, as described by Frank Kermode:

there is a fusion of tone and material. There is a characteristic Spark voice, slightly pedantic, produced in Scotland's good schools [...] This faint pedantry suits Miss Brodie, and the book should ideally be read aloud by a lady who has preserved the Edinburgh accent in all its soft severity. The tone is now more important than the plot.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Stevenson: *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), 65-66.

<sup>25</sup> Roderick Watson: *The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century (Second Edition)* (2007, Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan), 157.

<sup>26</sup> Frank Kermode: "To *The Girls of Slender Means*" in Joseph Hynes (ed.): *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark*

The narrator is keen to point out the rituals and social mannerisms that constitute the lives of the characters, keen to emphasize what kind of behaviour might be considered ‘proper’:

The girls could not take off their panama hats because this was not far from the school gates and hatlessness was an offence. Certain departures from the proper set of the hat on the head were overlooked in the case of fourth-form girls and upwards so long as nobody wore their hat at an angle.<sup>27</sup>

Beginning the novel with a detail such as this - it begins the second paragraph of the first chapter - prepares the reader for a book that lingers over social minutiae, and captures the state of mind of a city whose middle classes will form a damning opinion of a person based on even the smallest of social faux-pas. Spark’s Edinburgh is one of neighbours looking over each other’s fences, of petty jealousies and sneeringly restrained deprecation; of, inevitably, haves and have-nots: an Edinburgh still easily recognisable to readers of Rankin in the stark contrast between the ongoing redevelopment of the city centre and the deprivation to be found in its satellite estates. It captures what Willy Maley refers to as ‘the ‘fur coat and nae knickers’ world of Edinburgh in the 1930s’<sup>28</sup>: the kind of environment in which a person might be poor or otherwise inconvenienced, but in which that is no excuse not to maintain respectable appearances (another parallel to Raymond Chandler’s glitzy, surface-obsessed Hollywood, where image is all and inner beauty is irrelevant).

The importance of social niceties to Edinburgh above all is carried through in Rankin by the city’s increasingly relaxed attitude towards its criminals the further up the social ladder they climb. Several of Rebus’s adversaries throughout the series are upper-middle class, from the clientele of Hyde’s gentleman’s club in *Hide & Seek* (1990) to Rebus’s recurrent nemesis, Cafferty, the gangland boss whose release from prison in *Set In Darkness* (2000) is the first step in his ascent through Edinburgh’s social spheres. Without giving up any of his criminal activity, Cafferty comes to live in a suburban mansion in a respectable neighbourhood. By the time of *Exit Music* (2007) he is hosting visiting Russian oligarchs, but at the same time counters the prestige of such an engagement by screening for them amateur pornography, filmed secretly in flats he rents to unwitting members of the lower classes. Unlike the community uprising that greets the paedophile at the centre of *Dead Souls* (1999) upon his release from prison, there is no such reaction to Cafferty’s seedy misdeeds because, externally, he remains a model neighbour; where the paedophile lives in a council estate, with no middle class airs or graces to hide behind, Cafferty shields

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(1992, New York: G.K. Hall & Co.), 177.

<sup>27</sup> Muriel Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1965, London: Penguin), 5.

<sup>28</sup> Willy Maley: *Muriel Spark for Starters* (2008, Edinburgh: Capercaillie), 56.

his corruption from public view with opulence:

The house was Victorian, the ceilings high with ornate cornicing. Cafferty had started collecting art, big splashy paintings which hurt Rebus's eyes. He wondered if any of them were by Roddy Denholm. The curtains were closed and he left them that way, turning on the lights instead. TV and hi-fi and three sofas. Nothing on the marble-topped coffee table but a couple of old newspapers and a pair of spectacles - the gangster too vain to wear them anywhere outside the privacy of his home.<sup>29</sup>

Cafferty, a career criminal who has done nothing to change his ways since his release from prison, has nevertheless eluded capture, delegating the dirty work to lesser minions and devoting his attention to keeping up appearances. His criminal activity is entirely dependent on the image he projects, whether he accomplishes this through the lavish house in an affluent neighbourhood or through smaller details such as not wearing his glasses in public. In this regard, a direct line can be drawn between Cafferty's image management and Spark's Brodie set adjusting their hats outside the school gates - Edinburgh is more concerned with the image its citizens present to the world than with the actual merits of their behaviour.

Spark comes to use 'Edinburgh' as adjectival shorthand for exactly this kind of superficial snobbery, cementing the connection between the city and its obsession with outward appearance and ostensibly 'proper' behaviour. Brodie's withering dismissal of the Brownies and Girl Guides is exemplary of this: "For those who like that sort of thing," said Miss Brodie in her best Edinburgh voice, "that is the sort of thing they like."<sup>30</sup> 'Edinburgh' is used here to describe a very specific kind of underhanded condescension, and is used adjectivally in various contexts throughout, mainly as an adjunct to a certain kind of haughty behaviour associated with Brodie and her fellow middle-class spinsters, such as their perhaps surprising prudishness for such supposed progressives. We are told that Mr Lowther, the music teacher with whom Brodie has an affair, 'looked at Miss Brodie like a child showing off its tricks and almost as if testing Miss Brodie to see if she were at all willing to conspire in his un-Edinburgh conduct'.<sup>31</sup> When she does finally consent to an affair, it is carried out at Lowther's home in Cramond, beyond the city boundaries, away from prying eyes and at a safe distance from any preconceived notions of how one should carry oneself around Edinburgh.

It is in behaviour such as this that Brodie, and the book around her, becomes

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<sup>29</sup> Ian Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008, London: Orion), 380.

<sup>30</sup> Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1965), 31.

<sup>31</sup> Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1965), 23.

emblematic of Edinburgh in the 1930s and the way of life it represents, just as Rankin would later use Rebus to depict the state of Edinburgh at the end of the twentieth century; Eunice, one of ‘the Brodie set’, even describes her as ‘an Edinburgh Festival all on her own’.<sup>32</sup> She believes herself superior to many, certainly to her fellow teachers at Marcia Blaine, and so she believes Edinburgh to be superior to many other cities, certainly to other Scottish cities. Whilst it would be wrong to align Brodie with Spark herself, this view of the city is nevertheless one shared by the author, Spark quoted as saying ‘Edinburgh has always been a European city: its ties are with Europe and not with England’<sup>33</sup> and later to take up residence in Italy until her death in 2006. There is certainly a sense of Edinburgh as being set apart (and above) from the rest of Scotland, another trait attributable to Spark’s own upbringing in the city:

Most Edinburgh-born people, of my generation at least, must have been brought up with a sense of civic superiority. We were definitely given to understand that we were citizens of no mean city. In time, and with experience of other cities, one would have discovered the beautiful uniqueness of Edinburgh for oneself as the visitors do. But the physical features of the place surely had an effect as special as themselves on the outlook of the people. The Castle Rock is something, rising up as it does from pre-history between the formal grace of the New Town and the noble network of the Old. To have a great primitive black crag rising up in the middle of populated streets of commerce, stately squares and winding closes, is like the statement of an unmitigated fact preceded by “nevertheless.”<sup>34</sup>

The pointed use of the phrase ‘no mean city’ is a clear shot at Glasgow, borrowing as it does the title of Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long’s infamous 1935 account of working class life in the Gorbals: this is no locus of abject poverty and squalor; this is not the knife crime capital of Scotland; this is Edinburgh. The Castle Rock is, to Spark, an eternal reminder of the very essence of the city, both for the castle itself with all the history that has passed through it and the dormant volcano on which it rests. It is a certainty, a permanence, the very thing that will keep Edinburgh Edinburgh regardless of how often the streets surrounding it rise and fall, come and go, change and change again; the city’s identity rests upon its very strong sense of its own history. Spark talks earlier in the same essay of how much she associates the word ‘nevertheless’ with Edinburgh and her education there, as something inseparable from her memories of the place, and here, the word finds its physical manifestation in the primal mass of Castle Rock, the people and the

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<sup>32</sup> Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1965), 27.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Rankin: “The Deliberate Cunning of Muriel Spark” in Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (eds.): *The Scottish Novel Since The Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams* (1993, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 52.

<sup>34</sup> Muriel Spark: “Edinburgh-born” in Joseph Hynes (ed.): *Critical Essays on Muriel Spark* (1992, New York: G.K. Hall & Co.), 22.

place once again inexorably intertwined.

Nevertheless, Brodie's historically-biased view of Edinburgh, shared with Spark to an extent but without the author's critical eye, is myopic at best. She exists in a middle-class bubble, as do her students and, for the most part, the rest of the book, its satire and morality play centring on the mores of Morningside and similar environs. The one prominent example of the characters moving outside of this comfort zone contextualises the novel's satire of the middle classes, augmenting Miss Brodie's blind spot towards fascism with a demonstration of how blinkered she is to the problems that exist in her own city. Taking the girls on a walk through the city on a weekday morning, Brodie proves blithely unaffected by the still-evident aftermath of the economic depression of the early 1930s, that which casts such a pall over Marlowe and his hard-boiled counterparts:

Now they were in a great square, the Grassmarket, with the Castle, which was in any case everywhere, rearing between a big gap in the houses where the aristocracy used to live. It was Sandy's first experience of a foreign country, which intimates itself by its new smells and shapes and its new poor. A man sat on the icy-cold pavement; he just sat. A crowd of children, some without shoes, were playing some fight game, and some boys shouted after Miss Brodie's violet-clad company, with words that the girls had not heard before, but rightly understood to be obscene. Children and women with shawls came in and out of the dark closes. Sandy found she was holding Mary's hand in her bewilderment, all the girls were holding hands, while Miss Brodie talked of history. Into the High Street, and 'John Knox,' said Miss Brodie, 'was an embittered man. He could never be at ease with the gay French Queen. We of Edinburgh owe a lot to the French. We are Europeans.' The smell was amazingly terrible. In the middle of the road farther up the High Street a crowd was gathered. 'Walk past quietly,' said Miss Brodie.<sup>35</sup>

Faced with the reality of Edinburgh in the 1930s, Brodie can but take refuge in the past, regaling her charges with stories of Knox and Mary whilst, with her 'walk past quietly', effectively encouraging them to ignore the blatantly obvious problems of the present. She is fully aware of the problems blighting her city, and yet deliberately chooses to ignore them, eliminating the possibility that she is simply blissfully unaware. Brodie might insist that Edinburgh is a European city, and Spark that it is 'no mean city', but here the girls are exposed to an Edinburgh that would later be developed further by Rankin, an Edinburgh that has as much in common with Glasgow as Rome, one of squalor, class divide and post-industrial blight. Spark might focus primarily on the machinations of the affluent middle-class, but she acknowledges the hardships experienced by the less fortunate literally living in the shadow of the Castle, and in so doing reveals what Sandy later comes to think of as 'other people's Edinburghs quite different from hers, and with which she held only the

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<sup>35</sup> Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1965), 32-33.

names of districts and streets and monuments in common'.<sup>36</sup>

The blind spot that leads Brodie to overlook Edinburgh's woes in favour of the splendour of its history and its most famous sights re-surfaces in Rankin, with Rebus presented, unlike Brodie, as one of the few who is actually immune to the city's dazzling sheen. Walking over the North Bridge with present lover Jean Burchill in *The Falls* (2001), the detective remains unmoved:

Jean stopped to look at the view: the Scott Monument, the Castle, and Ramsay Gardens.

'Such a beautiful city,' she said. Rebus tried to agree. He hardly saw it any more. To him, Edinburgh had become a state of mind, a juggling of criminal thoughts and baser instincts. He liked its size, its compactness. He liked its bars. But its outward show had ceased to impress him a long time ago. Jean wrapped her coat tightly around her. 'Everywhere you look, there's some story, some little piece of history.' She looked at him and he nodded agreement, but he was remembering all the suicides he'd dealt with, people who'd jumped from North Bridge maybe because they couldn't see the same city Jean did.

'I never tire of this view,' she said, turning back towards the car. He nodded again, disingenuously. To him, it wasn't a view at all. It was a crime scene waiting to happen.<sup>37</sup>

Those who see only the tourist-friendly side of Edinburgh almost seem to forget that it remains a real, functioning city, with all the social problems that entails, rather than a sanitised historical theme park. The ever-present reminders of the city's history, and the tourists they attract, give the impression of a city out of time and disconnected from the rest of the world; a living picture-postcard. Rebus's line of work shatters this illusion, bringing him face-to-face with crimes the equal of any committed in any other city and confirming that Edinburgh is very much a typical, contemporary urban environment beneath its charmingly antiquated exterior. Like Miss Jean Brodie and her middle-class contemporaries, it puts on a front in public and for visitors; but in private, left alone with only those who know it well, its darker side is revealed.

### **'Completing the precursors': Edinburgh as crime fiction locale**

Edinburgh to Stevenson, Spark and Rankin is a city where the actions of the individual can go unquestioned and unchecked, through a combination of the anonymity of life in any city, the realisation that a refined front can mask a multitude of sins and a sense of innate propriety prohibiting the asking of too many impolite questions. It is through this attitude that we ultimately find a case to be made for *Jekyll and Hyde*'s functioning as an early

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<sup>36</sup> Spark: *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1965), 33.

<sup>37</sup> Ian Rankin: *The Falls* (2005, London: Orion), 153.

example of the Edinburgh crime novel, and *Jean Brodie* as a sly perversion of the form (both, after all, revolve around the solving of central mysteries, regarding respectively the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde and the identity of the ‘Judas’ of the Brodie Set). The importance of public over private life; the forbidding of improper questions bred by the deep-set Calvinist mentality; the tendency, like Stevenson’s Utterson, to ‘let my brother go to the Devil in his own way’: all combine to make Edinburgh a city particularly well-suited to the criminally-inclined.

The crime fiction of Ian Rankin is very much the sum of these influences. From these two chapters we can see the dual touchstones that Rankin combines to create the Edinburgh of the Rebus series: the bleak outlook and societal engagement of American hard-boiled fiction coupled with traditions of Scottish authors writing about Edinburgh. His technique is that which Harold Bloom, in his *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973, 1997), labels *tessera*:

I take the word not from mosaic-making, where it is still used, but from the ancient mystery cults, where it meant a token of recognition, the fragment say of a small pot which with the other fragments would re-constitute the vessel. A poet antithetically “completes” his precursor, by so reading the parent-poem as to retain its terms but to mean them in another sense, as though the precursor had failed to go far enough.<sup>38</sup>

The precursors which Rankin ‘completes’ are Spark and Stevenson. He ‘retains’ their depictions of Edinburgh as Calvinistic, in thrall to notions of superficial propriety and bound by its own history; but ‘re-constitutes’ these elements as the foundation for a city that fits the generic requirements of hard-boiled fiction. It is a role for the city that, as discussed above, is hinted at in both Spark and Stevenson, if not as a locale for hard-boiled fiction then certainly as a locale for crime fiction in a broader sense: like the best hard-boiled fiction, both novels are as much about the city that birthed them as the characters whose actions they depict. Rankin identifies these parallels at an early stage in his writing of the Rebus series, taking Spark and Stevenson’s depictions of Edinburgh and, where they ‘failed to go far enough’, pushing them over completely into the realm of crime fiction (and in so doing implying that, logically, any Scottish literary canon that includes Stevenson and Spark should also incorporate crime fiction, given the similar concerns running through each). By fully embracing a genre that places more emphasis than most on the importance of the urban environment whilst maintaining parallels with existent Scottish literary traditions, Rankin finds the perfect vehicle through which to transmit his ideas about the city and remain true to the spirit of Spark and Stevenson. In placing a detective as his

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<sup>38</sup> Harold Bloom: *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (Second Edition)* (1997, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press), 14.

central protagonist, he also allows himself the freedom to travel through and comment upon every facet of the city's social structure as a matter of course.

That Rankin can draw upon and subvert the attitudes found in Stevenson and Spark in such a way despite the hundred-and-twenty-one years separating the publications of *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Exit Music*, the final Rebus novel, can be attributed to a strong, persistent sense of continuity between Edinburgh's past and present. McLaren, writing in 1950, suggests that, Edinburgh apart, 'it is difficult to think of any large town which has not altered so radically or superficially so much that a visitor from a hundred, seventy, perhaps fifty years ago would be quite confounded'.<sup>39</sup> This relates to Spark's idea of Edinburgh as a physical manifestation of the word 'nevertheless', a constant reminder of its past visible from every street and something McLaren goes on to explain in greater detail:

Whatever you built on the top of the Castle Rock it would be difficult to obliterate its overwhelming presence in the centre of the city. You may turn the great houses of the New Town into blocks of flats and offices, but, short of the inconceivable vandalism of pulling it all down stone by stone (a considerable feat) you will not destroy that grand pattern for centuries. It would take an atomic bomb to change the shape of the shores of the Firth of Forth and something more than an atomic bomb to move the omnipresent Arthur's Seat or the Pentland Hills. Nothing that man has yet thought of could change the climate. And it is surely the climate, more than anything else, that is responsible for that odd quality of timelessness in the stone of this stony city.<sup>40</sup>

Edinburgh is so densely and deliberately constructed as a city of immovable force that it proves more resistant than most to change. On a purely physical level, the distinct divide between the chaotic Old Town and ordered New Town still exists, and the Castle still looms large over both. This, coupled with the comparable attitudes towards the city to be found across the hundred-plus years spanned by Stevenson, Spark and Rankin, strongly implies that the steadfast mindset of Edinburgh's inhabitants stems in no small part from their ultimate inability to effectively reshape the physical landscape around them; thus, Deacon Brodie's actions find echoes in both *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, and Rankin's Edinburgh seems, at times, to be entirely populated by Jekyll and Hyde figures. History is doomed to repeat itself, past events leave psychic scars on the present and the people find reminders of old guilt and prior misdeeds everywhere they look. It is, in other words, the perfect setting for the generic requirements of Rankin's crime fiction, the missing link between the urban Scottish and hard-boiled traditions.

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<sup>39</sup> McLaren (1950), 15.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

### ***Chapter Three: Tartan Noir - The City in Rankin***

From the previous chapters, we can see the two distinct literary modes Ian Rankin draws upon to create Rebus's Edinburgh: hard-boiled detective fiction on the one hand, and the work of Scottish authors writing about Edinburgh on the other. By juxtaposing a globally-deployed form with such geographical specificity, he emphasises thematic similarities between the two: bringing to the fore, for example, the obsession each holds with refined appearances concealing something more venal beneath, and paralleling the inability of characters in hard-boiled fiction to escape the legacy of the past with the inability of Edinburgh, as a city, to escape its own history. The fatalism of noir is matched with a sense of Calvinist pre-destination inherited from Robert Louis Stevenson and Muriel Spark; Raymond Chandler's technique of interrogating the very foundations of the city in the context of a criminal investigation is transposed from Los Angeles to Edinburgh and made to mirror the more 'literary' investigations of the same topic in *The Prime Of Miss Jean Brodie* (1960) and *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886); Rebus, like Marlowe, becomes for all his flaws one of the few unequivocal forces for good in the city, facing off against secretly corrupt officials, outwardly respectable gangsters and other such Jekyll and Hyde figures. Rankin becomes more confident in re-imagining his Scottish influences as compatible with traditions of American hard-boiled fiction as the Rebus series progresses: as in *The Big Sleep* (1939), murder and the oil industry are equated in *Black & Blue* (1997), an equation Rankin lends added thematic depth when it becomes clear his murderer is imitating the unsolved crimes of the infamous Glaswegian serial killer Bible John, whilst the real Bible John now works as an oil man. *The Naming of the Dead* (2006), meanwhile, sets a typically convoluted noir-styled central mystery against the real-world backdrop of the G8 protests that took place in Edinburgh in 2005, creating something akin to hard-boiled journalism.

The three novels that will be examined in this chapter demonstrate how Rankin gains in thematic ambition as the series progresses whilst increasingly painting a portrait of Edinburgh that can be read as belonging to contexts of both Scottish literature and hard-boiled crime fiction simultaneously. Emblematic of the early Rebus novels, *Hide & Seek* (1990) owes more to Spark and especially Stevenson than Chandler, but parallels with hard-boiled fiction remain nonetheless. These parallels are made more explicit with each passing case, and by the time of the eleventh Rebus novel, *Set In Darkness* (2000), Chandler's notion of bodies lining the foundations of the modern city is made sickeningly literal by a plot centring around a series of murders at the location of the newly reinstated

Scottish Parliament. Rankin's confidence in intertwining his Scottish and hard-boiled influences culminates in *Exit Music* (2007), the final Rebus novel, which demonstrates a post-modern playfulness and awareness of the tropes of crime fiction whilst foregrounding Edinburgh's status as a city of letters.

### **The city-wide dualism of *Hide & Seek***

*Hide & Seek*, the second of the Rebus books, handles the traits of noir more obliquely than in later novels, suggesting that Rankin has a greater understanding of where his vision of Edinburgh aligns with Stevenson than with Chandler at this early stage; but parallels with hard-boiled fiction remain nonetheless. As with the first Rebus novel, *Knots & Crosses* (1987), Rankin quite openly and self-admittedly takes as his starting point for the novel Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.<sup>1</sup> The title itself is a clear pun on Hyde, made, if anything, too explicit in the course of the novel by several indicators, including the revelation of an exclusive club named 'Hyde's' as being of central importance to Rebus's investigation, characters named Vanderhyde, Lanyon, Poole and Carew, Rebus's own reading of the Stevenson novella, and the use of several quotations from *Jekyll and Hyde* as chapter frontispieces. Where *Knots & Crosses* applies Stevenson's notion of duality to the relationship between cop and killer, however, *Hide & Seek* takes Edinburgh itself as a literally concrete example of the split between external propriety and subterranean prurience. As discussed in the previous chapter, the shielding of inner sin with a reputable exterior is a recurring feature of Edinburgh writing, manifested most obviously in the separation of the respectable Jekyll from the wretched Hyde, but just as much in the 'do as I say not as I do' attitude of Miss Jean Brodie. Rankin, then, is simply applying an idea previously associated with some of the city's most famous individual fictional creations and transferring it to the entire city, suggesting that even the most outwardly righteous of Edinburgh's citizenry is inwardly corrupt, and updating Stevenson's vision of the otherwise repressed middle classes of the New Town trawling the streets of the Old Town for depraved kicks.

In this city-wide deployment of Stevenson's novel, Hyde becomes 'Hyde's', a seemingly respectable gentleman's club from the outside, where the great and the good men of Edinburgh can descend to an area below street level and hire rent boys to carry out any variety of sexual practice, however dangerous (a level of depravity at which Stevenson could only hint in his restrictive Victorian milieu). The club's owner, Finlay Andrews, crystallises the mindset of a city torn between stultifying decorum and wanton carnality in

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Rankin: "Exile On Princes Street" (1999) in *Rebus: The Early Years* (2000, London: Orion) vii-viii.

his explanatory monologue to Rebus at the novel's climax:

'Yes, I suppose they'd have a job finding a judge to try me, an advocate to prosecute me, fifteen good men and true to stand as jury. They've all been to Hyde's. All of them. Looking for a game with just a little more edge than those played upstairs. I got the idea from a friend in London. He runs a similar establishment, though perhaps with a less sharp edge than Hyde's. There's a lot of new money in Edinburgh, John. Money for all. Would you like money? Would you like a sharper edge to your life? Don't tell me you're happy in your little flat, with your music and your books and your bottles of wine.'<sup>2</sup>

Every level of Edinburgh society - from the judge in the upper classes, to the middle-class lawyers, to the everymen of the jury - has, on some level, been to Hyde's; they all have inner demons behind those polite façades.

This, of course, is essentially the same point Stevenson makes in *Jekyll and Hyde*: that inside every person is an equal capacity for good and evil, regardless of superficial niceties. Stevenson, however, restricts this point to the moneyed classes, only dealing with the upper-middle class Jekyll and his circle of friends on these terms whilst painting any lower class characters - Poole the butler, the little girl Hyde tramples - as essentially blameless, noble even. Rankin makes this point on a much broader sociological canvas, indicting all of Edinburgh. Nevertheless, there remains a thematic similarity between the two books, and this, coupled with Rankin's openly admitted plundering of the novel for his own, and his plea of ignorance as regards his writing crime fiction, makes a strong case for considering *Hide & Seek* purely as belonging to the traditions of Scottish urban fiction. However, by joining these thematic concerns with a lead character who just happens to be a detective, Rankin (however inadvertently) aligns both himself and, in a wider sense, traditional modes of writing about Edinburgh, with the hard-boiled tradition. *Hide & Seek*'s depiction of a trail of corruption leading from a city's small-time crooks and hustlers to its civic leaders and politicians finds echoes throughout the history of hard-boiled fiction, as described by Dennis Porter in his *The Pursuit of Crime* (1981):

From its beginning in *The Red Harvest*, the form taken by the hard-boiled detective novel suggests the metaphor of the spreading stain. The initial crime often turns out to be a relatively superficial symptom of an evil whose magnitude and ubiquity are only progressively disclosed during the course of the investigation. An important formal consequence of this is apparent in a work such as *The Big Sleep*, which has a large cast of characters, rapidly shifting locations, and an intricately plotted but episodic narrative structure.<sup>3</sup>

The hard-boiled form, then, reveals itself as a natural vehicle for what Rankin has to say

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<sup>2</sup> Ian Rankin: *Hide & Seek in Rebus: The Early Years* (2000, London: Orion), 379.

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Porter: *The Pursuit of Crime: Art and Ideology in Detective Fiction* (1981, New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 40.

about Edinburgh: the standard protagonist of the detective is one that easily lends itself to a panoramic exploration of all levels of society and the ways in which they interact, being one of the few character types who is actively expected to cross class boundaries as part of his job rather than being questioned for such behaviour. Rankin's Scottish influences are also of the sort that lend themselves to his chosen form without much difficulty, with arguments to be made for *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* as sharing several of the traits of crime fiction, including the who-/why-/how-dunnit aspects of their plotting and their exposures of civic hypocrisy. Stevenson could even be seen, to some degree, as an unconscious influence upon the nascent genre of crime fiction: by the time Chandler came to write *The Big Sleep* in 1939, the concept of Jekyll and Hyde had become engrained in the western cultural psyche, Stevenson's original novel expanded, distorted and disseminated to a wider audience via nine cinematic adaptations/versions, with another major Hollywood production based on the book to follow two years later.<sup>4</sup> The idea of respectable people suppressing the darker sides of their nature plays a large part in crime fiction, both in literary and cinematic permutations, and this expansion of Stevenson's original ideas could conceivably have influenced Rankin as much as the novel itself. Certainly, he increasingly proves himself comfortable with exploiting generic expectations to challenge his readership's views of Edinburgh as a place of gentility - placing the dead bodies that kick off the cases of *Mortal Causes* (1994) and *Set In Darkness* (2000) at historical tourist attractions, for example, or, as in Chandler, having Rebus's investigations regularly encompass the city's more impoverished areas, kept at a safe distance from the picture-postcard imagery of the Royal Mile - and although at this early stage he still leans more heavily towards Scottish than hard-boiled traditions there are nevertheless traces of both to be found throughout.

The 'large cast of characters' and 'rapidly shifting locations' described above are undoubted hallmarks of Rankin's throughout the Rebus novels, and whilst his work is generally less episodic than that of Raymond Chandler, there is nevertheless a noticeable progression through the strata of society in *Hide & Seek* (similar interactions between the machinations of the ruling class and the underlings in the lower classes who carry out their dirty work - and ultimately pay the price for it - can be found in *Let It Bleed*, 1995, and *A Question of Blood*, 2003). Where Chandler, in *The Big Sleep*, has protagonist Philip Marlowe start at the top (in the opulent mansion of current employer General Sternwood) and work his way down (to a decrepit garage on the outskirts of town and an abandoned oil

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<sup>4</sup> <http://uk.imdb.com/find?s=tt&q=jekyll&x=3&y=11>, accessed 20/08/09.

derrick), Rankin amplifies the irony of supposedly respectable people behaving badly by having Rebus start at the bottom and work his way up, the implication being that the trail left by the 'stain' of sin that Rebus must follow to its source has originated with the upper echelons and seeped through to those below - a theme equally at home in Edinburgh or Los Angeles. This original sin, as it were, has gone on to infect every level of society, including those who cannot afford to deal with the consequences.

Those who cannot afford to deal with the consequences include the residents of the suburban Pilmuir housing estate. Opening in the squalor of a junkie squat in Pilmuir - first in an urgent prologue, followed by the subsequent crime scene investigation - the novel deals in nightmarish, frequently hellish (sub)urban imagery, giving immediate credence to the aforementioned notion of hard-boiled fiction covering similar metaphysical terrain to that of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922). Eliot's vision of the modern industrial city is one of emotional and spiritual corrosion, where the values that have previously bound together communities are steadily eroded by the encroachment of industry and its all-consuming needs, turning the urban wasteland into a kind of hell on earth. This is manifested in Chandler by the every-man-for-himself ethos displayed by the various denizens of Los Angeles, and a similar sense of alienation and self-preservation can be found in Rankin's Edinburgh, particularly in estates like Pilmuir. However alarmist he may initially sound, Rebus's first encounter with then-new Chief Inspector 'Farmer' Watson comes to crystallise the novel's depiction of city life:

He flicked open the folder and began to pick over some of the sheets. 'Here, Inspector, it's Hades. Plain and simple.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Are you a churchgoer?'

'Sir?' Rebus was shifting uncomfortably in his chair.

'It's a simple enough question, isn't it? Do you go to church?'

'Not regularly, sir. But sometimes I do, yes.' Like yesterday, Rebus thought. And here again he felt like fleeing.

'Someone said you did. Then you should know what I'm talking about when I say that this city is turning into Hades.'<sup>5</sup>

Watson, himself a regular churchgoer, sees in Edinburgh a similar corrosion of values to that addressed by Eliot. Whilst there is undoubtedly something of the hard-boiled city to such a depiction of Edinburgh - a city so often depicted as postcard picturesque here metamorphosed into hell on earth, with what appears perfect on the surface ultimately hollow underneath - the parallel thrown up with similar depictions of Los Angeles in Chandler almost seems accidental for Rankin. Were any other city being described, we could, with some degree of certainty, point to the influence of Eliot via the first wave of

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<sup>5</sup> Rankin: *Hide & Seek* (2000), 209-210.

American noir; but as this is Edinburgh - and given Rankin's own admission of the influence of Stevenson - there is a strong implication that the 'Hades' ascribed to Edinburgh by Farmer Watson above is that whose streets are also stalked by Edward Hyde and James Hogg's justified sinner Robert Wringhim; one that owes as much to a legacy of religious fanaticism as to a sense of urban alienation. Watson places strong emphasis on the necessity of Rebus being a churchgoer to understand what is being said, suggesting an Edinburgh still caught in a religious struggle between absolute good and absolute evil more than a century after Stevenson and Hogg, one that is close to tipping over permanently into the latter. The (post-)industrial hell of the estates and the city's other more deprived areas that behaviour like that of the clientele of Hyde's has helped to create - the kind of urban hell recognisable to the progenitors of American noir with its decaying buildings, undisguised criminality and a citizenry essentially left to fend for itself by civic leaders - is conflated with the more literal Hell of Scottish Calvinism, that of eternal damnation for the 'non-elect', of a stark divide between good and evil and the lack of forgiveness for past misdeeds (as if by way of emphasis, Rankin singles out *Hide & Seek* as a prime example of how 'My own early books deal with devilry'<sup>6</sup>).

Edinburgh is framed not just as a metaphorical 'hell on earth', but as a city whose increasingly immoral ways are leading it to a particularly unpleasant end, one without clemency, at which it will be made to account for all of its sins - an entire city pre-destined to damnation. The most open site of corruption has moved from Stevenson's thinly-veiled Old Town to the decaying satellite estates ringing the city, but the basic principle is the same: every citizen of Edinburgh is on some level corrupt, but only the elite can afford to cover up their vices. The members of Hyde's might not be able to gain forgiveness for their actions but, unlike the residents of the estates, they can buy forgetfulness, convincing themselves that they are amongst the 'elect' of Calvinist tenets, that their money and high social standing gives them free rein to sin without the need for justification. The class struggle in Rankin is not that of 'good' workers versus 'bad' moneyed classes, but is instead a question of who can afford to have others overlook their misdeeds rather than punish them: the openly corrupt estates versus the secretly venal New Town. The trickle down effect of the 'stain' of sin is most visibly damaging to those at the bottom of the social ladder. Theirs are the crimes that are more often than not noticed, and punished accordingly. Once the club's clientele leave its grounds, they return to their normal routines amidst the ordered beauty of the New Town, largely unaffected by what takes place behind closed doors; but those they exploit return to a life of squalor and degradation,

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<sup>6</sup> Ian Rankin: *Rebus's Scotland: A Personal Journey* (2006, London: Orion), 112.

carrying psychic (and, on occasion, physical) scars of their encounters and unable to escape this cycle of abuse. It is the poor who continue to pay for the sins of the privileged, in both the conditions in which they are made to live and the psychological trauma caused by their abusers, and this injustice is made physically manifest in estates like the wasteland of Pilmuir.

Rankin juxtaposes the activities of the members of Hyde's - those which thoughtlessly exploit the lower classes for their own personal satisfaction - with the poor foresight of urban developers earlier in the twentieth century, and in so doing suggests that places like Pilmuir are where the actions of the corrupt upper classes have the deepest impact; an impact that has roots in both Calvinism and the noir tradition. According to the tenets of Calvinism, a crime once committed will never leave the non-elect unless he or she is deemed to be worthy in God's eyes and becomes one of the elect. Unlike, say, Catholicism, where forgiveness can be attained and past sins atoned for by any member of the Church, the non-elect Calvinist sinner is made to carry the weight of his or her own past at all times, and the impression continually given by Rankin is that Edinburgh as a city continually operates under the collective knowledge of its impending damnation. This notion of past misdeeds continually haunting the present - i.e. youthful misdeeds will be given just as much weight as recent sins when God's judgement comes - is another aspect of the Scottish character that finds a parallel in noir tradition, in the way characters are unable to escape the ghosts of the past and are still made to pay for their mistakes in the present. General Sternwood in *The Big Sleep*, for example, hints at as much, telling Marlowe that neither of his daughters 'has any more moral sense than a cat. Neither have I. No Sternwood ever had', before adding that 'a man who indulges in parenthood for the first time at the age of fifty-four deserves all he gets.'<sup>7</sup> Having made the mistake of fathering daughters at an age when he should realise he will be unable to control them appropriately, Sternwood is now paying the price of his lack of foresight, his past mistakes continuing to haunt him despite his expression of regret. To Rankin, this lack of clemency for past mistakes is made physically manifest in Edinburgh in estates like Pilmuir, the short-sightedness of urban developers earlier in the twentieth-century wreaking havoc in the present as their good intentions crumble into hives of economic and spiritual depression:

The housing estate, what he could see of it through the rain-lashed windscreen, was slowly turning back into the wilderness that had existed here before the builders had moved in many years ago. He had no doubt that in the 1960s it, like its brethren clustered around Edinburgh, had seemed the perfect solution to future housing needs. And he wondered if the planners ever learned through anything other than

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<sup>7</sup> Raymond Chandler: *The Big Sleep* (1939) in *The Big Sleep and Other Novels* (2000, London: Penguin), 10.

hindsight. If not, then perhaps today's 'ideal' solutions were going to turn out the same way.

The landscaped areas comprised long grass and an abundance of weeds, while children's tarmacadamed playgrounds had become bomb-sites, shrapnel glass awaiting a tripped knee or stumbling hand. Most of the terraces boasted boarded-up windows, ruptured drainpipes pouring out teeming rainwater onto the ground, marshy front gardens with broken fences and missing gates. He had the idea that on a sunny day the place would seem even more depressing.

Yet nearby, a matter of a few hundred yards or so, some developer had started building private apartments. The hoarding above the site proclaimed this a LUXURY DEVELOPMENT, and gave its address as MUIR VILLAGE. Rebus wasn't fooled, but wondered how many young buyers would be. This was Pilmuir, and always would be. This was the dumping ground.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the attempts at redevelopment, Pilmuir remains a place associated with the dregs of society, a place where the mistakes of the original developers can never be undone. Rankin depicts Pilmuir as being as much an irrefutable part of Edinburgh as Spark claims Castle Rock to be: another ruin from the past, this one a failed enterprise that seems older than its years, and one that is kept safely out of sight of the tourists. Its reclamation by the wilderness only adds to the idea that the estate is somehow an affront to nature, the city overstepping its boundaries and being punished as a result. That the punishment of the city continues to this day fits in with both the Calvinist philosophy of eternal damnation and the noir trope of continuing punishment in the present for mistakes made in the past (a trope that is also the foundation of the plot of *Knots & Crosses*, and continues to be visited upon Rebus as the series progresses, most notably in *Black & Blue*, 1997, in which a TV crew make a programme investigating a potential miscarriage of justice from the early days of Rebus's career with the police).

Rankin's depiction of the city and its populace as unable to escape past sins gives a real sense, despite the ever-shifting physical cityscape, of nothing ever really changing in Edinburgh: the citizenry are still behaving as they have always done, as Spark and Stevenson chronicled before Rankin and others will do after him; the same crimes are being punished in the present as were punished in the past; and for all the redevelopment and regeneration Castle Rock will always be at the centre of it all, with the grids of the New Town to its north, the chaos of the Old Town to its south and now the squalor of the estates all around. Despite its efforts to the contrary, Edinburgh remains, to Rankin, the city of Jekyll and Hyde, of Jean Brodie and Robert Wringhim, and it is exactly this persistence of guilt, hypocrisy, repression, crime and punishment that makes it such an apt setting for hard-boiled fiction.

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<sup>8</sup> Rankin: *Hide & Seek* (2000), 195.

### ***Set in Darkness and the cracks in the foundations***

The idea that nothing ever really changes in Edinburgh despite outward suggestions to the contrary is presented most forcefully by Rankin in *Set in Darkness* (2000), the first Rebus novel written after the reinstatement of the Scottish Parliament in the city after an absence of nearly three hundred years. By this point in the series (*Set in Darkness* follows ten novels and a book of short stories all featuring Rebus) Rankin is more comfortable with using the form of crime fiction to tackle similar themes to those explored by Spark and Stevenson, rather than aping those authors directly whilst making some concessions (deliberate or otherwise) to the genre. Alongside novels like *Mortal Causes* (1994) and *The Falls* (2001), *Set in Darkness* also sees Rankin employ specific pieces of Edinburgh history as counterpoints, starting points or both to Rebus's current case. It is, however, arguably the first Rebus novel to deal directly with a major, real-world Edinburgh-based event in something approaching real-time: whilst earlier novels deal with more general topical issues from sex trafficking to paedophilia (*The Hanging Garden*, 1998, and *Dead Souls*, 1999, respectively), *Set In Darkness* is the first to portray directly a fundamental change specific to Edinburgh as a city. By juxtaposing past and present in such a way, and in so specific a geographical context, Rankin effectively turns Rebus's investigation of a murder at the site of the Scottish Parliament into a dual investigation of not just the crime at hand but the city of Edinburgh itself, using the hard-boiled form to interrogate corruption at the highest levels, to question the very foundations upon which the city is built and, as above, to illustrate the impact of history on Edinburgh's capacity to change.

Gavin Wallace suggests that, to the impartial observer, the Scottish Parliament and Scottish literature might appear to be bedfellows, citing both the geographical proximity of the new parliament building to the Scottish Poetry Library and the involvement in the parliament's opening ceremony of, amongst others, Liz Lochhead and Edwin Morgan. He is, however, quick to disavow such notions, going on to claim that 'Scotland's distinguished literary tradition of vociferous dissent and opposition, radicalism, and scourging of the political establishment is as vibrant and sharp as it was in Burns's time.'<sup>9</sup> To Rankin, the most savage way of acknowledging this tradition of political dissent is to acknowledge how little difference the reinstatement of the parliament makes to Rebus's daily routine: he is still investigating the same kind of crimes citizens of Edinburgh have been committing since before the dissolution of the last parliament, the city once again unable to escape the burden of past sins. They are quite literally, in fact, the same kinds of

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<sup>9</sup> Gavin Wallace: "Voyages of Intent: Literature and Cultural Politics in Post-devolution Scotland" in Berthold Schoene (ed.): *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 17.

crimes: the two bodies that form the basis of Rebus's investigation throughout the novel - a recently uncovered corpse from 1979, the time of the last (failed) devolution referendum, and that of newly-elected MSP Roddy Grieve - are both found in Queensberry House, site of the new parliament and home to a grisly piece of Edinburgh folklore:

'You know Queensberry was the architect of the Act of Union?' Gilfillan was saying. He could see that he had an audience now, for the first time since the tour had begun in the brewery car park next door. 'Back in 1707. This', he scratched a shoe over the bare floorboards, 'is where Great Britain was invented. And the night of the signing, one of the young servants was working in the kitchen. The Duke of Queensberry was Secretary of State. It was his job to lead the negotiations. But he had a son, James Douglas, Earl of Drumlanrig. The story goes, James was off his head...'

'What happened?'

[...]

'He ran the servant through with a sword,' Gilfillan said, 'then roasted him in one of the kitchen fireplaces. James was sitting munching away when he was found.'<sup>10</sup>

The 1979 corpse is found bricked up in this self-same fireplace; Grieve's not in the fireplace itself, but still within the confines of the house. A pattern emerges, then, of corpses appearing at the same site on dates of huge political significance for the Scottish parliament, no less a site than that of the new parliament itself - a sure, if macabre, indicator of the novel's attitude towards Edinburgh's capacity for change. Rankin uses the same technique - that of history being re-enacted through the crimes Rebus investigates - in several other Rebus novels; most notably *Black & Blue* (1997), which charts the emergence of a Bible John copycat killer, and *The Falls*, which suggests that a group of mysterious dolls found in the hills outside Edinburgh in the nineteenth century were placed there to represent the victims of bodysnatchers Burke and Hare and that the trend has been revived by the killer in Rebus's latest case.<sup>11</sup> Through this patterning of history, Rankin is using Edinburgh to make philosophical points about change and progress, the city becoming a physical manifestation of a metaphysical debate. In placing crimes taken from history into an exceptionally current setting - the novel was published less than two years after the re-opening of the Scottish Parliament - Rankin depicts an Edinburgh almost removed from standard conceptions of time, past and present co-existing, the city seemingly caught between the desire to move on and the inability to do so. Justifying such a method in his introduction to a reissue of *The Falls*, Rankin suggests that 'There are things you can say in

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<sup>10</sup> Ian Rankin: *Set in Darkness* (2005, London: Orion), 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Rankin: *The Falls* (2005, London: Orion), 96-97.

fiction which can't always be contained by history books';<sup>12</sup> in his case, it is the paralleling of the then and now, to show how little has ultimately changed in the interim.

Besides the obvious implication in *Set in Darkness* that the 1997 devolution referendum has changed little - a corpse has once again appeared at Queensberry House, as has happened at least twice before - there is a clear suggestion in this central mystery, and the grotesque history that accompanies it, that the new parliament will literally be built upon the foundations of Edinburgh's macabre past. The implication is that figurative acts of cannibalism are still happening time and again: simply replace the mad Earl with politicians and the unfortunate servant with their constituents, or, again, the clientele of Hyde's and those they exploit; the privileged continuing to feed off of those less fortunate than themselves with little thought for the consequences. In positioning his book less as a traditional crime novel in the whodunnit vein, then, than as a survey of how the city has come from where it was to where it is, and how little has changed in the interim, Rankin exhibits comparable interests to Chandler and his hard-boiled peers, whose work similarly interrogates how Los Angeles grew from desert outpost to oil-fuelled metropolis. It is a set-up that ingeniously utilises both the distrust of civic authority to be found in hard-boiled fiction (and, of course, the plot spurred on by murder) and the sharp social critique - especially as regards the Old Town/New Town, poor/rich divide - to be found in the work of previous Edinburgh writers like Spark and Stevenson.

Underlining the unsavoury machinations that have helped to make the city what it is are the activities of Rebus's nemesis, the gangster 'Big Ger' Cafferty, whose behaviour upon release from prison runs parallel with the Grieve investigation as a direct indictment of the corrupt foundations of modern Edinburgh. Most frightening is the fate of property developer Barry Hutton - nephew of Cafferty's associate Bryce Callan and central to the mystery of the 1979 Queensberry corpse - who is ultimately disposed of by Cafferty, his body hidden in an undisclosed location:

Cafferty sat back. 'You know the story about the Old Town? Reason it's so narrow and steep, there's some big serpent buried under it.' He waited for Rebus to get it; decided to supply the punchline himself. 'Room for more than one snake under the Old Town, Strawman.'

The Old Town: the building works around Holyrood - Queensberry House, Dynamic Earth, *Scotsman* offices... hotels and apartments. So many building sites. Lots of good, deep holes, filling with concrete...<sup>13</sup>

Rankin goes on to finish the novel with the words '[Cafferty] was back, and in charge of *his*

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<sup>12</sup> Ian Rankin: "Introduction" in *The Falls* (2005, London: Orion), xii.

<sup>13</sup> Rankin: *Set in Darkness* (2005), 465.

Edinburgh, and that was all that mattered...'.<sup>14</sup> The idea that Edinburgh will ultimately always be controlled by its criminal element is, as with the bodies in Queensberry House, tied to a piece of the city's historical mythology, its context here leading to a different, more threatening interpretation of a piece of tourist-friendly folklore: rather than an actual giant serpent, Cafferty suggests that the snake of legend is, in fact, a 'snake' meaning 'treacherous person', and that the bodies of more than one are supporting the buildings of the Old Town. In a single breath, Cafferty transforms the tartan kitsch vision of the Old Town from 'Olde Worlde' fantasy to stomach-churning reality, from a town built on top of a storybook monster to one built upon a graveyard peopled with both criminals and their victims; one whose residents walk upon the resting places of the missing, the disappeared, the forgotten. Hutton's fate is an indicator that this is a continuing process, that as long as Edinburgh is built upon, remade and remodelled, the cost of its regeneration - the bodies of those who stood in its way - will literally be worked into the very fabric of its buildings. Rankin makes sure in listing the potential graves around the building site to name buildings that encompass every social strata resident in the city: the politicians in Queensberry House, the tourists in Dynamic Earth, the media in the *Scotsman* offices and, finally, the ordinary people simply trying to live in the apartments. By accepting (or, perhaps more accurately, refusing to question) the methods by which Edinburgh is built, everyone is made complicit in the corruption; the city is Cafferty's precisely because nobody, ultimately, is willing to accept the necessary changes that challenging his way of doing things will bring. Again, Rankin blurs the lines between the civic hypocrisy on display in previous Edinburgh fiction and the idea that everyone who lives in the city is corrupt by default, as found in hard-boiled American writing. For all the airs and graces that the most high-brow residents of Edinburgh might affect, each and every one has a part to play in the dead bodies that line the foundations of their city, if only through their silence; and when these are the foundations upon which a city is built, there is very little hope for its eventual salvation.

### **The Edinburghs of *Exit Music***

Rankin's increased confidence in deploying the tropes of crime fiction as a means by which to interrogate perceptions of Edinburgh culminates in the final entry in the series, *Exit Music* (2007). His familiarity with not just works of hard-boiled fiction themselves but with the theory and criticism behind them becomes evident even in incidental details in the novel: the death at the centre of the plot is that of dissident Russian poet Alexander

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<sup>14</sup> Rankin: *Set in Darkness* (2005), 465.

Todorov, who shares a surname with Tzvetan Todorov, the structuralist who pioneered the theoretical analysis of crime fiction. That Rebus's final mystery is an investigation of the death of a literary figure is also a playful touch of the kind which Spark would surely approve, given her penchant for meta-fictional narratives in works such as *The Comforters* (1957) and *The Driver's Seat* (1970). This is the work of an author who now feels the confidence to fashion to his own design a city that he has previously handled with near-documentary realism, and to prove once and for all that Edinburgh can be at once a setting for stylised crime fiction whilst maintaining its relevance to wider concerns. It is a thoroughly post-modern depiction of the city, one full of foregrounded artificiality and a wide range of influences from film and music as well as literature. By presenting Rebus as a man out of time while working on his last case, Rankin provides a framework in which such a depiction serves rather than distances from the plot and characterisation, building upon the foundations of hard-boiled and Scottish fiction and his own previous novels to create a fitting swan song for his protagonist.

The novel's opening scene establishes the city as a locus of shadowy isolation, echoing not just literary predecessors but the *film noir* cinematic tradition that sprang from hard-boiled fiction, and blends this generic expectation with the kind of specific details that have grounded the previous Rebus books in Edinburgh as a real city:

November in Edinburgh, not quite cold enough for a frost but heading that way. King's Stables Road wasn't the busiest of thoroughfares. A No Entry sign prevented vehicles from using it as a route from the Grassmarket to Lothian Road. At night it could be a lonely spot, with not much more than a multistorey car park on one side, Castle Rock and a cemetery on the other. The street lighting seemed underpowered, and pedestrians kept their wits about them. The middle-aged couple had been to a carol service in St Cuthbert's Church, helping raise money for the city's children's hospital. The woman had bought a holly wreath, which now lay on the ground to the left of the corpse.<sup>15</sup>

John Scaggs suggests that *noir* - the French for 'black' - 'codifies the dark, shadowy atmosphere and setting of hard-boiled fiction, which is a clear indicator of the Gothic heritage of crime fiction, and *film noir* emphasised this 'darkness' both thematically and through the use of lighting techniques that emphasised or created shadows on the screen'.<sup>16</sup> The above quoted passage would seem to fit such a description. Even though the locations named - King's Stables Road, the Grassmarket, Lothian Road, St Cuthbert's Church, the ever looming presence of Castle Rock - are uniquely part of Edinburgh, they are deployed

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<sup>15</sup> Ian Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008, London: Orion), 3.

<sup>16</sup> John Scaggs: *Crime Fiction* (2005, Oxon: Routledge), 69.

in a manner befitting *noir*: the sense of isolation brought by the lack of access for traffic, the dimly-lit streets, the hints of urban gothic around the castle and the cemetery and, of course, their proximity to the body of Todorov, whose death prompts Rebus's investigation.

Rankin pays further attention to the lighting of his tableau as the scene progresses, noting that 'Suddenly, their faces turned blue. The police car was arriving, lights flashing', from which emerges two policemen, one of them carrying a torch:

His colleague had switched the torch on, and the middle-aged man realised that there was blood on the ground, blood on the slumped body's hands and clothes. The face and hair were clotted with it.' Said colleague, we are told a few lines later, had 'been crouching down, the better to shine light on to the body.'<sup>17</sup>

The overall effect is as cinematic as it is literary, suggesting that Rankin is as influenced by Humphrey Bogart films in his perception of *noir* and hard-boiled fiction as by Raymond Chandler novels, writing a vision of Edinburgh that, on a purely visual level, is comparable to that of Los Angeles in the Bogart-starring cinematic adaptation of Chandler's *The Big Sleep* (dir: Howard Hawks, 1946).

The black-and-white of *films noir* amplifies the stylisation of Chandler's heightened realism, creating a world of shadows and light, of dualism and the starkly-defined contrast between extremes. It is a style wholly appropriate to *Exit Music* (itself a cinematic term, used to describe music that plays over the end credits of a film) which, more than ever, presents Rebus and 'Big Ger' Cafferty as two inextricable sides of the same coin, to the extent that the novel ends with Rebus anxiously awaiting news of his nemesis' health as Cafferty lies in a hospital bed - a world without Cafferty is a world with no need for Rebus, just as Jekyll cannot exist without Hyde. Further allusions to the self-consciously cinematic nature of the novel are found in references throughout to the contemporaneous death of Hollywood Western star Jack Palance:

And Jack Palance was dead. Rebus didn't know what he'd been like in real life, but he'd always played tough guys in his films. Rebus poured another Highland Park and raised his glass in a toast.

'Here's to the hard men,' he said, knocking the drink back in one.<sup>18</sup>

Palance's death is used as a marker of the end of an era: Rebus toasts not the man, but the image projected by the characters he played, a wholly artificial real-world parallel to the end of Rebus's career and, perhaps, the end of Cafferty's life - the end of a city where 'hard men' belong. That Palance was a star of Westerns is also wholly appropriate, given the extent of the Western's influence on the hard-boiled form: the lone sheriff/detective here to

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<sup>17</sup> Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008), 17.

clean up the town/city for little personal gain beyond the knowledge that good has prevailed.

What is most striking about this cinematic stylisation is how unashamedly it plays into generic expectations whilst still maintaining focus on a detailed depiction of Edinburgh as a city distinct from others. In earlier novels, Rankin appears almost keen to distance himself from the kind of stylisation of Edinburgh that other crime writers (Chandler, to give one clear example) apply to their own chosen cities, afraid that it will distract from the very serious points he makes about Scotland as a country and the standing of his work as, first and foremost, Scottish literature. The closer Rebus comes to retirement, however, the more Rankin appears willing to present a subjective view of Edinburgh, one filtered through years of consuming both Scottish fiction and crime fiction. Having established in his body of work his dedication to presenting a very real, very tangible sense of Edinburgh as a place, he now seems to feel free to approach the city more playfully, confident in his ability to deliver a serious novel that indulges in the stylistic tropes of pulp fiction without ever crossing over into such territory itself. Just as Rebus and Clarke suspect their case may prove to have international ramifications, the novel counterpointing Todorov's death and the arrival of a delegate of Russian oligarchs in Edinburgh with the real-world poisoning of former KGB member Alexander Litvinenko and subsequent controversy, so Rankin transforms Edinburgh into a locale that can compete with Los Angeles, Paris and London as a globally accessible setting for overtly stylised crime fiction.

Rankin is also keen to foreground in *Exit Music* a sense of Edinburgh as an especially literary city, it being only the second Rebus book written since the city was made a UNESCO World City of Literature in 2004 (but the first able to deal with this development directly, 2006's *The Naming of the Dead* too concerned with the commotion surrounding the 2005 G8 meeting at Gleneagles to pass comment). Guidelines laid out by UNESCO for qualifying status as a World City of Literature include:

Urban environment in which literature, drama and/or poetry play an integral role;  
Experience in hosting literary events and festivals aiming at promoting domestic and foreign literature;  
Libraries, bookstores and public or private cultural centres dedicated to the preservation, promotion and dissemination of domestic and foreign literature;  
Active effort by the publishing sector to translate literary works from diverse national languages and foreign literature.<sup>19</sup>

In placing at his novel's centre the murder of a dissident Russian poet who has recently been involved with the Scottish Poetry Library, Rankin covers all four of these quoted

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<sup>19</sup> "Do you have what it takes to become a UNESCO City of Literature?", from [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=36908&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=36908&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html), accessed 22/07/09.

guidelines: providing a location ‘dedicated to the preservation, promotion and dissemination of domestic and foreign literature’ in the Poetry Library; proving its ‘experience in hosting literary events’ by having Todorov give a reading of his work there, a guest of humanitarian writers’ group PEN; demonstrating ‘active effort by the publishing sector to translate literary works’ in the translated volumes of Todorov’s work available for purchase at the reading and thereafter in the Library; and, through the reading of Todorov’s work Clarke and Rebus must undertake to help their investigation, having the whole affair play out in an ‘urban environment in which literature, drama and/or poetry play an integral role’. Even the local newspaper, the populist *Evening News*, when covering Todorov’s murder, runs a photo of the poet taken a month earlier upon his arrival in the country. That the paper has a posed photograph of Todorov’s arrival in the country in its archive would suggest that its interest in the man is not exclusively because of his unfortunate end; it appears almost keen, in its placement of Todorov in front of the Castle in a tartan scarf, to assimilate him into the cultural life of the city.

By presenting literature as being so central to the identity of Edinburgh, Rankin essentially justifies the extent to which literature has shaped his own view of the city: the extent to which his Edinburgh is also that of Spark and Stevenson, is also Chandler’s Los Angeles. The life of the city is influenced as much by how it is portrayed in literature as vice versa. With this in mind, then, Rankin is essentially offering up Edinburgh as a text to be read like a book and, in doing so, foregrounding the status of the Edinburgh he portrays as a literary construct. Edinburgh becomes an ideal location for both hard-boiled fiction and Scottish literature simply because he has read it as such. Where previous authors have taken the city’s Old/New Town divide and winding closes as settings for case studies of hypocrisy, repression, betrayal and duality, Rankin pushes those themes to a logical extreme and introduces dead bodies to the streets. Rather than look at the streets and see them as locations for a claustrophobic, fog-enshrouded nightmare, as in *Jekyll and Hyde*, he makes them cinematic, as in the opening of *Exit Music* quoted above. How a person sees Edinburgh becomes, to Rankin, a matter of what they bring with them to their interpretation, just as when reading a book. By the time he writes *Exit Music*, Rankin brings with him years of accumulated reading (and writing) of hard-boiled fiction and Scottish literature, and insight into how the two fit together. His Edinburgh, then, is by this point one simultaneously grounded in a physical reality and stylised to the extent required by his chosen genre, able to accommodate any possible thematic avenue he may wish to explore.

By way of contrast (and further exemplification), Rebus’s Edinburgh at this point in

his career is emphatically not one of possibilities. Where Rankin continues to see boundless new opportunities, Rebus, less than a fortnight away from retirement, sees a city that has little use for him anymore. Out for drinks with younger colleagues, he steps outside for a cigarette (due to the recently imposed smoking ban) but, in a moment of reflection, sees little reason to go back inside:

And what exactly could Rebus add to the mix? He took out another cigarette and lit it, then started walking.

He took a left on to Frederick Street and a right into Princes Street. The castle was being illuminated from below, its shape picked out against the night sky. The funfair was under construction in Princes Street Gardens, along with the market stalls and booths parked at the foot of The Mound. It would be a magnet for shoppers in the run-up to Christmas. He thought he could hear music: maybe the open-air ice rink was being tested out. Groups of kids were weaving their way past the shop fronts, paying him not the slightest heed. When did I become the invisible man? Rebus asked himself. Catching his reflection in a window he saw heft and bulk. Yet these kids teemed past as if he had no place in their version of the world.

Is this how ghosts feel? He wondered.<sup>20</sup>

It is Rebus's experiences of Edinburgh, accumulated over twenty years and seventeen novels (and already significantly into his police career at the time Rankin starts writing), that leave him feeling this way. Having spent his working life immersed in the city's darker underbelly, he feels no connection to this lighter, more magical city experienced by the kids who have not had to face the same horrors. That he feels like a ghost is particularly apt given how often history has impinged on the cases he has investigated, both that of the city and that of his own past. His experience of walking through the city as it changes for Christmas is his experience of living in Edinburgh over the past twenty years in microcosm: for all the superficial change and progress being made, he is nevertheless still trying to find a murderer, just as he has done many times before and, were he not retiring, would no doubt continue to do many times hence. Like a ghost, he is ultimately powerless to affect real change; the same crimes are still being committed, even if they are committed in more modern buildings or for reasons relating to Edinburgh's development as a city. Even though he is deemed outmoded by the 'new' Edinburgh, as suggested by the kids who pass him by without paying a bit of notice, he is doomed to watch familiar history repeat itself time and again; a man out of time in a city that, in its constant intermingling of past and present, often feels the same way.

Ironically, it is in Rebus's world-weary resignation come *Exit Music* that the possibilities of Edinburgh opened up by Rankin are made evident: he is once again reshaping the city to fit the story he wants to tell, in this case one of aging, retirement, and

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<sup>20</sup> Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008), 198.

endings. Edinburgh has been, to Rebus, variously a place of Scottish archetypes (*Hide & Seek*), underworld conspiracies (*The Black Book*), terror (*Mortal Causes*), lurid history (*Set in Darkness*), mystifying folklore (*The Falls*), political engagement (*The Naming of the Dead*) and, on more than one occasion, a place of indisputable beauty. To Rankin, it remains all these things simultaneously. To Rebus, it has become a place of exhausted possibility. Where he has previously felt a strong kinship with the city he has come to call home, he now finds it moves too quickly for him to keep up without ever having changed enough for him still to believe he can make a difference.

Ultimately, Rebus and Rankin agree that Rebus is emblematic of a period in the history of the city that is now coming to an end, both author and creation linking the cop's retirement to a reinvention of Edinburgh in which only one of them feels comfortable:

‘Know what I did yesterday, while Siobhan was grafting? Went to Oxfords and watched them demolish a couple of tower blocks. I could remember making a few arrests there down the years, but not the exact details. Guess that really does mean my time's past, Todd. There's a story in the paper this morning that more English voters than Scots think we should go independent.’ Rebus turned his head towards his passenger. ‘Makes you think, eh?’<sup>21</sup>

Rebus is a relic of post-industrial, post-war Scotland: a working-class hero made good, who has got where he is through hard work and experience. His natural working environment is the less salubrious side of Edinburgh: the satellite estates, the tower blocks, the dark alleys and seedy bars; the areas lost to gentrification, like the Grassmarket as described in *Set in Darkness*. Rebus's partner and successor Siobhan Clarke, meanwhile, is representative of the next generation, not only of police officers but of those who are changing Edinburgh and making it their own: English by birth, Edinburgher by choice, raised in a politically correct world, middle-class, liberal, university-educated, technologically literate, able to solve new kinds of crimes without leaving her desk, pro-independence but able to reconcile that with ever-increasing globalisation of business. Rebus becomes synonymous with, to borrow from Greil Marcus, the old, weird Edinburgh<sup>22</sup> - the city whose rough edges its leaders feel the need to smooth over in order to be taken seriously internationally.

Even this encroachment of the new is treated philosophically by Rebus, however, who sees it as another case of history repeating, a periodic reshaping of the city that echoes previous reinventions; a few years earlier, in *Fleshmarket Close*, upon learning that a former hospital is to be turned into ‘a mix of retail and housing’, he wonders if the new

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<sup>21</sup> Rankin: *Exit Music* (2008), 452-453.

<sup>22</sup> c.f. Greil Marcus: *Invisible Republic: Bob Dylan's Basement Tapes* (1998, London: Picador), Chapter Four: “The Old, Weird America”, 87-126.

owners might run ghost tours on the site: ‘same as they did with places like Mary King’s Close, said to be home to the spirits of plague victims, or Greyfriars Kirkyard, where covenanters had perished’.<sup>23</sup> The city’s past has been commoditised before, and as the present becomes the past it will happen again. Rebus is the kind of detective who excels at his job because he possesses just such intimate knowledge of his surroundings and their history, and knows that for all the aspirations towards progress and reinvention, Edinburgh will still, at heart, be Edinburgh; just not necessarily an Edinburgh in which he belongs. Like Marlowe before him, he is resigned to the knowledge that, as one man, he is ultimately unable to affect change on a grand scale, but must instead find contentment in small victories.

Rankin seems to acknowledge as much himself. Writing in 2006, two books from the end of the Rebus series, he talks of the superficial changes that have swept the city in the two decades since he started writing, whilst ending on a note of cynicism as to how much progress can ever really be made:

Edinburgh keeps evolving as a city, which means that some of the early novels already have a ‘historical’ feel to them. The near-uninhabitable tenements of Niddrie and Craigmillar, as described at the start of *Black & Blue*, have almost disappeared entirely to be replaced with hospitable housing. The waterfronts of Leith and Granton have been gentrified - or are at the planning stage. Infamous gap-sites such as the ones behind the Usher Hall and on the eastern side of Leith Street have been replaced with modern developments, and a stretch of Lothian Road has been transformed into the ‘Financial District’, complete with Sheraton Hotel and Spa (as mentioned in *Set in Darkness*). Joyce once said of *Ulysses* that if Dublin were blown to kingdom come, it could be rebuilt using his book as the blueprint. Yet after fifteen full-length novels, I’m not sure the same can be said for my version of Edinburgh. In some ways (and ironically, given their alleged mutual antipathy), we have Glasgow to thank for this. When ‘the second city of the Empire’ was elected European City of Culture and began its ‘Glasgow’s Miles Better’ campaign, it began a radical programme of regeneration. Edinburgh was slow to follow, but follow it did. How far a UNESCO World Heritage Site can move with the times is a moot point.<sup>24</sup>

This last sentence ultimately gets to the heart of Rebus and Rankin’s relationship with, and attitude toward, Edinburgh throughout the novels. Rankin’s status as a writer of popular fiction necessitates a swift work rate (at least one novel a year, for the most part, throughout the Rebus series), and his decision to have the novels exist in real time - i.e. twenty years pass between the events of *Knots & Crosses* and *Exit Music*, just as twenty years separate their writing - means he can detail almost journalistically the physical changes that sweep

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<sup>23</sup> Ian Rankin: *Fleshmarket Close* (2005, London: Orion), 318.

<sup>24</sup> Rankin: *Rebus’s Scotland* (2006), 92-93.

Edinburgh in the period during which he writes. For all this supposed change, however, his concerns remain essentially the same throughout the series: civic hypocrisy, the gritty underbelly beneath the tourist-friendly façade, the corruption underlying (often bankrolling) progress, the lingering shadows of Miss Jean Brodie and Doctor Henry Jekyll and the inescapability of the past. Edinburgh's status as a protected heritage site means that despite the new development work taking place all over the city by the time Rebus's career draws to a close, its core must remain essentially as it has been for centuries prior: the same buildings, the same streets, the same characters, the same crimes. Where other cities are free to move into the future relatively unencumbered, Edinburgh is, to some degree, held by its history in a cycle of repetition. New technologies can intervene, as witnessed by the encroachment of the internet as the series progresses; likewise new businesses, new residents and new buildings can augment the city, but it can never change to a degree that it becomes completely unrecognisable from what has been before. Every book brings with it some degree of change to the city, but Edinburgh is ultimately always different yet always the same, Spark's definitive 'nevertheless' - the imposing figure of Castle Rock - dominating the landscape and anchoring all that surrounds it. The ultimate conflict in the Rebus novels is not, as it might first appear from the generic trappings of the series, good versus evil or cop versus crook: it is, instead, permanence versus change, and Edinburgh's history is the history of external change versus internal continuity. The tension in the city is that of how to keep things as they always have been whilst maintaining a space that accommodates modern lifestyles; even the tourists, ostensibly here to immerse themselves in the past, will paradoxically demand a high standard of modern commodities, of recognisable brand names and up-to-date technology. Edinburgh is revealed as a city torn between its need to re-enact the past on a daily basis and its desire to join the modern world.

Rankin wonders, in the passage quoted above, if the Edinburgh he describes in his early novels is still recognisable to present-day residents; but whilst there are ephemeral physical changes throughout the series as he himself notes, the steadfastness of his thematic concerns suggests that little of any real import has changed about the city, not just in the past twenty years, but since Stevenson wrote about it a century earlier, and possibly for even longer than that. Where Rebus, in his pessimism, views this inability to change with weary resignation, Rankin instead uses it as a solid bedrock from which to explore every imaginable aspect of the city. Each of the Rebus novels is essentially a variation on previously established themes, as is ultimately necessitated by their hard-boiled form; but within this framework Rankin is able to present different visions of Edinburgh, depending

on where Rebus's cases take him: one of exclusive social clubs and squalid squats in *Hide & Seek*; one of sordid history bleeding into the present in *Set in Darkness*; one that is no country for old men in *Exit Music*. For all their underlying constancy, the Rebus novels rarely repeat themselves as regards Edinburgh, each successive entry in the series finding a new angle on a familiar city like Spark and Stevenson before them, just as hard-boiled fiction finds new ways to tell the same stories again and again. Edinburgh, to Rankin, is actually Edinburghs, something he himself is keen to emphasise:

I may share some of my memories with Rebus, but we are far from being the same person, and we do not inhabit the same Scotland. Doing the job he does, he tends to deal with victims and the families of victims, with criminals and the dispossessed, many of them in the least happy of circumstances. This leads Rebus to see Edinburgh - to my mind one of the best and most beautiful places in the whole world - as a series of crime scenes, and to be always mistrustful of the people he meets. His Edinburgh is not mine.<sup>25</sup>

That Rankin writes within the framework of crime fiction allows him to explore different Edinburghs from those previously depicted in fiction. Although his work has much in common with the work of Stevenson and Spark, *Jekyll and Hyde* and *Miss Jean Brodie* are almost exclusively concerned with the upper echelons of society. His chosen form means, by necessity, that Rankin must cover a broader social spectrum in greater detail, dwelling on Edinburgh's darker side where Jean Brodie encourages her pupils not to stare and Hyde disappears into streets enshrouded in fog and shadow. There is just as much room in the Rebus series for Pilmuir estate and Leith waterfront as there is for Edinburgh Castle and Morningside. To different people it is different cities, depending on what each person looks for, what they bring with them to their interpretation, what their preconceived notions of the city are; a great piece of literature given physical manifestation. To Rankin, it is all of these potential interpretations at once, all of them feasible, all of them ripe for exploration in fiction, but none of them making sense without an understanding of those aspects of Edinburgh that will always remain.

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<sup>25</sup> Rankin: *Rebus's Scotland* (2006), 12.

## ***Conclusion: It's Hard To Be A Saint In The City***

In his depiction of Edinburgh throughout the Rebus series, Ian Rankin draws a clear parallel between traditions of both Scottish and hard-boiled fiction, whilst simultaneously dismantling the notion of an exclusively Scottish literary tradition along nationalistic lines. His Edinburgh is a city unique within Scotland, one that is spoken for no more by Glaswegian urban writers than are the Highlands or the Islands; the resultant suggestion is that we must speak not of a single Scottish tradition, but of Scottish traditions, plural, to reflect the diversity of experience contained within the country. Though Glasgow and Edinburgh are two major Scottish cities less than fifty miles apart, there are significant differences in outlook, attitude and behaviour between both. Edinburgh is depicted as insular, concerned with propriety, repressed, full of guilt, secrets and duality; Protestant where Glasgow is Catholic, to employ a familiar shorthand. Rankin's portrait of Edinburgh belongs with those painted by the city fiction of Muriel Spark and Robert Louis Stevenson. It fits less easily alongside Glaswegian writers such as Alasdair Gray, James Kelman or Edwin Morgan.

Similarly, Rankin dispels any idea of a single national tradition acting as sole influence on contemporary Scottish authors, his depiction of Edinburgh clearly influenced as much by the likes of the American Raymond Chandler as by the Scottish Spark and Stevenson, and as much by film and music as by literature. He is very much a product of the time in which he writes, able to access a variety of media from across the world through the increasing encroachment upon everyday life of multi-channel television and the internet in the twenty years covered by the Rebus series, and to reflect this accordingly in his work. His achievement in this regard is in his ability to merge this wide range of influence from across the world and across genres into work that nevertheless remains distinctively Scottish, anchored to a single locale that is interrogated and eulogised by the manner in which it complements and is contrasted with these influences. Local detail is not sacrificed for wider readability to a worldwide audience, nor the city's quirks made less idiosyncratic by the co-option of inspiration from abroad; rather, Rankin demonstrates, by his alignment of conspicuously Scottish elements with those external influences, how Scottish fiction can maintain global relevance in an age in which national boundaries are blurred more than ever. Reading his work through the lenses of setting and genre reveals kinship with the work of writers worldwide, lending global relevance to potentially parochial novels.

At the same time, Rankin has some very specific things to say about Edinburgh. In focusing on the city over a twenty year period, he is in a unique position to pass comment

on how it changes within that time-frame, or, as is more often the case, how it does not change at all. His quick work-rate - seventeen Rebus novels in twenty years - allows Rankin to chronicle in real-time the physical changes made to Edinburgh, whilst simultaneously demonstrating that the forces shaping the psychology of the city remain the same as they were when Spark and Stevenson were writing: repression, duality, hypocrisy, greed, self-preservation, Calvinism. For all the new building work and redevelopment that takes place throughout the series - the Scottish parliament, Leith Waterfront, the business district - Rebus remains bound, by the rules of the genre he inhabits, to investigate the same kinds of crimes over and over again. Rankin connects these generic limitations with the city's status as a protected heritage site, to suggest that the repetition inherent to crime fiction (i.e. murder after murder after murder) finds a parallel in Edinburgh's literal inability to escape its past, doomed to repeat history endlessly and unable to enact more than superficial change as a result. The past and present bleed into each other, Rebus called upon at times to deal with cases that either echo the history of the city or are very directly linked to historical incidents. Edinburgh becomes a city where the past is re-enacted on a daily basis, and not only for the benefit of the tourists. Unlike that tourist-friendly façade, the historical theme park aspect of the city that recreates pieces of tartan kitsch on a daily basis, Rankin's historical repetitions are made manifest in the crimes committed then and now, the suppressed desires and the lingering influence of Calvin and Knox.

Throughout the series, Rebus, like the city around him, remains a source of constancy even as he, too, undergoes superficial changes. As he ages in real-time between *Knots & Crosses* (1987) and *Exit Music* (2007), his attitude towards Edinburgh degrades from adopted home town to place where he no longer belongs; and yet he continues to be a steadfast protector of the vulnerable and underprivileged of the city, despite his increasingly ambivalent feelings towards his surroundings. For all his failings, Rebus becomes the kind of guardian Rankin seems to feel that Edinburgh deserves: a tarnished hero for a tarnished city. It is in Rebus that Rankin finds hope for Edinburgh, not only in moralistic terms but in literary terms too: Edinburgh becomes different things to Rebus over the course of the series, suggesting a city that is malleable in fiction if not in reality, and amenable to a multitude of viewpoints and stories. Indeed, Rankin manages to find something new to say about the city in each one of the Rebus books, be it through an unexplored geographic area, an unprobed area of society or through passing comment on some new real-world development. In conflating Scottish traditions of writing about Edinburgh with those of hard-boiled fiction and noir, Rankin effectively opens up the possibilities of the kind of stories that can be told about Edinburgh, expanding the

parameters of the city's literary future whilst remaining respectful of its past.

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