Character Poetics in the Contemporary Crime Fiction Series and a series novel: *Dog & Bone*

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ABSTRACT

Character is a key component of the contemporary crime fiction series, but few studies have considered the poetics of character, and how it is constructed. This thesis addresses the gap in current research by establishing the literary techniques and formal devices by which crime series character is both generated and maintained. The series form is reconceived as 'a meganarrative', a methodology which prompts new insights, and underlines that 'series character' can reside in the protagonist and setting – Rebus and Edinburgh being prime examples. The thesis comprises creative and critical research. The creative study is an original work of fiction, *Dog & Bone*, which investigates the poetics through practice, and innovates the genre with book two of a series about an ageing hitman and his dog. The critical study establishes new theory on series character in contemporary crime fiction. The core poetics is defined in chapter one, via an examination of the series protagonist. Chapter two investigates the inevitable masculinity of this poetics, then explores how it can be inflected and challenged by feminine patterns. Chapter three augments the core poetics to include place as a character, and shows that this expanded poetics can also be inflected. The thesis establishes a set of concepts necessary to its arguments, including mythorealism, iterative framing, on-duty/off-duty, character density versus transformation, gendering of temporal progression, narrative mirroring, charactericity of place. Author interviews are cited alongside comparative readings of series by Ian Rankin, Lee Child, Liza Marklund, Tana French. The thesis findings are situated with respect to studies on series/serial/transtextual character and also setting, referencing scholarship on literature and TV, from crime and other genres. Existing ideas are challenged and a new poetics is proposed, reflecting the distinct properties of crime series character, human and topographic. Via creative-critical research, this thesis radically revises current understanding of the contemporary crime fiction series.

LIST OF CONTENTS

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INTRODUCTION TO CREATIVE-CRITICAL THESIS

Character Poetics in the Contemporary Crime Fiction Series and a series novel: *Dog & Bone*

Crime fiction has been the focus of increasing scholarship in recent decades, but very few studies have examined the unique properties of the crime series.[1] Two main elements are essential to the identification of novels as belonging to a series – a continuity in the main characters and/or a continuity in the setting. It is to a poetics of series character (in which 'place' will be understood in relation to character) that this thesis is devoted.[2] To articulate such a poetics, existing theories about fictional character cannot be relied on, as these inherited literary-critical accounts are directed at one-off figures in standalone texts. Characters in crime series can extend across decades of time and millions of words, and they demand a new conceptual framework. My thesis addresses the gap in current research by proposing a poetics of crime series character. Through creative and critical research, I establish the literary techniques and formal devices by which character is generated and maintained. The thesis comprises a series novel, *Dog & Bone*, and a critical study in three chapters. The study begins with the crime series protagonist but in subsequent chapters these findings are extended. As will become apparent, gender and place are integral to the conventions by which crime fiction asserts itself as a genre, and I address their formative influence on character. Via a set of arguments, supported by close reading, I arrive at new theories and radically revise current understanding of character poetics in the contemporary crime fiction series.

My creative study investigates this poetics through practice. *Dog & Bone* is a crime novel set in Edinburgh, about a 64-year-old hitman and his dog. It innovates the genre through the atypical protagonist, an old yet dynamic anti-hero. *Dog & Bone* is the second book in my crime

[1] I use crime fiction as an umbrella category, as per Anderson et al.: 'Following Priestman (1998 [*Crime Fiction from Poe to Present*]) and Knight (1980 [*Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*]), "crime fiction" should be understood as a general term covering a wide range of subgenres (for example who-dunits, thrillers, police procedurals, detective novels, noir and the like)' (7).

[2] A series is a collection of related but independent stories. A serial is a *single* story divided into installments. The adjectival form of series is serial, but to avoid confusion, and following Walton and Jones, I use 'series' as a noun and adjective.

series, and the follow-up to *A Dog's Life* (unpublished). This relational aspect is particular to the series form, and one that I have been able to explore through writing a novel that is not a series opener, but already part of a sequence. The negotiation of character and place with respect to a pre-existing storyworld has been integral to the methodology of my creative project.

Methodological considerations have also strongly influenced the critical project. Poetics is 'an account of the resources and strategies of literature' (Culler 71), and for this account to reveal the literary strategies in contemporary crime series, it is necessary to examine a range of series. However, each series can be in excess of 20 novels. Close reading and textual comparison – the traditional methods of literary criticism – would entail multiple primary texts spread across several series, dissipating the potential for a rigorous and targeted examination.

For my critical study I devised a methodology that would address these challenges and allow me to theorise the contemporary series form while still achieving depth in my analyses. I focus on a group of prize-winning and critically acclaimed crime series, all with a global readership. Forming a backbone to my critical project is Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus series. Many series adhere to the same model as Rankin – with a central detective figure, attached to the same location, who solves a different crime (more or less) in each novel – and hence it can serve as a benchmark. There are currently 22 novels in the Rebus series and I have selected four, to represent the opening, middle, and later stages. Each chapter of the critical study examines two Rebus novels, and these are then cross-compared with three other series, selected to bring out particular arguments. As a foundation for the overall thesis, the core poetics is defined in chapter one, via the protagonist, and I compare two Rebus novels with two from Lee Child's Jack Reacher series. Chapter two investigates the inevitable masculinity of this core poetics, but then explores how it can be inflected and challenged by feminine patterns, and comparisons are drawn between two Rebus novels and two from Liza Marklund's Annika Bengtzon series. Chapter three augments the core poetics to include place as a character, and shows that this expanded poetics can in turn be inflected, in ways that further innovate the genre; here the

comparative readings are between two Rebus novels and two from Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad series.

The thesis thereby articulates key concepts by focusing on four authors and ten core texts. As an extension of my methodology I incorporate the authors' observations on their own fiction. I interviewed Ian Rankin and Lee Child in person. Liza Marklund and Tana French were not available, but I have quoted comments they made elsewhere. This is a study of poetics, and hence author insights on creating character are of particular import. My arguments respond to studies on series/serial/transtextual character and also setting, referencing scholarship on literature and TV, from crime and other genres. Danielsson is a primary source, and one of the few critics to theorise the series form. In defining the parameters of my study, contemporary is understood as the last forty to fifty years, when, as identified by Danielsson, a new type of crime series emerged, which differed from earlier Golden-Age or Hard-Boiled variants.

My thesis looks in detail at specific novels in a few exemplary series, and incorporates author testimony along with theoretically informed, close textual analysis – methods that have allowed me to arrive at a set of propositions relevant to an understanding of all contemporary series. To reach these conclusions, my approach has also entailed a reframing of the literary form. Scholarship has tended to treat the crime series as a collection of duplicatable novels; within each series these texts are united by shared qualities such as author, protagonist, setting, quest-based crime narrative. Each novel is typically understood as a separate unit that replicates the same 'formula', a view expressed by Priestman when he defines the crime series as 'the form which repeats, theoretically "ad infinitum", the same kind of action in roughly the same narrative space or time-slot' ('Sherlock's Children' 50).

I challenge that approach, and reunite the multiple novels of a series into a single work of literature, perceived as a whole. To identify it as a single work, I use the term 'meganarrative'. It is the longest form of ongoing fiction, able to span multiple books. This formal reconception of the crime series as a meganarrative opens up new ways to define the underlying poetics. In my thesis I conduct a close reading of selected novels, but on the understanding that these are

excerpts from a meganarrative, and my study addresses the larger-scale patterns that emerge across such an extended and continuous fiction.

Crime fiction is a genre associated with pace, plot, peril, compelling characters, social commentary, vivid settings, action, intrigue, entertainment, the seduction of vicarious transgression, the comfort of resolution. These features are evident in standalone novels as well as series, and a quest-based plot that solves a murder is often seen as *the* defining trait of the genre. However, I contend that – particularly when it comes to the series form – these are not texts that investigate a crime and offer a solution. These are, above all, meganarratives that conduct a long and detailed enquiry into *character*; character as a mimetic means to model and understand being and place, but also character as a literary construct. Through my novel and my critical study I elaborate new theory and establish the formal elements and devices that together constitute how literary character is made and maintained and indeed *challenged* by the series mode. With its strong focus on poetics, this thesis constitutes a paradigm shift in the creative-critical understanding of the contemporary crime fiction series.

CHAPTER 1

CONSTRUCTION OF CRIME SERIES CHARACTER

> *I've had millions of words I've been able to write about Rebus's life, and every time I write a little bit more about him, I find out a little bit more about the inside of his head. And he lives more or less in real time, so he has changed over time, and I've been able to show that in a way that you can't if you're just doing one book.* (Rankin, Interview).

Series fiction can generate characters that exist across hundreds of thousands of words, rising to millions in the longer-running series. Such a scale of literary endeavour demands the reconceiving of character. This chapter establishes a fresh understanding of literary character in the contemporary crime fiction series, by focusing on the protagonist, the lead (human) figure that persists novel to novel, and often provides the title by which a series is known and distinguished. Via close attention to the poetics of the protagonist, I arrive at the fundamental traits associated with the creation and ongoing curation of character in the series form. I thereby establish a core set of theories that will be further examined in chapters two and three, with respect to gender and place.

There is extensive scholarship on character poetics in narrative fiction. This is mainly directed at one-off characters in standalone novels, but I begin by highlighting a number of relevant points, also referencing transtextual character. I then examine current research on crime series character, challenging the prevailing ideas in order to arrive at a new poetics, which I demonstrate via author interviews and close readings from selected novels: Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus series, *Hide and Seek* (#2), *Resurrection Men* (#13); Lee Child's Jack Reacher series, *Killing Floor* (#1), *61 Hours* (#14).

Rankin's words about Rebus, quoted above, offer a useful starting point to these enquiries: 'every time I write a little bit more about him, I find out a little bit more about the inside of his head'. In his novels Rankin has created a 'human-like' figure, and the writing process becomes a way of augmenting his and the reader's understanding of Rebus. Margolin can elucidate this idea of character construction as a process of infilling:

> [T]extually created characters are radically incomplete as regards the number and nature of the properties ascribed to them. Generally, which (kinds of) properties are specified or not and how many are a function of the text's length and of the author's artistic method [...] Characters are thus partially indeterminate (schematic, not fully individuated), and are technically person-kinds who can be filled in (specified, concretized) in various ways and to different degrees (68).

This suggests that a reader, from the pieces available in the narrative, builds a 'person-kind' with varying degrees of completeness; here Margolin reflects the mimetic possibilities of literature, its capacity to emulate real life, and create an almost-breathing character from textual clues. Margolin proposes that 'which (kinds of) properties are specified or not and how many are a function of the text's length'; this implies that a longer text allows *more* properties to be specified, enabling a reader to construct a character that is more 'complete'. Such an argument is highly relevant to series and serial fiction – across all genres, not just crime – given that an extended, sequential narrative will, through wordiness alone, supply more material on a particular character. Infilling and extension also occur in transtextual fiction, when an author 'borrows' a secondary character from a canonical text. Rosen suggests:

> Because all characters and the fictional worlds they occupy are structurally incomplete, realist readers continually supplement texts with outside information, hanging a referential body on the gappy structure posed by the text [...] when contemporary authors become fascinated with a minor figure they dramatically extend, and physically enact with the production of a new fiction, a process of supplementation that is mental and imaginary in everyday reading (157-8).[3]

Series authors are similarly 'fascinated' with a character – their own rather than another author's – and they also use the series form to 'physically enact with the production of a new fiction, a process of supplementation'.

The impetus to augment character is apparent, too, in the *roman-fleuve*, and here again there is scholarship relevant to the study of crime series. Felber says of sequence novels: 'Characters

[3] Rosen, like Margolin, is indebted to the theories of textual indeterminacy developed by Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser.

who recur are depicted through the progressive accumulation of details. An initial portrait is revised through multiple and often parallel appearances; the complex presentation ends only with the termination of the final volume' (148). Danielsson, a key scholar on the crime fiction series, has identified the *roman-fleuve* as among the formative influences that have, in recent decades, critically reshaped the contemporary crime series:

> Signs of seriality, such as intratextual references and chronological developments, are increasing in the series, and although there is still an important difference between detective *series* (the object of this study), and *serial* fictions, I argue that the series is adopting traits from the serial, and from the *roman-fleuve*, notably a focus on the ongoing life of the protagonist (*Dynamic* 141; emphasis in original).

Here Danielsson draws attention to changes in the crime series that have impacted on the character poetics. Past series typically comprised discrete novels that could be read in any order. Danielsson highlights that nowadays series are becoming more like a serial or a *roman-fleuve*, genres that can – with characters that recur across a sequence of linked novels – convey the sense of a life lived through all its permutations. As well as citing Felber, Danielsson references Walton and Jones, who note that: 'Works in a series are routinely marketed by appealing to the reader's investment in a character and continuing interest in his or her life story' (152). This life-story arc is found in many contemporary series, and Danielsson argues that the *roman-fleuve* is the genre that 'the detective series resembles the most' (*Dynamic* 144).

Whilst I agree there are similarities between the *roman-fleuve* and contemporary crime series, this chapter establishes the ways in which Danielsson has overstated the 'conclusive shift in narrative focus—from investigation and case to protagonist and life' (Ibid., 148). Nevertheless a partial shift of focus has occurred, as evident in many current series, including the Rebus novels. Danielsson's research was published in 2003 and she situates this change in the series form to around the 1970s: 'the former cardboard figure has over the last thirty years or so turned into a dynamic character, with a private life and personal problems. The detective series, moreover, has developed from a chronicle of murder cases to a life story in installments' ('Private' 1).

However, as my own findings will show, the 'murder cases' continue to outweigh 'private life' as a determinant of character poetics, even in series that reflect the influence of the *roman-fleuve*. Danielsson also suggests that 'most contemporary detective series […] resemble traditional, realistic novels in that psychological processes are part of the plot and developing characters are the sources of action' and elsewhere she refers to the detective series as 'a chronicle of character development' ('Private' 2; *Dynamic* 149). Character development has become a central concern in contemporary series, one that I interrogate in this chapter, to establish the means by which it is modelled in the narrative. An extended account, across multiple volumes, of a protagonist's 'life' may foster in a reader the sense that they have an increased understanding of that fictional character – that the character has developed or is more complete. But, as my close readings will evidence, more fictional material on a protagonist does not necessarily mean that they accrue a greater *depth* of character.

This raises the issue of what is meant by 'character'. In literary theory, the term has been a topic of entrenched debate since the 1960s; the formalist/structuralist approach treats literary character as an abstract 'concept' or set of signs, whereas the humanist approach treats it as a 'real' or 'human-like' person.[4] However, formalist and humanist critics who examine literary character do so in relation or reaction to shared cultural perceptions. What is generally understood by the term 'character' is pertinent to any work of fiction, but has particular relevance to the crime series form, where character becomes a long-term enterprise; Rankin has written nearly 2.7 million words featuring Rebus, and Child has produced around 3.9 million words featuring Reacher.[5] To understand how the author is able to transport a protagonist through each accumulating episode/novel of such a meganarrative, it is necessary to examine two common definitions of the word 'character'. Firstly, taking Rebus as an example, he is '*a* character' in that he is a (fictional/invented) person in a novel. The series

[4] See Heidbrink for a condensed chronology of the research on fictional character from Aristotle to the present day.

[5] Calculated using figures on www.readinglength.com (accessed 29 Apr 2020) for Rankin's 22 Rebus novels and Child's 24 Reacher novels. These totals are approximate and not independently verified, but indicate the scale of both series. Rebus and Reacher do not appear on every page (other characters narrate sections), but as the driving force in these series, I have ascribed to them the full word count.

situates itself in the realist tradition, and thus the character is given a particular name (John Rebus, usually referred to as Rebus) and a set of attributes (male, Scottish, Police Inspector, middle-aged, divorced, smoker, whisky drinker, music lover). This literary creation is also figured as *possessing* character; here the word is used in its other guise, signifying the mental and moral qualities distinctive to a (living) individual. A reader will treat Rebus *as if* he is real, with a rich mental landscape that reflects their own consciousness. The reader construes Rebus's inner character by piecing together clues from the text – the process of infilling described by Margolin – and this generates another list, slanted towards the beliefs, values, personality traits that – via Rebus's actions, dialogue or inner monologue – are conveyed in the novels. This list of Rebus's inner character traits includes attributes such as loner, contrarian, pessimist, judgemental, Calvinist, iconoclast, avenger, moraliser.

Aspects of the protagonist's inner character are repeatedly figured in different situations throughout the Rebus series, and later in the chapter I demonstrate this via a number of extracts. Rankin is, whether consciously or not, adhering to an essentialist metaphysics of human character, based on the philosophy that a (living) individual has a core essence, that they are imbued with an underlying human nature, which permeates/dictates their actions in this world. Rankin models Rebus in accordance with these precepts, creating a realist fictional figure. The inner attributes conferred on Rebus (contrarian, loner) are combined with the outer attributes (Scottish, Police Inspector) and become embedded, novel by novel, as *characteristics*. They 'harden' into the defining features that identify Rebus to the reader. The naming of Rebus in the text is not enough; to meet reader expectations, Rebus must bring to each novel his physical and metaphysical 'baggage'. Similarly, in Child's series, Reacher is equipped with a set of traits that the reader expects to find in each novel, and which establish and maintain the protagonist: outer attributes such as male, American, ex-Military, drifter, tall, strong, vigilante, fighter, coffee drinker; inner attributes such as loner, rootless, insightful, patient, driven, vengeful, fearless.

Both Rankin and Child have created characters modelled as possessing character, and, noted by Danielsson, these days a typical series protagonist will be equipped with 'a private life and personal problems' that unfold novel by novel. Chronology carried less significance in, for example, Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe novels, whereas with contemporary series, readers feel obligated to read the novels in a particular order, to piece together that ongoing life. Rebus is a prime example of this more psychologically realist character with a 'biography'. Indeed Rankin cites the twelve-volume *roman-fleuve* by Anthony Powell, *A Dance to the Music of Time*, as a formative influence, providing direct evidence of Danielsson's position (Plain *Ian Rankin's* 14). However, across the meganarrative the reader still needs to recognise it is the *same* Rebus in each novel. For this reason he is figured as a character with certain identifying traits, namely those listed above. These are structured into the narrative in a manner that repeats, novel after novel. In effect, these attributes are a nuanced version of the tics and stock phrases – such as the 'little grey cells' of Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot – that are associated with series characters from the Golden Age of crime fiction. Danielsson proposes that 'most contemporary detective series […] resemble traditional, realistic novels' but I argue that when contemporary series are scrutinised with respect to the patterning of the protagonist's habits/identifiers, then the resemblance to a 'traditional, realistic' novel cannot be sustained.

The significance of patterning within the series form was established by Eco's seminal theories on the iterative poetics of series character. As Mayer says, 'Eco was one of the first critics to take popular seriality seriously by emphasising the effectiveness of its oscillation between repetition and variation (or innovation) as a narrative forcefield' (32). Eco suggests that in crime series the reader 'continuously recovers, point by point, what he already knows, what he wants to know again: that is why he has purchased the book. He derives pleasure from the nonstory' (159). Eco also proposes that: 'Vices, gestures, nervous tics permit us to find an old friend in the character portrayed' (158). His observations were made in 1962 with respect to Rex Stout's Nero Wolfe series, which predates the biographicising influence of the *roman-fleuve*, but – as noted by Vanacker – iteration remains crucial even in later series that *do* follow the life-story template, such as Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski series: 'Equally as important

as the crime novel's drive towards closure, then, is this "non-story", the affirmation that the reader is encountering the same, unaltered, beloved character. […] As a result each Warshawski novel iteratively performs Warshawski's personality' (101).

The iterative performance of 'the same, unaltered, beloved character' risks creating a caricature, though Paretsky avoids this, as does Rankin, through the careful construction of their protagonists as realist figures who display ageing and psychological development. Child too avoids caricature, Reacher being shown to possess complex thought patterns and psychological depth, but nevertheless an iterative quality is prominent in the Reacher series, which adheres more to the pre-biography mode studied by Eco. The sense of an ongoing 'life' for Reacher is deliberately suppressed. The fictional chronology is de-emphasised, although there are plot lines linking some of the novels.[6] However, on the whole, the Reacher series presents a protagonist who remains the same and is not burdened by an increasingly complex biography. This reflects Child's belief that: 'the attraction of a series is the comfort and the familiarity, therefore, the reader doesn't really want the character to change, the reader wants the same guy to show up each time' (Interview).

Reiterative Framing

So far I have introduced my initial arguments regarding series character and established that in the Reacher series the identifying attributes are prominent, fulfilling Child's aim for 'the same guy to show up each time', while in the Rebus series they are more suppressed, reflecting Rankin's desire for a character that 'lives more or less in real time, so he has changed over time' (Interview). Via close reading, I now determine how these identifying attributes are communicated. Whether prominent or suppressed, a protagonist's characteristics are often

[6] For example, in *61 Hours* (#14) Reacher has phone conversations with Major Susan Turner, and he then travels across the USA, encountering 'obstacles' en route that instigate further novels, before he finally meets Turner and frees her from prison, in *Never Go Back* (#18).

relayed via small vignettes that recur, novel to novel. As evident in *Hide and Seek*, Rebus is frequently shown spending the night in his living room:[7]

> Sleep did not come easy, but eventually, slumped in his favourite chair, a book propped open on his lap, he must have dozed off, because it took a nine o'clock call to bring him to life (35).

Later in the same novel there is another example:

> Rebus opened his eyes. The sun was streaming into his living room, a record's run-out crackling. Another night spent in the chair, fully clothed (177).

In *Resurrection Men* the motif appears again:

> Finally, he'd headed back to his flat and fallen asleep in the chair, waking at midnight with a raging thirst and a thumping head (75).

It is also mirrored later in the same novel:

> On the hi-fi, Michael Stipe alternated between rage and grieving
>
> John Rebus sat down in his chair, prepared to let the night-time take its toll (211).

This seemingly incidental detail of where the protagonist sleeps is nevertheless able to convey elements of Rebus's inner and outer character. Eco refers to the presence in crime series of a 'repertoire of *topoi*, of recurrent stock situations which animate these stories' (159; emphasis in original), but I suggest that the double reading of topos has particular significance in the crime series. 'Topos' means a traditional theme or formula in literature, but has its origins in the Greek word for place. These vignettes of Rebus sleeping in his chair do more than 'animate these stories'; the figuring of a series character in a particular locus, like an animal in its lair, is able to relay many subtle signals. Jameson's examination of Chandler with respect to Barthes' *effet de réel* can convey a sense of these subtleties:

> If in Balzac the object-world was meant to give a metonymic signal, like a wild animal's den or an exoskeleton, in the Barthesian view of Flaubert's descriptions, these last were

[7] There are other recurring motifs in the Rebus series, such as: the protagonist's dishevelled appearance; his addiction to cigarettes; regular visits to the Oxford Bar; his empty home life; no food in his fridge; his Saab car.

> simply meant to emit the signal "we are the real, we are reality"—by virtue of their very contingency [their absence of necessity?]. It was because such details (the ornate clock, the barometer) played no part in the action, and unlike their Balzacian equivalent did not mean or express anything, that they were able to stand in for the sheer massive contingency of reality itself (66).

The physical details that reiteratively frame a character in a crime series are giving a Balzacian metonymic signal, but they also contribute to furnishing the fictional world with the contingent 'stuff' that declares 'this is [a] reality'. But what 'metonymic signal' is emitted by Rebus's chair as a recurrent image? The chair communicates how alone he is; falling asleep in his living room, rarely making it to the bedroom, no family or partner influencing his habits. Rebus disregards the domestic 'rule' that sleep should happen in bedrooms. The chair being typically where he sleeps also implies that his nights are restless; Rebus is upright, and has to 'anaesthetise' himself with music and alcohol: 'Sleep did not come easy'. The motif of these restless nights, spent on a chair in the living room, conveys to the reader, via a process of iteration, that not only is Rebus a loner, he is a *troubled* loner.

Turning to Child's series, it too frames Reacher via particular settings that recur. The protagonist eating a meal in a diner tends to feature in every novel, beginning with the iconic opening sentences of #1, *Killing Floor*:

> I was arrested in Eno's diner. At twelve o'clock. I was eating eggs and drinking coffee. A late breakfast, not lunch (11).

The motif appears several times in the novel, with further visits to that same diner, for example:

> We crunched over the gravel and into the diner. Slid into the end booth. The woman with the glasses brought us coffee (402).

In *61 Hours* a coffee shop/diner features once again. This novel is narrated in third person, the mode that predominates across the series:

> A waitress came by and Reacher ordered the biggest breakfast on the menu.
>
> Plus coffee (124).

The same coffee shop is visited later in the novel:

> The line moved slowly but steadily and Reacher got level with the steamed window. Inside he could see vague shapes bustling about (262).

The diner motif communicates a range of themes pertinent to character. It reinforces Reacher as an everyman, eating burgers and apple pie in the socially inclusive, prototypical all-American restaurant. And yet he *only* eats in diners, as he is rootless, constantly on the move, so this establishes him as 'of the people' but also apart. Reacher is shown to have rejected the stability of a home. The diner is also a version of the mess or canteen the character would have frequented during his army years. Another vignette that conveys Reacher's transience, his lack of 'baggage' or indeed any luggage (except for a toothbrush), is the visit to a clothes shop, typically once within each novel, when the protagonist buys new clothes and sheds the old. Child makes Reacher's lack of belongings into one of his 'properties'. The character performs who he is each time he attires himself anew in his trademark clothing – durable, functional, generic, no-nonsense. This is first seen in *Killing Floor* when Reacher purchases 'a pair of pants, a shirt and a jacket. A light fawn colour, pressed cotton, as near to formal as I was prepared to go. No tie. I put it all on in the changing cubicle in the back of the store. Bagged up the old stuff' (254). The clothes-store scene, figured in a different way, also recurs in *61 Hours*:

> He chose pants with a flannel lining, a T-shirt, a flannel shirt, and a sweater made of thick cotton. He added white underwear and a pair of black gloves and a khaki watch cap. Total damage was a hundred and thirty bucks. The store owner took a hundred and twenty for cash. Four days of wear, probably, at the rate of thirty dollars a day. Which added up to more than ten grand a year, just for clothes. Insane, some would say. But Reacher liked the deal. He knew that most folks spent much less than ten grand a year on clothes. They had a small number of good items that they kept in closets and laundered in basements. But the closets and basements were surrounded by houses, and houses cost a whole lot more than ten grand a year, to buy or to rent, and to maintain and repair and insure.
>
> So who was really nuts? (126)

Unusually, in this second extract, Reacher is shown reflecting on the consequences of his decision to avoid being 'encumbered'; introspection does feature in the Reacher series but, for reasons examined later, it is not prioritised in the narrative.

The motifs cited above, in the Rebus and Reacher novels, contribute to the maintenance of series character, through the iteration of defining traits, framed and staged in particular locations. Character consistency becomes a central concern, and these defining traits typically operate within certain parameters, an aspect that Rosen notes in relation to a different genre:

> [A] character's field cannot be shifted to an unlimited degree. In fan fiction, a character like Captain Kirk might have a different sexual orientation or might be the manager of a Starbucks instead of a starship, but he would not resemble the Kirk we know at all if he were an uninsured part-time barista at that same Starbucks and talked like Spock (177-8).

These observations are applicable to a single-authored meganarrative such as a crime series. The reader, after just one Rebus novel, will have an expectation – based on the premise that a 'character's field cannot be shifted to an unlimited degree' – that they will meet a sufficiently similar Rebus in the next novel. If he was figured as a cheerful optimist, the reader might suspect a substitution had occurred. Iterative traits thereby become a way of signalling and maintaining the Rebus-ness of Rebus – his quiddity.

In Child's series, there is a strong focus on the iterative presentation of character via repetition of those rephrased but nevertheless familiar descriptions and scenes that reference Reacher's size, his lack of baggage, his military background, his rootlessness, his fighting abilities. Across the Reacher meganarrative, now comprising 24 novels, there accrues an accumulation of this fictional material. Here I borrow and repurpose a phrase coined by Creeber (5) – it is my contention that Reacher displays 'character density' as opposed to character development. This is an important distinction. Character density is, I suggest, what tends to define series protagonists of the Golden-Age and Hard-Boiled era. Reacher reflects this earlier mode, where narrative material builds up around the protagonist; novel after novel they acquire textual weight but concentrated in the same behaviours, and hence the character acquires density.

Across the Reacher series there is an *implied* development because more of his existence has been documented in the novels. The reader may have the impression of knowing the protagonist better, because they have witnessed more episodes and prequels in that existence, and read more of the character's back-story recollections. But this does not necessarily mean the protagonist has changed or evolved, hence what tends to transpire is character density. Indeed, Child's intention has been to *suppress* that thrust toward character development, reflecting his belief, cited above, that 'the reader doesn't really want the character to change, the reader wants the same guy to show up each time'.

Turning to Rankin's series, this is more representative of the character poetics found in the majority of contemporary crime series. Rebus does display iterative traits and a degree of character density, but this is combined with a greater emphasis on progression and character *development*. Rankin's series offers more of the protagonist's life story and – in distinction to Child's series – this life is shown to effect changes in Rebus. The resultant character development is modelled in two ways: further insights are offered into the protagonist's psyche; the series also presents Rebus as maturing over the years, in terms of his mental outlook and attitudes. This chapter will later revisit the issues of character development and ageing, but here it is worth stating that, in contemporary crime series, the repeat staging, indeed the *celebration*, of certain habits and identifiers is still a core component of the poetics.

On Duty – Off Duty

In a meganarrative, as the above findings have shown, iterative traits and repeated topographic vignettes are a means of constructing and curating the protagonist, novel to novel. And contemporary series will, as Danielsson identified, often include details of the protagonist's private life. But how is this poetics shaped by the *crime* aspect of these crime series? The genre dictates that the primary focus of the text is the investigation of crime, in particular murder. The stakes are high. The protagonist is typically presented in situations that place them under extreme duress. Across all genres, duress is arguably what motivates narrative development, but crime fiction is where its influence is most clearly discernible and generically encoded.

It is duress that gives rise to what is, I contend, one of the truly distinctive features of crime series character: these series protagonists only appear on the page when there is an instigating crime – typically murder – which triggers that particular volume in the sequence. In my interview with Rankin, I asked, 'Is Rebus's light switched off when there's no crime, is his voice silenced?' He responded:

> [T]he crime rate in Scotland isn't huge, and the murder rate in Edinburgh isn't huge, and so, when I was writing the books, I kind of thought, well, this is the one exciting thing that happens to him the whole year. So each book is basically a year of his life. Although the events of the book might only take place over eight, ten days. But this is the one big thing, that's happened to him and his colleagues, that whole year. And the rest of the year's been a bit more banal. It's been bland, banal, boring, nothing much happening. And so you get this one short period where it's suddenly very exciting, they're all keen to get stuck in […] So, in-between times what's happening is that they're just being cops going about their normal business, and investigating easily solved, domestic-style cases, that aren't very interesting to read about (Interview).

As Rankin suggests, the reader is supposed to infer that, between novels, Rebus spends his time solving uninteresting 'domestic-style cases'. The protagonist is brought 'to life' when there is a violent crime to solve, but deprived of agency during the 'bland, banal, boring' rest of the year. That the text falls silent when there is 'nothing much happening' is then mirrored in how Rebus's weekends, his time off, are presented in the novels:

> He'd spent most of Saturday in the Oxford Bar, passing time first with one set of drinkers, then with another. Finally, he'd headed back to his flat and fallen asleep in the chair, waking at midnight with a raging thirst and a thumping head. He'd not been able to get back to sleep until dawn, meaning he didn't wake until midday on Sunday. A visit to the launderette had filled in the afternoon, and he'd gone back to the Ox in the evening.
>
> All in all, then, not a bad weekend (*Resurrection Men* 75).

Two (fictional) days have been reduced to one paragraph, in stark contrast to Rebus's crime-centred working week, when a single day may fill several chapters. The narrative directs the reader to privilege the on-duty 'murder-case' presentation of character, and disregard their off-

duty existence. There is, however, a glimpse of Rebus's private life in the opening pages of *Hide and Seek*:

> John Rebus stared hard at the dish in front of him, oblivious to the conversation around the table [...] What had he in common with these people? Would they laugh if he told the story of the police alsatian and the severed head? No, they would not. They would smile politely, then bow their heads towards their plates, acknowledging that he was . . . well, *different* from them (2).

Here Rebus is shown as being out of his element; in police mode the character knows how to act, and his anecdote about the dog would raise a laugh among fellow officers; Rebus in civilian mode is awkward to the point of desperation. In formalist terms, the dinner party conveys that Rebus is most 'at home' when he is working. Throughout the series there are episodes featuring his private life, and in the next chapter I examine these in more detail, but for now the key point to make is that the protagonist's off-duty existence is for the most part downplayed.

The text also pays little regard to the undramatised lacunae between the Rebus novels, the eleven and a half months of the fictional year when the character is not working on a murder enquiry. There are sporadic examples, such as the following from *Hide and Seek* when Rebus is shown reflecting on his failed marriage: 'Rebus thought about how a group photograph of his wife, his daughter and him might look. But no, he couldn't visualise it. They had grown so far apart, ever since Rhona had taken Samantha to live in London' (15). This refers to events that have happened, 'unseen', between #1 and #2 of the series. An example of 'other time' can also be found in *Resurrection Men*, directly after the summary of Rebus's weekend cited above:

> At least he wasn't having the blackouts any more. He could remember the conversation he'd had in the Ox, the jokes he'd been told, the TV shows playing in the background. At the start of the Marber enquiry, he'd been at a low ebb, the past seeming to suffocate him just as surely as the present. Memories of his marriage and the day he had moved into the Arden Street flat with his young wife. That first night, he'd watched from the window as a middle-aged drunk across the street leaned for all his life against a lamp-post, struggling for balance, seemingly asleep though standing. Rebus had felt an affection for the man;

> he'd felt affection for most things back then, newly married and with a first-time mortgage, Rhona talking about kids . . .
>
> And then, a week or two before the tea-throwing incident, Rebus had himself become that man: middle-aged and clutching at the self-same lamp-post, struggling to focus (75).

Firstly, it should be noted that – as per the deprivileging of off-duty Rebus referred to above – although the character can 'remember the conversation he'd had in the Ox, the jokes he'd been told', these details are withheld from the text. Rebus then recalls an event prior to the start of the series, before he first 'appears' in *Knots and Crosses*. The key point to make here is that, although there are intermittent passages such as this one, fictionalised self-reflection is not a strong component of the Rebus novels.

Crime series protagonists rarely have 'time' to muse on their own existence as they are focused on the here and now of the 'quest', this teleologically oriented arc being of course one of the defining traits of the genre. As Malmgren states, 'Crime fictions are quest narratives' in which 'someone is looking for someone or something' (152), and typically the quest is to right a perceived wrong, either through legal/professional means (Rebus) or illegal/vigilante means (Reacher). This requires action not introspection. If there is 'thinking' portrayed in the narrative it is usually associated with the pursuit and resolution of the quest and entails a modelling of ratiocination toward that end, rather than a modelling of the character's psychic interiority. Indeed, in crime series, there are particular ways in which character itself comes into focus as a subject of enquiry, apparent in the way the fiction employs ideas of psychological profiling, notions of behavioural patterns and personal motives. This probing of character – typically by a detective protagonist or their equivalent – is always vital to the plot as it helps solve the crime. But setting aside these functional concerns, it becomes evident that in the meganarrative of a crime series, human character is presented as a combined conscious/sub-conscious in which 'answers' and 'explanations' can be found for every action; provided the detective figure is

modelled as applying the right skills – be it psychological profiling and military training, in the case of Reacher, or police training and a facility for understanding people, in the case of Rebus.[8]

Thinking is modelled as a means to an end, and self-examination is avoided. The figuring of Rebus as needing to be active rather than introspective is apparent in the following extract from *Resurrection Men*:

> He'd thought before of selling his flat, buying a little house just outside the city - commuting distance, but a place where he could find a bit of peace. Problem was, you could have too much of a good thing. In Edinburgh, he had twenty-four-hour shops, myriad pubs within a short walk, and the constant background hum of street life. In a place like Inveresk, he feared the silence would get to him eventually, drawing him deeper into himself - not a place he really wanted to be (307).

The character is shown as wanting to avoid the perils of being drawn 'deeper into himself', preferring instead the bustle of city life. His restlessness mirrors the narrative structure, which promotes active Rebus, out and about doing his job. As conveyed by the proportioning of the text, working Rebus is accorded a higher status over weekend Rebus. This topic will be examined further in chapter two, but evident in the above remarks by Rankin, priority is clearly being given to Rebus on a *murder* enquiry: 'the one big thing, that's happened to him and his colleagues, that whole year'. Murder is the catalyst that turns humdrum Rebus into the obsessive, tormented figure that will pursue a killer until they are caught, regardless of the personal consequences:

> It was two in the morning when the phone woke him. He was lying on the living room floor, next to the hi-fi, CD cases and album sleeves spread around him. He crawled on hands and knees to his chair and picked up the receiver.
>
> 'Yes?' he croaked.
>
> 'John? It's Bobby.'
>
> Rebus took a moment to realise who Bobby was: Bobby Hogan, Leith CID. He tried focusing on his watch.

[8] As Rankin says of Rebus, (treating the fictional character as if he is alive): 'He's much better than me at reading people and at reading situations. And a lot of that he's just learnt, during the process of doing the job' (Interview).

> ‘How soon can you get down here?’ Hogan was asking.
>
> ‘Depends where “here” is.’ Rebus was doing a stock-check: head cloudy but bearable; stomach queasy (330).

This extract is three-quarters of the way into *Resurrection Men*. Rebus is not accorded the (relative) comfort of falling asleep in his favourite chair, listening to music, instead he is shown ‘lying on the living room floor, next to the hi-fi, CD cases and album sleeves spread around him’, with his ‘head cloudy but bearable; stomach queasy’. From the start of the novel onwards, Rebus is figured as suffering increasing levels of mental anguish, and in the final chapters he is subjected to a physical assault that necessitates ‘a blood transfusion and seven stitches’ (436).

At the end of each Rebus novel, once the investigation is concluded, this heightened/ transfigured/tormented version of the character is shown to subside and leave. In *Hide and Seek*, for example, Rebus’s withdrawal is staged across the last two pages, transmitted via sentences such as: ‘And so it ended, the story petering out, the rumours dying a little less slowly’; ‘he sat at the kitchen table for the umpteenth time, writing a rough draft of his letter of resignation’ (260). This conflicted act of leave-taking culminates in the final paragraph:

> He opened the file and took out the photographs [...] Important people. Influential people. [...] He brought out a metal wastepaper bin from beneath the desk, dropped the photographs into it, and lit a match, holding it over the bin, as he had done so many times before (261).

Will Rebus destroy the incriminating photographs? The question remains open, and there is none of the knot-tying closure of Golden-Age detective fiction. On departing the text of *Hide and Seek*, the protagonist is delivered into an unnarrated limbo where doubts, guilt and recriminations linger. And from this same limbo the character is once more summoned, at the start of the next novel in the series.

In the Reacher series a similar pattern can be discerned, of on duty and off duty, with periods of untold ‘other time’ in between, a structure that Child acknowledges:

> I want, in the reader's head, Reacher's voice to be silenced between adventures in order to emphasise that, sure, for three hundred and sixty-four days of the year, nothing happens to him, he does not stumble into trouble (Interview).

Reacher is ex-army, a drop-out from society, who hitchhikes his way round the USA, always on the move, and 'when he had to he worked whatever job he could get. He had worked the doors in night clubs, and he had dug swimming pools, and stacked lumber, and demolished buildings, and picked apples, and loaded boxes into trucks' (*Never* 151). Is this the Reacher who is hero of a best-selling series of 24 novels translated into 49 languages, with well over 100 million sales?[9] Reacher does not become the character associated with Reacher until he 'stumble[s] into trouble'. Then on-duty Reacher sets to work, the super-charged 'twin' who only surfaces once or twice a year, for a brief ten days – this is the Reacher familiar to readers, and yet, across the duration of his (fictional) life, for most of time he is not *this* Reacher, he is the other Reacher.

Unlike Rebus, righting wrongs is not Reacher's regular employment but a role he assumes between the pages of each novel. At the beginning of *61 Hours* Reacher is a 'kind of stowaway' on a senior citizen bus tour, passing through South Dakota during a blizzard (21). Before this point Reacher 'had been in Marshall, Minnesota, for no very memorable reason' (25). The text underscores that this 'other time', prior to *61 Hours*, is not important or 'memorable'; indeed within the series as a whole, coach journeys come to represent the unnarrated in-between time. At the start of each novel Reacher is typically figured as wanting to keep himself to himself. In the opening pages of *61 Hours*, Reacher is shown not to engage with the other passengers: 'He slept through most of the drive time and all his responses to conversational gambits had so far been entirely courteous but brief, and completely devoid of substance' (22). Shortly afterwards the coach crashes and the passengers are taken to a local police station, where Reacher glimpses crime-scene photographs of a 'sprawled black-clad body, large, probably male, probably dead, snow on the ground, blunt force trauma to the right temple. No blood' (50). Reacher then

[9] Figures taken from the official website of Lee Child and Jack Reacher. www.leechild.com/faqmedia.php Accessed 29 Apr 2020.

becomes markedly more engaged and talkative, telling the Deputy Chief of Police: '"I like to know things. I'm hungry for knowledge"' (57). The quest is underway. Reacher is once again on duty, a role that requires him 'to protect or avenge those he cares about or feels responsible for: lovers, subordinates, women, children, the helpless, and the wrongfully harmed' (Roberts 28). The narrative presents a figure obsessed with securing his version of justice, and, as Roberts suggests, Reacher's 'analytical' approach to retaliation 'only seems saved from complete amorality by the unambiguous villainy of the subjects of his violence' (21).

When Reacher's quest concludes at the end of *61 Hours* it is unclear whether the protagonist is alive in the aftermath of a huge explosion. Such an ending is unusual in the Reacher novels and *Killing Floor* is more representative of the series as a whole; here the final chapter signals Reacher withdrawing from the text and from society, and resuming his nomadic status, via phrases such as: 'I didn't want property taxes and maintenance and chambers of commerce and strategies [...] I wanted the open road and a new place every day. I wanted miles to travel and absolutely no idea where I was going' (523).

In the Rebus and Reacher series, what I have identified is a dormancy of character that is then activated. The series form in effect models a *particular* conception of character, which has echoes in the idea of 'hypokeimenon':

> This word means "that which underlies." One finds the word in Aristotelian physics and metaphysics, and in such contexts it has a long history in Latin, as *substantia* or as *subiectum.* Both of these are Latin translations of *hypokeimenon,* which is, and means, that which remains unchanged as it underlies the process of all change (Gadamer 276).

Gadamer's position is elucidated by Lawn and Keene, who suggest that hypokeimenon 'articulates the unchanging substratum that underlies every change or alteration, the relationship between the thing and its accidents, the substance and the matter' (138). I argue that the metaphysical model of character present in crime series is that of hypokeimenon, a latent subiectum or *subjectum,* intermittently catalysed by violence into becoming the active *subject* on the pages of the novel. The subjectum is the enduring essence, the wellspring of

character, which underlies change, alteration, accidents. The subjectum can be understood as the character's *latent* potential to become all it can be, with the subject then being the manifestation of that potential.[10] Where that potential is expressed in crime series, is via the character's pursuit of the quest. The quest commits them to take action, the narrative then becoming a record of those actions. I have already established that the construction and maintenance of a series protagonist – via the iteration of habits/identifiers – draws upon an essentialist understanding of human character. What now becomes clear is that – via the imperative to 'take action' – this essentialist understanding is brought into counterpoint in crime series with a diametrically opposed concept, namely an existential model of human character – based on existence not essence – that figures Rebus/Reacher as being the sum total of what he *does* between the pages of each novel.

Does this interplay of ancient and modern metaphysics offer any guidance on the poetics? I argue that the elusiveness of crime series character, its both/and-ness rather than either/or-ness, its situatedness in the tension *between*, is part of its fundamental construction. Nevertheless, the dualing of subjectum/subject and essentialist/existentialist models does narrow down the territory where – within an ontology of fictional being – one can *locate* crime series character.

Consistency versus Transformation

In my arguments thus far, I have demonstrated that the repeat staging of certain topoi and particular traits can contribute to character consistency and continuity across a meganarrative. My close readings have also shown that, at the start of each novel, the protagonist is catalysed into being an active subject. It takes crime, more specifically a murder, to bring forth this heightened manifestation of Rebus or Reacher, but that 'rebirth' carries with it the prospect of change. The very form of the series, with a protagonist that emerges from limbo and is made anew for each episode, has the potential to generate difference. Indeed, a certain malleability is necessary to the idea of psychological 'growth', and is perhaps what distinguishes caricature from character. As Rankin himself states, when reflecting on his experiences of writing a series

[10] Such a model is arguably applicable to character poetics in other literary genres.

and (re)creating Rebus for each episode: 'I've never felt, as I start to write a novel, oh here we are going through the motions again, because between books he has changed, so I'm not writing about the same guy twice' (Interview).

Framing my argument in formalist terms, what the series generates is a character that has stable traits, but a character that is *also* newly created for each episode of the meganarrative. Rabinowitz asks a set of questions that elucidate this unique aspect of series character poetics:

> What are the **grounds** that permit us to decide that we can legitimately use information we gain about a character N_1 as **evidence** to interpret the actions or psychology or thoughts of character N_2 at a different (particularly, earlier) period of time? Or, to put it yet a different way [...] under what circumstances do I have the 'right' to assert/claim that N_2 is the same character as N_1, knowing that the consequences of anyone's accepting that claim will be that character N_1 is thereby **changed**? (2; emphasis in original)

A pseudo-mathematical sequence is applied to different manifestations of the same character, Rabinowitz highlighting in particular the impact of prequels. This has relevance to the Reacher series where backstory novels are inserted in the chronology, but to illustrate my argument I will focus on the Rebus series, in which the publication dates follow the fictional chronology. Richardson suggests 'for a character to be transportable between texts, it must have an independent essence that endures in different situations' (539).

But is $Rebus_2$ of *Hide and Seek* the same as $Rebus_{13}$ of *Resurrection Men*? Analysing how the protagonist is introduced in both novels can help answer this. I have already cited the dinner-party scene when the reader first meets Rebus in *Hide and Seek*; the character is 'oblivious to the conversation around the table' – he feels 'an unfocused despair' and knows he is '*different*'. $Rebus_2$ can now be compared to $Rebus_{13}$ from the opening sentences of *Resurrection Men*:

> 'Then why are you here?'
>
> 'Depends what you mean,' Rebus said.
>
> 'Mean?' The woman frowned behind her glasses.
>
> 'Mean by "here",' he explained. 'Here in this room? Here in this career? Here on the planet?'

> She smiled. Her name was Andrea Thomson. She wasn't a doctor – she'd made that clear at their first meeting. Nor was she a 'shrink' or a 'therapist'. 'Career Analysis' was what it said on Rebus's daily sheet (1).

In searching for the 'independent essence' referred to by Richardson, there are evident differences between that first encounter with Rebus in *Hide and Seek* – mute, isolated, despairing – and the Rebus of *Resurrection Men,* who is confident, combative, dry witted, and who – instead of staring silently at a plate of lobster – is prepared to challenge this non-shrink/non-therapist at her own game. Rebus in *Hide and Seek* is, as noted earlier, out of his element at a 'civilian' dinner party. Nevertheless, I argue that Rebus is presented as having changed with the passage of (fictional) time, and matured in the intervening eleven years.

Modelled within the Rebus series is the promise that there is still more to reveal about the protagonist. These can be hidden layers of the character's 'psyche', and a feature of the Rebus series is the use of revelatory confessions that appear at intervals and offer further insights on Rebus, such as the following: 'He thought about the job too much as it was, gave himself to it the way he had never given himself to any *person* in his life' (*Black Book* 93; emphasis in original). New details from their backstory is another way of revealing more about a character, such as the passage quoted above, in which Rebus is shown to recall the early days of his marriage, thereby highlighting his current plight when he finds himself 'middle-aged and clutching at the self-same lamp-post, struggling to focus'. These methods, along with the presentation of ageing/maturing, are all ways that construct Rebus as a protagonist that displays character *development*. They also construct Rebus as a character that has more to reveal.

When reading a series, the lure of narrative deferral is precisely what produces the idea of character as yet to be fully known; the expectation that in the 23rd Rebus novel one might learn 'a little bit more about the inside of his head'. In series that follow the biographic template, narrative deferral is also linked to the revealing, episode by episode, of incidents in the character's personal life, often relating to relationships and family, an aspect I examine further in chapter two. This trajectory in the protagonist's private life, along with the effects of ageing and psychological maturing, are all changes consistent with the mimetic modelling of a

character with an anima/persona and a life story. Nevertheless, inconsistencies do emerge. Meganarratives are not machine-made. They are crafted year after year by an author who, even with the help of editors, may introduce small differences to the character that will be spotted by observant readers. Rankin acknowledges certain mistakes in his own series:

> [I]n *The Black Book* I say that Rebus went to school in Cowdenbeath. By the time we reach *Dead Souls*, some six years later, we find that he actually attended Auchterderran Secondary School [...] In using my own life as a template for some of Rebus's background, errors sometimes do creep in (*Rebus's Scotland* 6).

Along with inconsistencies that could be classed simply as 'errors', there is another type of inconsistency that reflects the author's desire – deliberate or perhaps subconscious – to evolve their protagonist. In P.D. James's characterisation of her protagonist Inspector Dalgliesh, Vanacker observes that across the series arc the character becomes less 'irritable' ('Visitor' 75). I suggest that James decided to modify Dalgliesh's personality, to create a less abrasive figure. Dalgliesh also 'sheds the sexist comments of the earlier novels' (75), and this, I argue, was to bring the character in line with societal attitudes, which became more progressive between 1962 and 2008, the publication timespan of the series. These changes seem about *altering* rather than ageing the protagonist, but Vanacker proposes that: 'Dalgliesh's status as a character of long duration prevents us from seeing these minor changes as inconsistent. He resembles his readers, and his creator, in the sense that he appears to have slowly changed and aged over the decades' (75).

A crime series character is of such 'long duration' that the issue of consistency versus inconsistency becomes crucial. Rebus displays character changes consistent with maturing, but there are also inconsistent errors. Vanacker's analysis of Dalgliesh shows that the series form can mask (deliberate) inconsistencies and re-present them as compatible with character development. Rabinowitz does, however, suggest that 'it's possible to reject a later version of a character even when written by the same biographical author. At least some people refuse to believe that Sherlock Holmes is the same Sherlock Holmes after his battle with Moriarty' (2).

There is the ever-present risk that altering a character will, referring back to the point made earlier, lead the reader to doubt their quiddity. Nevertheless, the series form is flexible enough to absorb a degree of inconsistency in the protagonist. It may be confined to one episode, and an example of this can be found in the Reacher series. Across Child's meganarrative, attention is drawn to the protagonist's mathematical abilities, but in *Bad Luck and Trouble* (#11) this skill is amplified, evident when Reacher visits a cashpoint/ATM and applies his 'junior-idiot-savant facility with arithmetic' to a large sum that has appeared in his account (12):

> One thousand and thirty dollars.
>
> 1030.
>
> Not inherently an interesting number, but Reacher stared at it for a minute. Not prime, obviously. No even number greater than two could be prime. Square root? Clearly just a hair more than 32. Cube root? A hair less than 10.1. Factors? Not many, but they included 5 and 206 along with the obvious 10 and 103 and the even more basic 2 and 515 (13).

In this novel I suggest it suited Child to have a version of Reacher where his mathematical skills were more enhanced. Reacher's bank account is the sole means of communicating with this perpetual drifter, and his analysis of the number 1030 prompts him to contact the former colleague who placed the deposit: '"If a military policeman needs urgent assistance from a colleague he calls in a ten-thirty radio code'" (14). Returning to Rabinowitz's idea of a character having different versions, then Reacher_{11} differs from other Reachers in the sequence. Rabinowitz notes, of cartoon series: 'Nor is it intuitively clear that continuity of "author" makes two Bugs Bunnies the "same" character. Are all the Bugs Bunnies, for instance, virtuoso pianists of the same caliber as the one in "Rhapsody Rabbit"?' (2). I argue that when enough consistent traits are maintained alongside these inconsistencies – that is, the reader still 'recognises' Reacher (or indeed Bugs Bunny) – then the poetics of the crime series form can accommodate discrepancies; it allows errors to be absorbed, and permits the trialling/testing of new attributes, that may or may not be retained in subsequent novels.

However, these evolutions and changes in the protagonist rarely take them on an extreme trajectory. Reader expectations are a factor. Once a series is underway and established, there is

a tendency to maintain the familiar aspects of the lead character. Alter them too much, and it may alienate readers. But in terms of my investigation of the poetics, it is important to stress that the crime series – with its re-incarnation of character for each new episode – does have embedded in its form the scope for a more *radical* transformation across the meganarrative arc. Miller proposes that 'Police and offenders are conjoined in a single system for the formation and re-formation of delinquents' (5). Rephrasing Miller's position, I argue that, in contemporary series, it is crime and the novel that are conjoined in a single system for the formation and re-formation of *character*.

Crime series contain the sorts of 'pressures' that would tend to re-form character. The protagonist is repeatedly put in harm's way, at the center of a murder investigation, and they are often subjected to violence. The series form, as discussed above, is equipped to model major changes – it could show the cumulative mental and physical toll on the protagonist, exerted by their proximity to violent crime. And yet in most contemporary series, there tends to be a limited trajectory and the conservation of stable attributes. This poses the question – is a figure such as Rebus (or indeed Reacher, Warshawski or Dalgliesh) shown to change *enough*, given the events they have 'lived' through?

I contend that *amnesia* is a significant factor in the poetics of crime series character. A willful forgetting of past traumas allows the protagonist to carry on, unencumbered by too heavy a burden of grim remembrance. Rebus is rarely shown recalling any of the extreme events of the preceding novels. When there are occasional references, they are in passing, without detail, for example in *Hide and Seek* where he reflects on his promotion to the rank of Detective Inspector, following 'a long, hard case full of personal suffering' (16).[11] In the Reacher series this shedding of the past is even more marked, Child having chosen to *avoid* the trend toward the series as 'life story in installments':

[11] This refers to #1 *Knots and Crosses* in which Rebus's daughter is kidnapped and Rebus is shot and nearly strangled to death.

> I was aware that everybody was doing that […] why go head-to-head with people that are already doing stuff so well? I should self-consciously do something different, which was a happy coincidence, because I wanted this rootless, alienated character (Interview).

Child is tailor-making the characterisation of Reacher to fit a decision about narrative form, a decision that is also reflected in the author's approach to what Reacher 'feels' about past events:

> [I]f you're one of those writers that does envisage it as a strictly chronological, in-order biography almost, then each book has this tremendous weight, that somehow has to be dealt with, but Reacher is fundamentally not interested in what has already happened (Ibid.).

This issue of fictionalised forgetfulness is touched on by Richardson:

> In genres with weaker mimetic pretensions (low budget television series, Harlequin-type romance novels, operas, etc.), the concept of character is much more limited […] Usually, there is no historical memory; detective Columbo doesn't remember getting knocked unconscious 50 times, or that the villain he faces has an identical modus operandi to a very similar villain he faced two years ago in viewing time (535).

Reacher's 'mimetic pretensions' are not as weak as those of a character such as Columbo. I have already established that Reacher is equipped with an ongoing biography, albeit suppressed, Child noting that, 'he, obviously, by definition, carries this long history with him, but he tries his best to ignore it and shed it' (Interview). However, now that Child's series has reached 24 novels it does test the boundaries of realist fiction. The Reacher figured in #1 is a 36-year-old, ex-army drifter; this is a different proposition to the Reacher of #24, well into his fifties, a drop-out who is *still* drifting, still administering justice.

Realism Meets the Mythic

On reviewing the close readings of Rebus with respect to change and development, it is evident that he conforms to a mimetic and realist conception of character. But when considering Child's series, the realism becomes more tenuous. Across the accumulating duration of the Reacher novels – and this is a key finding – what emerges is a literary character that combines realism with *myth*. Reacher's 6'5" height, his muscled physique, his capacity to win fights against

multiple opponents, these are the outward sign of mythic traits that permeate all aspects of his characterisation. Eco proposes that:

> The hero equipped with powers superior to those of the common man has been a constant of the popular imagination […] Often the hero's virtue is humanized, and his powers, rather than being supernatural, are the extreme realization of natural endowments, such as astuteness, swiftness, fighting ability, or even in the logical faculties and the pure spirit of observation found in Sherlock Holmes (146).

Throughout the series Reacher manifests the 'extreme realization of natural endowments', his abilities never diminish even as he notionally ages across the meganarrative. The iterative performance of Reacher's superior attributes creates an unchanging mythic hero. Reacher is figured as partly human, occasionally fallible, but mostly he is shown being invincible – the capacity to endure and vanquish thereby signalling his 'immortality'. Even Rebus, a more realist character than Reacher, is portrayed as not fully human, evident in the following extract from *Resurrection Men,* narrated by Siobhan Clarke:

> Rebus had confessed to her once, after too many late-night drinks in the Oxford Bar, that he saw ghosts. Or didn't see them, so much as sense them. All the cases, the innocent – and not so innocent – victims . . . all those lives turned into CID files . . . They were always more than that to him. He'd seemed to see it as a failing, but Siobhan hadn't agreed.
>
> *We wouldn't be human if they didn't get to us*, she'd told him. His look had stilled her with its cynicism, as if he was saying that 'human' was the one thing they weren't supposed to be (250; emphasis in original).

Alcohol brings forth a confession from Rebus, but in the series as a whole, drinking is shown to facilitate the character's amnesia regarding his past. Indeed, alcohol becomes the means for maintaining the realist aspirations of a meganarrative that, at 22 novels, could, like Child's series, raise questions of credibility. These observations can be added to my findings in the previous section. It is now evident that amnesia plays a significant *structural* role in the poetics.

Viewed from a realist perspective, any ongoing crime series has the potential to become overburdened by its own historicity, with the protagonist recalling an ever-increasing list of previous investigations and traumas. The modelling of amnesia – via alcohol in the case of

Rebus, or a desire to 'shed' the past, in the case of Reacher – removes those elements that would challenge these realist pretensions. However, it creates a paradox that is particular to the crime series protagonist. Amnesia seemingly supports the character's realism, but it also serves to *undermine* it, by presenting the character as impervious to their own past. This amnesia then becomes part of what constructs the protagonist as mythic.

To determine what myth brings to the interpretation of crime series, I begin with a brief analysis of the concept. Coupe describes myth as 'an elemental expression of the narrative imagination' (xi). Moyers, inspired by the theories of Joseph Campbell – who is in turn indebted to Vladimir Propp – sees myth as an expression of the 'need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are' (Campbell & Moyers 4). The mythic hero is an archetypal figure that taps into these yearnings for the elemental, the eternal, a figure that is more than human, but yet can reveal what it is to *be* human. These same qualities are replicated in the crime series protagonist, along with further mythic structures, namely aspects of what Campbell defines as 'the hero's journey' or monomyth; the crime series protagonist faces challenges, leading to an ordeal in which the 'enemy' is vanquished, but, contrary to the monomyth, in the series form the protagonist is *not* transformed by their journey – each successive novel takes them back to the beginning of a journey they are destined never to complete.

Across a crime series there is climax upon climax, every novel testing the protagonist to their extreme limit, a limit the protagonist survives, only for them to be pushed to that extreme yet again in the next episode. Amnesia and the phoenix-like capacity of a series character to be reborn after every 'fire' is integral to the poetics of crime series character. Both these aspects emerge from the mythic template that underlies the protagonist. And it is, I argue, this mythic template that then 'constrains' the trajectory of the protagonist. As shown above, the series form is able to accommodate character transformation, but the protagonist's mythic and iterative qualities effectively countermand that potential.

In formalist terms, the mythic hero emerges as a symbiotic byproduct of the series form. But the crime series protagonist is also figured as mortal, with an ongoing life. The dichotomy between the two modes of representation is captured here by Eco, in his analysis of Superman, the 'mythological character of comic strips' (149):

> The mythic character embodies a law, or a universal demand, and therefore must be in part predictable and cannot hold surprises for us; the character of a novel wants, rather, to be a man like anyone else, and what could befall him is as unforeseeable as what may happen to us (148).

The protagonist in contemporary crime series is, I argue, a literary figure that *fuses* the dichotomy expressed by Eco, creating a character that is 'mythic' but also 'like anyone else'.

Mythorealism is the term by which I define and identify this poetics. It is fundamental to an understanding of the contemporary crime series protagonist – a character who obeys certain predetermined patterns and yet whose destiny is also 'unforeseeable'. There is, arguably, evidence of mythorealism in the crime protagonists of earlier eras. However, my focus here is on contemporary iterations, where the protagonist has shifted toward a more biographic model, such that the mythorealism incorporates an evolving 'private life and personal problems'. In contemporary series, mythorealism constructs a protagonist that rises from the ashes when required to solve a crime, who almost dies with every book, and is seemingly undaunted by a long history of extreme episodes, with little or no memory of past trauma. This same protagonist is also equipped with an ongoing biography and a realist existence built from everything that happens to them; events in their (minimal) private life together with the (suppressed) events connected to each previous murder investigation.

This mythorealist dual reading can be applied to Reacher. On the mythic side, he presents as a powerful lone stranger who (repeatedly) saves the day. But study the meganarrative from a realist perspective, and the Reacher that emerges after 24 novels is: a vigilante responsible for killing, judge-and-jury style, multiple individuals; a serial monogamist with a string of abandoned relationships; a figure whose fictional biography becomes impossible to chart. The

Reacher series is an extreme example, but it highlights that this same pattern is *also* present in a series such as Rankin's, even though the protagonist is modelled more closely on real life. Rebus has a daughter, a drink problem, a number of relationships with women, a flat in Marchmont, an ongoing biography, all details that make the character appear 'to be a man like anyone else'. But again, bringing an alternative reading to his meganarrative, what emerges is the heroic, activated, on-duty Rebus, the 'mythic character' who 'embodies a law, or a universal demand' – a figure whose actions in the text are dictated by the generic conventions of the crime quest.

My primary conclusion, from this chapter's examination of character poetics, is that the contemporary crime series protagonist is a mythorealist figure. Child's series displays the more mythic version of this poetics. Rankin's series has a greater emphasis on the realism. In many ways, Child's series creates a world where, like that depicted in Golden-Age crime fiction, society is 'fixed' and order reinstated when Reacher – a 'hero equipped with powers superior to those of the common man' – eradicates the guilty. In Rankin's series, on the other hand, there is a different conception of criminality, and he argues *against* reading the crime series protagonist as superhero:

> [A]s readers, we enjoy our main characters if they have some flaws; we don't like perfection, we don't like superheroes, superhuman people in our fiction. We like them to get things wrong, we like them to fail occasionally. And Rebus often feels that; he feels that maybe he got the right person for the wrong reason, or that solving a crime doesn't really make anything better, that crime comes along and fills up that vacuum (quoted in Sloma 72-3).

While Rankin may defend the realism of his protagonist, my analyses have shown that Rebus does display mythic tendencies. Indeed Rankin's series is exemplary of many contemporary series where the protagonist presents as overtly realist, but it is a realism grafted onto a mythic template. This creates flawed heroes rather than superheroes; flawed in their humanity, persuasively real but not quite mortal, aspiring to a mythic heroism but often thrown off course. The Rebus series reflects the current era and the increasing realisation that there are no easy

answers, and ‘solving a crime doesn’t really make anything better, that crime comes along and fills up that vacuum’. In the following two chapters, I examine the poetics of crime series character in relation to gender and place. This will augment my findings on the core poetics and the concept of mythorealism, but I will also show how this poetics can be inflected to draw further attention to the root causes of crime and criminality in contemporary society.

CHAPTER 2

CRIME SERIES CHARACTER AND GENDER

Through close reading of the series by Rankin and Child in the previous chapter, I established that the form constructs a character that is mythorealist. Rebus and Reacher were examined when activated under duress, and also in their downtime, where the descriptions typically presented them as alone, or drifting and devoid of responsibilities. But such a pattern of behaviour is indicative of privilege, in particular of gendered privilege. How, then, does gender affect the emerging poetics of crime series character I am developing here? In a study of feminism and the crime novel, Munt argues that:

> The image is archetypal—the warrior knight, the tough cowboy, the intrepid explorer—he is the representative of Man, and yet more than a man, he is the focus of morality, the mythic hero […] Both the form and the content of this scenario are iconically masculine, in a literary and cultural sense (1).

By populating these narratives with characters that conform to 'the warrior knight, the tough cowboy, the intrepid explorer…the mythic hero', the crime genre communicates an 'iconically masculine' message. Plain, a key critic of gender in crime fiction, proposes: 'Whether the detective is male or female, straight or gay, she or he always exists in negotiation with a series of long-established masculine codes' (*Twentieth* 11). These codes are liable to create a figure with no home life, no significant relationships, and no dependents. The protagonist may be a woman or man, but the series form typically stages a performance of gender that is masculine. This masculinity is, however, narrowly defined. The genre codifies it as invincible, heroic, autonomous, but contemporary society encompasses maleness in many different guises. A mismatch is also evident in how women are portrayed in crime fiction, female characters being typically consigned to a limited set of generic guises such as victim, femme fatale, mad woman, good girl, or as a sexualised dead body.

In the crime genre there is clearly an ongoing issue with representations of what it means to be female or male, and as I proceed to examine the impact of gender on series character poetics,

it is important to recognise that although the labelling of certain 'norms' of behaviour as feminine or masculine can be useful tools within literature studies, these labels do not reflect my own real-world awareness of gender as a performative spectrum. Nevertheless, in the fictional worlds of crime fiction, gender is still codified in particular ways. This chapter establishes how gender has shaped the traditional poetics. I also show that representations of gender can be reconfigured, allowing the series form to offer further commentary on contemporary understandings of crime. To present my argument I draw on current scholarship, author interviews, and close readings of the Annika Bengtzon series by Swedish author Liza Marklund, focusing on *The Bomber* (#4) and *Last Will* (#6) (translated by Neil Smith), comparing them to extracts from Ian Rankin's Rebus series, *Resurrection Men* (#13) and *Exit Music* (#17). In these later novels Siobhan Clarke is co-protagonist, and I reference her characterisation alongside that of Rebus.

To examine gender in Rankin's series, I begin with an extract from *Exit Music*, which illustrates the prevailing (masculine) poetics. Rebus has returned to his flat, alone, after being warned by the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency to stop his surveillance on crime boss Cafferty:

> 'Fuck,' Rebus announced, the single word summing up the day's adventures. He didn't know how to feel about the SCD men. Yes, he wanted Cafferty taken out of the game. But suddenly it was important that it was *him* making the bone-crunching tackle. So it couldn't *just* be about Cafferty; it was about the means and method, too. Years he'd been fighting the bastard, and now technology and some bespectacled penpusher might end up finishing the job. […]
>
> There should be mess.
>
> There should be fuss.
>
> There should be blood . . . (268-9)

Present here are the hallmarks of the masculinised crime protagonist; a hero acting in isolation, intent on 'making the bone-crunching tackle'. By giving Rebus attributes that reflect mainstream ideas of manhood in western society – loner, driven, fighter – Rankin has arguably done 'a good job' of constructing a character that readers will recognise as male.

When Rankin introduced Clarke to the series he gave her a number of attributes that would make her a counterpoint to Rebus: 'I thought, nice that she's female; you got a few sparks that fly between them. A different generation from him, been to college, computer literate. What the hell? Make her English as well' (quoted in Sloma 80). Gender is one of Clarke's defining characteristics, the intention being to create opposition between her and the male protagonist. But how does Clarke perform this femininity in a genre where female protagonists have to negotiate 'long-established masculine codes'? Passages from Rankin's series show that male traits are indeed present in the characterisation of Clarke; for example when she single-handedly defends a sex worker, Laura, from being stabbed by Dow (Laura's ex-husband):

> The knife sliced into Laura's flesh, making a soft sound almost like a mild reproach. *Tsssk!* Siobhan grabbed for the knife arm, trying to lock it behind him […] Dow flung his head sideways, catching Siobhan on the bridge of her nose. Tears welled in her eyes, and she momentarily lost strength.
>
> *Tsssk!*
>
> The knife again finding its target. Siobhan let go his arm and aimed her knee into his groin, connecting with all the force she could muster (*Resurrection Men* 223).

Clarke plays 'warrior knight', tackling an assailant, and later in the novel she displays facets of 'intrepid explorer':

> And at least when she was tailing Dempsey, she was keeping busy. She wasn't at the station, being fawned over . . . she wasn't at home, brooding over a ready meal . . .
>
> She switched the car's CD player on: Mogwai, *Rock Action*. It had an edginess to it which she found soothing. Maybe she could relate to it. Edgy and samey but with sudden unpredictable shifts.
>
> Just like an investigation.
>
> And, maybe even, just like her (323).

On a solo mission, following a suspect, Clarke escapes the feminine fates of 'being fawned over' or 'at home, brooding'. Instead, she casts herself as '[e]dgy and samey but with sudden unpredictable shifts', which, setting aside the equivocal 'samey', places her as masculine.

The Gendering of Home and Work and Temporal Progression

In the extracts examined so far, Rebus and Clarke can be seen complying with masculine norms, but gender is also codified through how the prose is apportioned. The previous chapter established that the poetics of characters such as Rebus and Reacher entails their on-duty work existence being narrated in great detail, whereas their off-duty private life, or indeed the long gaps between novels, can be reduced to a few lines of prose. In this chapter I make a further intervention by demonstrating that this imbalance of on-duty/off-duty, work/home, public/personal, is gendered.

In the majority of crime series, the protagonist is shown investigating a crime; they could be a private detective or in the police, or have a similar role, but whether professional or amateur, their job is to pursue the quest and steer the narrative toward a resolution. Work has long been associated with masculinity/achievement/ambition/independence, while the home is associated with femininity/nurturing/family/community. These interpretations are being challenged in contemporary society, but, as touched on earlier, normative conventions continue to shape the crime series and they manifest in how the masculine presentation of character through work/quest takes precedence over the feminine presentation of character through home/family/ relationships; evident in *Exit Music,* when Rebus contemplates his personal life:

> Ciggies and booze and a little night music. At one time, they would have provided enough consolation, but he wondered if they would sustain him once the job was behind him. What else did he have?
>
> A daughter down in England, living with a college lecturer.
>
> An ex-wife who'd moved to Italy.
>
> The pub (15).

About to retire from the police force, Rebus acknowledges that there is little in his life beyond work. The estranging of Rebus from femininity and family life is modelled in the physical distancing of his daughter and ex-wife. This gender-inflected privileging of work over private life is also present in the characterisation of Clarke, for example in *Resurrection Men* when a police counsellor asks her:

> ‘What about outside work? Are there any keen interests you have?’
>
> Siobhan thought for a long time. ‘Music, chocolate, football, drink.’ She looked at her watch. ‘With any luck, I’ll have time to indulge in at least three of them after this.’
>
> Thomson’s professional smile faded perceptibly.
>
> ‘I also like long drives and home-delivery pizza,’ Siobhan added, warming to the subject.
>
> ‘What about relationships?’ Thomson asked.
>
> ‘What about them?’
>
> ‘Is there some sort of special relationship you’re in just now?’
>
> ‘Only with the job, Ms Thomson . . . And I’m not absolutely sure it loves me any more’ (439).

Clarke is ‘married’ to the job and her ‘masculinity’ is proclaimed via football, alcohol, home-delivery pizza, these being marginally offset by a ‘feminine’ predilection for chocolate. As with Rebus, the narration focuses on Clarke in her work mode, and she too lives alone. Massey critiques the characterisation of Clarke, arguing that she ‘is presented as little more than a version of Rebus in drag’ (51). This mirroring has, however, been deliberately created by Rankin, as evident in *Resurrection Men* when Rebus contemplates: ‘More and more, she reminded him of himself. He wasn’t sure it was necessarily a good thing, but was glad of it all the same’ (429).

Clarke is intended as Rebus’s enlightened female double but she still presents in the narrative as masculine, via her portrayal as a loner workaholic. Clarke models a way of life that could appeal to many readers, female or male, and to criticise the character as insufficiently feminine would be at odds with current nuanced perceptions of gender. Nevertheless, she does demonstrate that a masculine archetype prevails in the construction of both female and male protagonists.

So far, my findings on gender could be equally applicable to one-off crime novels. I will now examine the particular ways that gender shapes character poetics in the series form, where the meganarrative creates a much longer arc. As shown in chapter one, most contemporary series construct a pseudo-biography for the protagonist, and they will be modelled as ageing. Their

existence is typically staged to occur in the nebulous middle years, pitched somewhere between 30 and 55. Time moves on, according to the chronology of the individual novels, but it does not significantly alter the protagonist's physical appearance or indeed their psyche, with amnesia shielding them from the traumas of the job. There is also minimal acknowledgement of how the biological clock might impact on a female protagonist, even though the later years of middle age equate to a loss of fertility.

The series form presents ageing as having no major impact because it tends to model a *masculine* conception of ageing. A key way in which this semi-immortal middle-ageness is maintained is through the distancing of family and offspring; the masculinised hero-icised presentation of character is achieved through excising the feminised time-calibrated presence of progeny. A child would entail full commitment to an onward-marching chronology, because they transform radically year by year. Remove procreation from the narrative and it allows the never-ageing of the protagonist to persist unchallenged. These observations tally with Eco's analysis of comic strips: 'the "parsifalism" of Superman is one of the conditions that prevents his slowly "consuming" himself, and it protects him from the events, and therefore from the passing of time, connected with erotic ventures' (155).

The crime series protagonist avoids any extreme developments that might end their trajectory. And by persisting alone and childless, the 'passing of time' becomes less marked. The character is never 'consumed' and is free to occupy 'a narrative plot which multiplies like a tapeworm; the greater its capacity to sustain itself through an indefinite series of contrasts, oppositions, crises, and solutions, the more vital it seems' (149).[12] Across the series Rebus does have a sequence of relationships with different women, and a daughter from a failed marriage, but the parsifalic model still applies, as these factors never divert him from 'the oppositions, crises, and solutions' of the crime quest.

[12] As an example of a 'tapeworm' narrative Eco cites Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* and the subsequent novels that continue their adventures. However, Eco's remarks are, I suggest, equally relevant to crime fiction series.

By effectively being sealed off from 'the events, and therefore from the passing of time, connected with erotic ventures', the overall timeframe of a typical crime series is able – and once again I borrow Eco's comments on the Superman stories – to 'develop in a kind of oneiric climate—of which the reader is not aware at all—where what has happened before and what has happened after appear extremely hazy' (153). An evasive, dreamlike quality is maintained in the Rebus series by his daughter Samantha often being figured as elsewhere, so although she ages from child to adult across the series, her presence is more background than foreground.[13]

This unshackling from time is further evident in Clarke, whose parsifalism is more marked than Rebus's. Danyté observes that Clarke 'seems asexual, never falling in love, as Rebus in part does, and indeed never having a steady boyfriend or even an occasional lover. Nor are there any references to earlier partners or sexual experiences' (47). Clarke does not have offspring, and although there are no rules requiring a character's female gender to be expressed through motherhood, it is worth noting that Rankin, by making her childless, effectively withholds one of the main challenges that a female protagonist might present to the genre. Clarke is able to maintain an unfettered timelessness, that in her case is lodged around the younger end of middle age. Petrie suggests that:

> The series plays out a kind of family saga in which Rebus's failure as a father to Sammy [Samantha] is ultimately compensated by the emergence of his surrogate daughter Siobhan Clarke. The fact that Siobhan is also a professional, who understands and shares her mentor's identification with the job, erases the gulf between the professional and domestic spheres that Rebus, like many other fictional policeman [*sic*], has conspicuously failed to reconcile (158).

The figuring of Clarke as surrogate daughter to Rebus transfers family into a work/quest mode, foregrounding the mythic, the symbolic, and evading the murkiness of blood ties. Petrie suggests that Rebus as 'father' to Clarke 'erases the gulf between the professional and domestic

[13] There are references to Rebus's daughter throughout the series, and she appears in person in seven of the 22 novels published to date. In *Knots and Crosses* she is kidnapped, and in *The Hanging Garden* she is run over and confined to a wheelchair. Clearly these are significant episodes, but I nevertheless argue that Rebus having a daughter is not a central concern of the series.

spheres', but I argue that the professional sphere has subsumed the domestic, repurposing it in an idealised father-daughter/boss-sidekick relationship. Most summarised, in 1983, 'the basic generic conventions of the literary detective' (364), and although he failed to acknowledge the significance of gender, Most does allude to this evasion of the carnal, the avoidance of an encumbered domesticity:

> [H]e is almost always single or divorced (it is marriage that provides the most fertile ground for this genre's crimes); his parents are almost never mentioned, and he is invariably childless. It is his freedom from all such categories that permits him so clearly to see through their workings in all the other characters (343).

The long-running convention of the series protagonist as single/divorced/childless is, I argue, about prioritising the crime story. The text avoids an investigation of the protagonist's private life, allowing the investigation of the crime to be the primary focus. As cited in the last chapter, Rebus himself states: 'He thought about the job too much as it was, gave himself to it the way he had never given himself to any *person* in his life' (*Black Book* 93; emphasis in original). By reducing the character's existence to loner workaholic, this avoids any significant partners/dependents/friends who might place complex diversionary demands on both the protagonist and the ongoing meganarrative. Not only does this leave the protagonist free to pursue the quest, they are liberated from time itself – their mortality is not being measured against the ageing associated with fertility and children.

My earlier findings established that the series form generates a mythic archetype, with a protagonist designed and destined to serve the demands of the quest. It is now evident, through further close readings of Rebus and Clarke, that the ideal way to serve those demands is to remove the feminine obstacles of family and a carnal chronology. This brings me to an important question – does the form *inevitably* generate a mythic archetype that is male?

One of the challenges of this chapter is that, in order to examine gender and crime series character, it is necessary to step outside of a genre whose conventions are so firmly established, they tend to codify any attempts to apply a fresh perspective. Readers have become so well

schooled in a genre where 'crime quest' and 'archetypal [i.e *male*] hero' seem a natural fit. The series form suits the type of mythorealist character examined in chapter one, as the typical crime narrative only requires them to perform in a conventionally masculine and heroic way. Nevertheless there are series where femininity does disrupt generic conventions. Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski series is one such example, studied by Kinsman:[14]

> Showing a greater sensitivity to the needs of families, friends and children – and to the crimes that threaten them – has not compromised the contemporary female sleuth's toughness or gumption. In each of Sara Paretsky's novels, the irascible, but deeply loyal, Vic winds up reluctantly seeking help from friends and neighbours (162).

Warshawski is presented here as a character whose (masculine) 'toughness or gumption' is offset by a (feminine) 'sensitivity to the needs of families, friends and children'. Kinsman highlights how the modelling of female friendship has facilitated the de-autonomising of the protagonist:

> This challenges the deeply embedded genre construct of the singular, abstract and judgemental code of the avenging knight (detective), answerable to no-one and set apart from his society.
>
> Instead, through the device of female friendship, the genre investigates one of our culture's abiding social constructs for females: the 'ethic of responsibility' [Gilligan] […] the affiliative and co-operative connections with others which women are taught to value (163).

I disagree with Kinsman's position that these female series protagonists embedded in a pseudo-family of friends can ultimately challenge 'the singular, abstract and judgemental code of the avenging knight (detective)'. Kinsman proffers 'greater sensitivity' as a quality that has not '*compromised* the contemporary female sleuth's toughness'. She casts the female protagonist

[14] Kinsman's study focuses on Linda Barnes's Carlotta Carlyle series and Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski series. On p. 154 Kinsman lists some of the authors whose fiction she has chosen to exemplify via Barnes and Paretsky: Amanda Cross, Margaret Maron, Laurie King, Barbara Wilson, Kathleen V. Forrest, Barbara Neely, Valerie Wilson Wesley, Edna Buchanan, Joan Smith, Michelle Spring, Gillian Slovo, Val McDermid, Liza Cody.

as a modification to the male ideal. The loner workaholic becomes a sensitive loner workaholic with a few friends.

Such friendship patterns still leave these female protagonists free to operate with masculine autonomy. Yes, they may model an 'ethic of responsibility', but typically these women protagonists are (adult) orphans, any children connected to them are often a niece or nephew, and if there is a relationship with an older person, they are a neighbour or friend rather than a dependent relative. Kinsman suggests that: 'Domestic arrangements of the detective and her friends, for example, may illustrate experiments in living other than the traditional nuclear family or the eccentric spinster model so often encountered in literary works' (166).

However, whether the protagonist is female or indeed male, these 'experiments in living' never take them far from the basic pattern of the parsifalic hero, identified by Eco. Unlike Parsifal these crime series protagonists are not always chaste but they are typically loners with no progeny, and thus conform more readily to the underlying structure of the immortal (masculine) hero. As Denise Mina, an author of several series, points out: 'Crime is a very hard genre to feminise. If you have a female protagonist she is going to be looking after her mum when she gets older; she is going to be worried about her brother and sister; she will be making a living while bringing up kids'.[15] Mina makes a valid observation but it exhibits reverse sexism. Her comments reflect the conventions that continue to frame womanhood in contemporary society, but at the same time she ascribes these caring roles as *only* relevant to a female protagonist.

Performing Femininity

So far, my analyses of Rankin's series have shown Rebus and Clarke performing the masculinised protagonist, in compliance with the mythorealist template. I have also identified female-led series that partially inflect this model. To establish whether the male archetype can be challenged more fully, I now turn to a series that figures its female protagonist in a radically

[15] Mina has made her own bid to feminise the genre, with series protagonist Alex Morrow who has twin boys and a husband; but family/home rarely feature in the text and the childcare is done by the husband. Note too how Mina's protagonist has an androgynous first name. In many series the female lead will be referred to by a name that masks their gender, such as Paretsky's Warshawski who is either V.I. or Vic.

different way. Liza Marklund's lead character is Annika Bengtzon, an investigative reporter on the crime desk of a Swedish national paper. This role meets expectations of a crime series protagonist, but the character also has caring responsibilities for her children. Bengtzon does not fit the parsifalic model, nor does she conform to the newer feminist tradition of a protagonist embedded in a friendship network. Bergman, a key commentator on Marklund, notes that: 'While the American women detectives tend to create their own "chosen families" of friends […] Bengtzon seeks to create her belonging primarily in the shape of a nuclear family' ('Conflicted' 117; citing Reddy 109-11).

Part of Marklund's radicalism rests on the fact that she does embrace the nuclear family: she writes it into the crime series. Children are an integral part of Bengtzon's characterisation, and they feature in the author's descriptions of her protagonist: 'She's limitless and a lone ranger, but with a complex personality. She cries too much, she's really mean to her colleagues, but she loves to cook, she wants a career and her kids' ('Liza Marklund: Exposed'). Elsewhere, Marklund says of Bengtzon: 'I wanted her to be vulnerable, to cry easily, to love her children. But also to be ambitious, clumsy, aggressive, make mistakes and get away with them' ('Murder, they wrote'). In these brief portraits, Marklund uses epithets that are typically associated with a crime series protagonist – 'limitless and a lone ranger'. Bengtzon is assigned a number of male traits – 'ambitious', 'aggressive' – along with female traits – 'cries too much', 'vulnerable'. However, it is the prominence given to *family* that distinguishes Bengtzon from Rebus and Clarke.

By inflecting the core poetics through a greater emphasis on family and domesticity, Marklund creates a series protagonist who can perform femininity. Before examining the impact of this on character construction and narrative, it is crucial to emphasise that 'lone ranger' Bengtzon still partially adheres to the genre's masculine codes. Once again referencing Munt's list of archetypes, in the finale of *Last Will* Bengtzon is presented as 'mythic hero'. Her home has been firebombed by an assassin, and, after rescuing her children using 'superhuman' strength, Bengtzon escapes:

> The heat hit her from behind, wiping out all concentration. Unable to think rationally, she clambered on to the windowsill and threw herself out. She tumbled through the air, straight out and straight down, falling from the upper floor to the terrace just as the room behind her exploded into a firestorm (506).

The protagonist is modelled here as brave, strong, fearless, and Bergman observes that 'the end of the novel sees a Bengtzon who is true to the archetypal hardboiled hero: after repeated blows she still manages to save the day' ('Conflicted' 118). In *The Bomber* Bengtzon plays the role of 'intrepid explorer' in her efforts to be first on the scene, after an explosion at the Olympic Stadium:

> That must have been where the bomb went off. The curved shape was torn apart, spiking up into the night sky. She ran on, but realized that she wasn't going to get much further.
>
> 'Oi, where do you think you're going?' a fireman shouted.
>
> 'Up there,' she shouted back.
>
> 'It's shut off!' the man yelled.
>
> 'Oh, is it?' she muttered. 'So arrest me!' (22).

In these passages Bengtzon responds head-on to the challenges presented by her investigations. She is shown to behave like a private eye or police detective, encountering situations that put her life at risk. The text often portrays her in a heroic guise, and Marklund acknowledges that Bengtzon is a subversive figure who 'violates norms': 'I have equipped her with a wide spectrum of character traits that women normally aren't allowed to have' (quoted in Kärrholm 135). Bengtzon also has traits that *are* associated with being a woman – she has children. The protagonist's subversiveness thereby rests, in part, on her being figured as both hero *and* mother.

Bengtzon having a family makes her unusual within the genre, and later I cite other examples of atypical series where domestic considerations shape the narrative to varying degrees. However, the key point I wish to make here is not the 'unusualness' of Bengtzon having a family, but how much *attention* the narrative devotes to this domestic existence. Where Marklund's series radically departs from convention is in the detailed depiction of the protagonist during non-working hours, the many passages that feature the quotidian details of

her personal life. I showed in the previous chapter that Rebus's downtime is glossed over via short paragraphs that refer to sleeping in his chair, listening to music, drinking whisky. A similar pattern is replicated in Clarke, whose off-duty life, as quoted above, comprises '[m]usic, chocolate, football, drink…long drives and home-delivery pizza', but again these facets of Clarke's existence are never narrated in any detail. By contrast, Marklund's series takes the reader into all aspects of Bengtzon's off-duty life, often showing the sorts of activities that tend to be excised from crime fiction, such as domestic chores:

> As the potatoes came to the boil she fried the onions until they were transparent, then put them at the bottom of an ovenproof dish. Then she fried the pork with some bacon, as she had no salt, then added cream to the juices in the pan, poured it over the meat and put the dish into the oven.
>
> She'd just laid the table and lit the candles when Thomas got home. He came into the kitchen, jacket flapping, as he loosened his tie. 'I think I'm halfway there,' he said, giving Annika a quick kiss on the hair. 'This job's made for me. My CV is perfect, and with my personal contacts in the department, I can't see how anyone could beat me to it. Haven't you made any salad?' He was standing by the table, looking at what she had done. 'I thought we'd agreed to have something green with every meal,' he said, turning towards her.
>
> 'We did,' Annika said. My day's been absolutely great as well, she thought. I've been out to the Karolinska Institute and talked to a murder victim's work colleague. The police are about to arrest a group of German terrorists and I went shopping and made dinner. Aloud, she said: 'Can you get the kids while I chop up some salad?' She went to the fridge with a lump in her throat (*Last Will* 90-91).

The protagonist is shown struggling to maintain a household, feed a family and do a full-time job – namely those aspects that Mina suggested were incompatible with the genre. The feminine-inflected elements of family/home/relationships constitute what I term 'domestic time', and it is given far more prominence in Marklund's female-led series. A comparison can be made between the Bengtzon and Rebus series by conducting a tally – via two representative novels – of the number of pages that feature domestic time; in *Last Will* 25% of the novel is given to scenes featuring Bengtzon in her home, whereas in *Resurrection Men* only 10% of the text depicts Rebus and Clarke at home.

The content of these domestic scenes can also be analysed. In Rankin's series the home narration is mostly related to the murder investigation, for example Rebus and Clarke discussing the case in his or her flat. The home narration in Marklund's series also has content connected to Bengtzon's investigative role, for example, phonecalls to newspaper colleagues and police contacts. However, the majority of the text in these home scenes is generated by Bengtzon's personal life, and her relationships with her husband and children. In addition to a quarter of the novel being set in Bengtzon's home, a further proportion is devoted to personal-life episodes that happen outside her home, with trips to the children's nursery/pre-school, a party at her parents-in-law, a visit to her friend's flat. *Resurrection Men* also has a few scenes outside the home that show Rebus's relationship with his girlfriend, but on the whole there is minimal narration of domestic time and personal life in Rankin's series.

Crime series, as I have already shown, will typically narrate the protagonist's on-duty existence, and negate their off-duty hours. In narratological terms – and here I reference Russian formalism – the background texture of the protagonist's downtime, and their 'life' between the novels, is elided as the forgettable fabula of daily existence, leaving the syuzhet to be constructed from events that pertain to the criminal investigation. This is evident in the Rebus novels, where the syuzhet focuses on the character's job: 'He lived to work, and in a very real sense he worked to live, too: the much-maligned Protestant work-ethic. Subtract work from the equation and the day became flabby, like releasing jelly from its mould' (*Let It Bleed* 79). There are no demands (children/family) that might shape Rebus's personal life, and thus it is 'flabby'.

In Marklund's series, as my quantitative analysis showed, the poetics is modified to place more emphasis on Bengtzon's domestic time. There is a different assessment of what constitutes the syuzhet, which encompasses both work and home life. It may appear, with respect to my on-duty/off-duty model, that Marklund is simply devoting more of the narrative to her protagonist in the off-duty mode. However, reading Bengtzon's domestic existence from within the conventions of this character poetics – whereby the character portrayed in the novels is the

character understood as 'on' – then what emerges is that the series is presenting Bengtzon as effectively on duty at all times. The protagonist is required to work in her newspaper job and also in her domestic job, and both these modes are presented. This reflects traditional female norms and is one of the principal ways in which the character is shown to perform femininity. The poetics becomes a means of underscoring Marklund's feminist message about the demands placed on contemporary women. The Bengtzon novels also indicate that the series form is flexible enough to accommodate narratives where there is in effect no downtime, where the protagonist is perpetually working/on duty across the domestic and quest aspects of the fiction.

Compared to Rankin's series, the narrative in Marklund's series – both inside and outside the home – contains more of Bengtzon's domestic concerns. The above passage from *Last Will* features household chores but there is also the evident tension between Bengtzon and her husband. Indeed conflict shapes many of her personal relationships, even with her children, apparent in the heated way that she admonishes her six-year-old son for hitting his sister:

> Taking hold of his chair, she spun him round, forcing him to look at her. 'You mustn't hit your little sister,' she said, looking him right in the eyes.
>
> 'But she was the one who—'
>
> 'Quiet!' she said, in a loud voice. 'You are absolutely *not allowed* to hit your little sister. You're not going to turn into the sort of boy who hits girls, do you hear me? *Do you hear me*?' (*Last Will* 386; emphasis in original).

There is none of this drama in the (infrequent) scenes that feature the domestic lives of Rebus and Clarke, because there is limited material with which to create that tension and conflict. Clarke is perpetually single. Rebus does have relationships with women, but the novels present his lack of commitment; evident in *Resurrection Men* when, away on a police training course, Rebus phones his girlfriend Jean Burchill:

> He didn't mention that his work would be bringing him back into the city sooner than expected, didn't want that sense of expectation. If they made some arrangement, chances were he'd have to cancel at the last minute. Better for her not to know (108).

Later in the novel, Rebus and Burchill rekindle their relationship during a weekend trip:

> Replete after dinner, they managed a short stroll down to Airds Bay before retiring to their room. They left the curtains and the window open, so that the first thing they'd see on waking would be Loch Etive. Then they fell asleep in one another's arms.
>
> Sunday, they didn't rise till nine, blaming the country air as they embraced and kissed (375).

However, this episode does not sit easily in the text as there is not enough wider material within the novels to support the idea of Rebus having a fully realised personal/domestic existence. The typical series protagonist is shaped to serve the quest; their private lives are elided, and so when the prose follows Rebus and Burchill to Loch Etive, it casts the reader in the position of *voyeur*. At the end of this episode, Rebus as well as the narrative return to the safer territory of the crime quest – captured metafictionally in the car journey back to Edinburgh:

> 'Sorry, Jean,' he said, moving the gear lever into first.
>
> 'It's okay,' she told him. 'I had you there to myself for a whole weekend. I'm rather proud I managed that.'
>
> 'You certainly took my mind off things,' he agreed with a smile.
>
> 'But now they're back?' she guessed.
>
> 'They're back,' he admitted.
>
> 'And they're not going way?'
>
> 'Not unless I do something about them,' he said, flooring the accelerator (377).

Burchill – in effect a synecdoche for Rebus's private life – holds sway over the narrative for 'a whole weekend', until the crime story reasserts its primacy. As Plain notes, 'the provision of a stable relationship' constitutes 'a familiar generic rock' on which authors may founder: 'the same rock that has troubled writers from the "golden age" on. If the detective is to be the archetypal loner, then lovers must remain disposable, or a strictly domestic, commodity' (*Twentieth* 185). The 'threat' posed by stable relationships has shaped other genres too, such as Westerns, Spindler remarking of Karl May's fiction that the prerequisite of a series protagonist is that their 'status quo must be preserved' (212):

> As long as the hero remains a bachelor, the episodes of his adventures are unspecified in time and can multiply infinitely. A marriage would be an event that not only brings a (traditionally) irreversible change to the hero's life but also brings new responsibilities for the hero, making it more difficult for him to concentrate on his 'calling' (213).

Note the gendering of the protagonist as a 'bachelor' and also the use of the word 'calling' in this context, with its priestly connotations, and the sense that the protagonist has a vocation that requires them to be chaste. The danger being, as identified by Eco, that the protagonist will be 'consumed', that an event such as Superman marrying Lois Lane would be 'another step toward his death, as it would lay down another irreversible premise' (154).

However, do 'erotic ventures' always result in a protagonist being consumed, and unable to pursue their 'calling'? Across the meganarrative of Marklund's series, Bengtzon marries, has two children, divorces, marries again, becomes step mother to two further children, and, by the end of the final novel, has adopted her niece and is pregnant. These life events have not caused the protagonist to be consumed and the series has still been able to sustain itself through 11 novels' worth of 'contrasts, oppositions, crises, and solutions'. Eco's theories shed light on crime series but I argue that they only point to the masculine possibilities of the form, in terms of how ageing is modelled, and how family and relationships are envisaged.

If a protagonist's primary mode is to be an isolated semi-immortal (masculinised) hero, then stable relationships and children will end their trajectory. If a protagonist's personal life has an increased prominence in the series, then stable relationships and children can be integrated in the text. This, I contend, indicates that Eco's seminal theories on the series form can be reappraised and indeed modified, via a feminine inflection of the poetics that applies 'contrasts, oppositions, crises, and solutions' to the protagonist's private life *and* their role as investigator, thereby extending the narrative possibilities of domestic time as well as quest time.

My close reading of the episodes featuring Rebus and Burchill showed that they do not sit 'comfortably' in the text. I can now add that this disjuncture is created by the sentimental portrayal of the couple's relationship – conventions associated with romance literature have

been inserted in a crime novel. In the Bengtzon series, this mismatch does not occur because there is conflict in the crime narrative and in the protagonist's private life. As discussed above, quest time and domestic time provide material to shape into the syuzhet of the novels, and *duress* – such a key component of the genre – impacts on both. The tensions in Bengtzon's domestic existence reach a climax in *Last Will* when her husband discovers that she has known for some time about his extra-marital relationship:

> '*Stop lying to me!*' he shouted, grabbing her shoulder and spinning her round so fast she almost fell.
>
> 'Ow,' she said, looking up at his face, all red and distorted.
>
> 'How long have you been *pretending?*' he yelled. 'How the hell could you *do* this to me?'
>
> She felt anger explode in her gut with such force that she could hardly breathe. '*Me?*' she said. 'How could *I* do this to *you*? Are you mad, you fucking disgusting unfaithful *bastard?*' (476; emphasis in original).

Bengtzon is occasionally shown enjoying moments of pleasure with her family, such as playing with her children (*Bomber* 295), but often the narrative features arguments and anxiety, woven into the routines of everyday life. This ongoing texture is not ignored as the forgettable fabula of the quotidian; instead there is a 'window into the dreamlike obscurity (so blank because it is so familiar) that makes up their daily lives' (Langbauer 43). However, as seen in the quoted extracts, Bengtzon's routine existence is far from 'blank'. It is full of drama, with moments of mystery and violence: in effect the home narration exhibits the same genre-defining elements found in the crime series at large. Furthermore, through the suspense and intrigue associated with and generated by the evolving personal story, the home narration also helps to create the lure of narrative deferral, a key constituent of the series form.

Marklund is not the only author to create a character with an increased emphasis on domestic time and private life. It is evident in the Easy Rawlins series by Walter Mosley, where the complications of Rawlins's domestic existence figure prominently in the text. Another example is Ruth Rendell's Inspector Wexford series, where 'contrasts, oppositions, crises, and solutions' impact on Wexford's marriage and on his relationships with his grown-up

daughters.[16] Stoddard Holmes points out, 'the fact that he has a traditional home life, complete with spouse, children and grandchildren, distinguishes him among detectives' (151). This is a salient reminder that, in the genre as a whole, masculinised protagonists tend to prevail, and the more feminised figures, such as Bengtzon, Rawlins, and Wexford, are less common. It is also worth highlighting that these feminised protagonists can be male as well as female – their performance in the text need not match their assigned sex. Just as Clarke presents as masculine, Rawlins can present as feminine.

Mirroring and the Mythorealist Spectrum

It has been established, through my examination of Rebus and Clarke, that the series form tends to generate a male archetype. The Bengtzon novels then showed that this masculinity is not inevitable, and the series form can accommodate a female archetype by an increased emphasis on domestic time. This now raises a key question – does a feminine slant on the poetics undermine the protagonist's mythorealism? That is to say, does the re-proportioning of narrative focus on the domestic affect the distinguishing quality of series character poetics identified in my previous chapter?

The performance of femininity in contemporary series is not, I argue, at odds with mythorealism. Citing again the passages quoted above, the initial extracts from the Bengtzon novels showed her behaving heroically in accordance with the mythic template, and the later passages indicated the detailed realism of her domestic existence. She merges the heroic with the corporeal. And, crucial to my construction of a female archetype, the heroic with the procreative. Bergman captures this when she notes that '[t]hroughout the series Bengtzon fluctuates between the roles of "conflicted mother" and "lone avenger"' ('Conflicted' 112).

[16] Compared to Marklund's and Mosley's series, the recurring family characters in Rendell's series are less developed, and as Stoddard Holmes observes of Wexford's wife Dora, she is 'neither objectified nor given a subjectivity' (155). In Rendell's series her protagonist's domestic obligations tend to be consigned to the background, and the criminal investigation takes priority. This approach – i.e. 'the Wexford model' – of giving the protagonist children/family/an ageing parent but then underplaying their presence in the text is also apparent in further examples such as Denise Mina's Alex Morrow series, Ann Cleeves's Shetland series, and Elizabeth George's Inspector Lynley and Barbara Havers series. I am grateful to Shampa Roy for suggesting I consider Marklund in relation to Rendell and George.

The conception of mythorealism, developed in chapter one, can now be expanded. Evident in contemporary crime series there is, I contend, a range of iterations, from protagonists that display an extreme mythicism (Reacher), to those that show more realism but are still underlyingly mythic (Rebus, Clarke), to those where the mythic is further suppressed and their realism is foregrounded (Bengtzon). And when this spectrum is compared to my findings on gender, the first two categories equate to behaviours associated with masculinity, whereas the more realist characters such as Bengtzon display feminine patterns.

In series where the realism is prominent, the narrative offers more material with which to construct a detailed life story for the protagonist. This brings me back to Danielsson, referenced in chapter one. Her observations did not tally with my close readings of the Rebus and Reacher series. But turning to figures such as Bengtzon and Rawlins, then their series appear a closer match to Danielsson's 'representation of detective series as *romans-fleuves* or chronicles' (*Dynamic* 173); indeed Rawlins is one of the protagonists she cites in support of her arguments (Ibid., 94-103).

However, once again this biographic model can be disputed. Even in these more life-story-based crime series, the protagonist's domestic existence is *only* present on the page when there is an instigating crime that triggers the commencement of the novel. Whether they be masculinised or feminised, whether domestic time is suppressed or prominent, these protagonists only get to narrate their private lives when they *also* have a crime to solve.

Murder creates the catalyst. These series are, after all, *crime* series. But the current chapter has highlighted the impact of gender on the poetics of the series protagonist, in particular through the treatment of domestic time, and this leads me to a key question – what are the potential advantages and outcomes, when more of the protagonist's personal life is imported into this crime-focused form?

To reach an answer, I begin by reiterating that in a typical series, the domestic existence is subsumed by the crime quest. As established above, these home scenes are often connected to

the investigation, for example in *Resurrection Men* when a colleague visits Clarke for coffee in her flat and 'conveniently' reveals information about crime boss Cafferty (70-74).

In Marklund's series, on the other hand, the crime narrative and the domestic narrative are given *equal* significance and their own independent storylines. The Bengtzon series seems atypical of the genre, but only from a UK perspective. Bergman suggests Marklund's model is more common in Sweden (*Swedish* 83), and Hill also acknowledges that 'the common thread' linking many Nordic female authors 'is their focus on the personal lives of their protagonists, so that the crime element of the book, although remaining significant to the narrative, is not always the main focus' (276).

The domestic scenes in Marklund's novels are released from any functional requirement to service the crime quest. In *Last Will*, for example, there is a storyline about the difficulties faced by Bengtzon's son Kalle at his new pre-school. He is pushed off a climbing frame and suffers a concussion. Bengtzon then confronts the boys who hurt him: '"I want you to know something," Annika whispered, her heart thudding so hard that she could hardly hear her own words. "If you are ever mean to Kalle again, and I mean *ever*, I'll kill you"' (440; emphasis in original). This contributes to the characterisation of Bengtzon as someone prepared to issue violent threats to young children, but note that the scene has no direct bearing on the crime quest.

However, where the primary significance of this episode lies, is in the way that it reflects and augments the themes of *Last Will*. Bengtzon threatens to kill a child, in a novel where she herself is investigating a female assassin. This underscores society's gendered attitudes toward violent crime – female violence is typically judged as far more transgressive than male violence. Throughout the series, Marklund uses the technique of mirroring between the domestic narrative and the crime narrative to draw attention to wider issues. The troubled relationship between Bengtzon and her husband is able to comment on the patriarchal structuring of Swedish society. The protagonist's two children are another vehicle used to highlight gender inequality, via the boy's oppressive treatment of his younger sister.

Here I can answer the question posed above, and establish what an increased emphasis on the personal can bring to the form. By taking events in the protagonist's private life and mirroring them with events in the parallel crime quest, it is possible to offer a critique of the structural inequalities that afflict wider society. In, for example, Mosley's Easy Rawlins series, with its African-American protagonist, this mirroring of the crime quest and his domestic concerns are used to address race. In the Bengtzon novels, the focus is directed at gender.

The storylines in Marklund's series frequently feature violence against women, reflecting the author's real-world concerns: 'We don't have a long tradition of protecting women in this country. What happens at home is your own business in Sweden. Yet every 10 days a woman is beaten to death by her partner. It's a subject that I was angry about when I was a journalist – and I'm still angry' ('Murder, they wrote'). Alacovska, in her study of Scandinavian crime fiction, uses the term femikrimi to distinguish 'crime fiction with an explicit feminist agenda. Women's relations with children, husbands, boyfriends, girlfriends, co-workers and crime victims are as central to the femikrimi plot as murder and investigation' (387).[17]

By counterpointing Bengtzon's domestic existence with her activities as an investigative journalist, Marklund makes the feminist point that power and violence are *in* the home, not just out there in the public sphere. The novels suggest that incarcerating those who commit violent crimes against women does not 'fix' the less violent but still oppressive treatment of women in Swedish society.

Subjectivity and Compulsion

Through further examination of the Bengtzon series, I have shown how Marklund challenges the conservative thrust of more traditional crime novels, which tend to attribute crime to a single 'bad' individual. Marklund uses mirroring, and the characterisation of Bengtzon, to direct attention to the structural and societal factors *behind* criminality. Along with this

[17] The term 'femikrimi' has emerged in Nordic and Germanic scholarship. Alacovska's study is on Scandinavian authors (principally from Denmark) but, as Hill identified above, the femikrimi trend extends to the wider Nordic region (Denmark, Norway, Sweden, as well as Finland, Iceland, Greenland).

redirection of culpability, Marklund's series conveys a feminist politics. A different politics is evident in the Rebus series. Rankin is trying to 'tell a good story' rather than support the patriarchy, but in spite of the liberal affiliations evident in the series, it does – through the modelling of Rebus and Clarke – promote a mode of existence that is masculine and autonomous, unencumbered by domesticity.

Above I referred to Most and his suggestion that it is the protagonist's 'freedom from all such categories that permits him so clearly to see through their workings in all the other characters'. This autonomy is inseparable from gendered privilege. As masculinised figures, Reacher, Rebus and Clarke can exercise autonomy. To police society, they are effectively required to be on the outside looking in. Their lack of private life in the narrative is a formal outcome of their position as judge and jury and, in the case of Reacher, executioner.

For a feminised protagonist like Bengtzon, her autonomy is more conflicted, as seen in this extract from *Last Will*:

> Now she left the children and fled.
>
> When the nursery door closed behind her she always felt a huge sense of relief. Hours of unbroken concentration lay ahead and she could take possession of her brain until a quarter to four (125).

Marklund highlights the gendered nature of autonomy and she also reworks the genre's positioning of the protagonist as source of authority and external arbiter of the events recounted. These methods become a means of further embedding Marklund's politics. In *Exposed*, chronologically the first of the series, Bengtzon is abused by her boyfriend, and subjected to coercive control and repeated assaults; she murders him, and is convicted of manslaughter. This traumatic backstory is recalled by Bengtzon in subsequent novels. I established above that mirroring is employed in the text to highlight structural inequality. But by presenting Bengtzon as a woman who has survived domestic violence, killed her abuser, and carries a criminal record, this further complicates her position as independent adjudicator in the narrative.

Earlier I cited Kinsman who identified the 'genre construct of the singular, abstract and judgemental code of the avenging knight (detective), answerable to no-one and set apart from his society'. Marklund does challenge this construct by establishing her protagonist as a *victim* as well as an 'avenging knight (detective)'. In crime fiction, 'the ultimate subject is the society in which such murders are performed' (Most 365); Marklund shows how this critique of society can be reinforced through the narration of Bengtzon's lived experiences of violence, and of structural inequality. The focus of the novels is shifted away from the teleologically oriented crime quest. However, even in a figure such as Bengtzon, many of the genre's codes still hold true, indicating that, as a character, she has been constructed by *inflecting* rather than rejecting the core poetics I outlined in chapter one. While Bengtzon may, at times, be cast as victim, she still performs her role as investigative reporter. Even in *Exposed*, the novel where her victimhood is most prominent, the protagonist continues to pursue her job as a journalist, enquiring into the murder of a young woman, who was also in an abusive relationship. It was established above that the realism of Bengtzon does not supplant her mythic/heroic qualities, and here I can make the additional point that her victimhood does not usurp her position as the detective figure and external arbiter of events.

Gender is fundamental to an understanding of crime series. Through the Rebus novels I have demonstrated that masculinity still prevails in contemporary series. Through the Bengtzon novels I have presented a feminine inflection of this poetics, which opens up new possibilities in the form. Crime fiction has always been an instrument for critiquing society, and certainly that is the case in Rankin's series. But in Marklund's series, through mirroring, and through Bengtzon's victimhood, the author shows how this feminine inflection can amplify and extend such a critique. Nevertheless, even in an innovative series such as Marklund's, certain generic conventions still persist.

When seeking to identify, in contemporary series, the genre-defining constituents of the protagonist, what emerges is a figure that presents as mythorealist, investigator, and external arbiter. And when weighing the implications of these properties – which all establish the

protagonist as different from the run-of-the-mill rest of society – it is evident that these attributes create a figure condemned to be a misfit, a *loner*. In Reacher, Rebus and Clarke, this loner status is physical – they are excluded from conventional domesticity. As Rebus confesses to a colleague in *Resurrection Men*: '"This job's taken away my wife, my kid . . . most of the friends I ever had"' (191). By comparison, Bengtzon is firmly embedded in a family, and yet she alternates 'between striving for belonging and being a loner – sometimes even an outcast' (Bergman 'Conflicted' 120). In Bentgzon's case, her loner status is emotional rather than physical, and it is modelled via the protagonist's feelings of isolation and despair:

> She looked into her own eyes in the mirror, puffy and distant. She leaned forward over the basin until the light above threw dark shadows over her features.
>
> Who am I? she wondered. Where am I going? Am I driving my life and my family straight over the edge? Is there something destructive within me that I can't control? Do I somehow attract death and disaster? (*Last Will* 500-501)

This passage also reveals Bengtzon as *compelled* to do her job as a journalist, no matter the cost: 'Am I driving my life and my family straight over the edge?'. Rebus displays these same compulsive qualities, in the extract cited earlier: 'He thought about the job too much as it was, gave himself to it the way he had never given himself to any *person* in his life'.

The crime series protagonist may be female/male or masculinised/feminised in their performance, but compulsion and isolation are the two fundamental traits that equip them to pursue the quest at the heart of these fictions. It is the character's status as an outcast, a misfit, their inability to 'fit in', their inner and outer unease, their lack of equilibrium, their restlessness, that drives them to seek answers outside themselves that they cannot find within. They strive for absolution, resolution, but it will *always* be withheld by the unfolding of the series form, which will confront them with yet another murder, yet another crisis, yet another do-or-die situation.

Here my argument can be brought back to formalist terms. One of the techniques used in literature to delineate a fictional character is to segregate them from other figures in the text; the protagonist as a loner is not exclusive to the crime genre, and is a common method for

spotlighting a character within a narrative. But in crime series, this literary technique is taken to an extreme. The crime series protagonist – so carefully signalled as a loner – is the literary manifestation of attention-seeking subjectivity. Not only that, the crime quest – which is the catalyst that brings them out of limbo and onto the pages of the novel – this quest turns them into vehicles of narrative compulsion. The seeming imperative for crime fiction narratives to drive forward translates into a *driven* character. The crime series protagonist is, I argue, the inescapable outcome when you take the customary tools of literature and extend them ad infinitum and in extremis, intensifying all those character-generating traits such as difference, isolation, compulsion, arc, progression. What you end up with is a figure who, even when feminised, still complies with a narrow definition of masculinity. The perpetual outcast on a perpetual mission. There is no respite. The narrative will never let them settle. These crime series protagonists can never come in from the cold.

CHAPTER 3

CRIME SERIES CHARACTER AND PLACE

This thesis has examined, so far, the construction and gendering of series character, and how these manifest in the figure of the protagonist. I now wish to extend my argument *beyond* the human. Crime fiction has evolved as a literature of place. This is particularly evident in the series form, where a sequence of novels will typically attach to one location and stay for the duration, the Rebus series being a prime example. Jakubowski reflects a widely held view when he suggests, in a review of 21 crime series, that 'the city and place or region becomes an extra character in the stories' (12). The concept of fictional place as a character has relevance to other genres and eras of literature, but this chapter explores how it manifests in the contemporary crime series. Scholarship on crime fiction does acknowledge place as a significant character. However, these studies have failed to investigate the literary antecedents, or the poetics. This chapter traces why place has become 'a character' in the genre. I also articulate the literary techniques that make place into character and the way these operate across the time-inflected topography of a meganarrative. Place is shown to 'borrow' the poetics examined in chapter one; a poetics that evolved with respect to *human* character. In setting forth my arguments I challenge notions of fictional subjectivity, and extend the territory encompassed by crime series character, supporting my theories with author interviews and close readings from selected novels: Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus series, *Black and Blue* (#8) and *Exit Music* (#17); Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad series, *Faithful Place* (#3) and *Broken Harbour* (#4).

Through these methods, the core poetics of chapter one is augmented to include place as a character. It will also be established that this expanded poetics can in turn be inflected in ways that innovate the genre. I begin by considering place as character, character as place, and the boundaries of these terms. So far, my study of character poetics has focused on the protagonist, a 'person-kind' enclosed in an imaginary skin. With my attention now on 'place character', it is clear that the modelling of fictional place will always entail a demarcation of scale and

extent.[18] Rebus's chair, cited previously, carries the 'placeness' where a person might sit; this chair, like the nugget sequestered in a Russian doll, exerts occupancy within a set of fictional places whose boundaries overlap and expand; it is a chair, in a room, in a tenement flat, in Arden Street, in the neighbourhood of Marchmont, in Edinburgh, in Scotland, all of which are 'places'. Lutwack offers this definition of fictional place:

> Place is part of the physical contexts of a literary work, if we take context to mean the reconstitution in words of those aspects of the actual environment that a writer puts together to make up the 'world' in which his characters, events, and themes have their show of existence (37).

The phrase 'physical contexts' points to the difficulties in defining a term that embraces a vast range of scales. In literature, a place can be evoked through a collection of familiar parts, such as a description of a kitchen, with its paraphernalia of table/hob/fridge: readers can picture the scene because they have spent time in kitchens. However, when the place being described is a real city, not only are readers able to assemble it in their imagination from textual clues, they can go there in person. This encounter with a place such as Edinburgh, both on the page and by walking its pavements, can happen repeatedly in a meganarrative like the Rebus series. When visiting the actual place, one's impressions may be shaped by the novels that depict them, a phenomenon identified by Geherin; 'the power of literary description is so great that *representation* of place often contributes to the overall *perception* of that place' (5; emphasis in original). He suggests:

> Crime and mystery novels present an ideal opportunity to examine some of the artistic ways setting is used in fiction. For one thing, because of their essential subject matter—crime and its consequences—realism is fundamental to the genre and realistic depiction of setting is commonplace (7).

[18] As Tuan points out: 'Place exists at different scales. At one extreme a favorite [*sic*] armchair is a place, at the other extreme the whole earth' (149). The topic of this chapter is place rather than space, and Cresswell clarifies the difference: 'Space, then, has been seen in distinction to place as a realm without meaning – as a "fact of life" which, like time, produces the basic coordinates for human life. When humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way (naming it is one such way) it becomes a place' (16).

This contains the premise that because of its 'essential subject matter' the crime genre trades in realism; there is an expectation of authenticity in fictional representations of murder and it extends to the treatment of place – 'realistic depiction of setting is commonplace'. However, my findings so far have shown that, in the construction of human character in crime series, the realism is overlaid on a mythic template. Later in this chapter I establish that myth also impacts on the construction of *place* character in crime series, but for now I continue my review of scholarship on place within the genre, which, as evident in Geherin, often betrays a tacit assumption of realism.

When studying the conventions that both define and are created by the crime genre, it is apparent that many of these are communicated through the treatment of place. Reijnders highlights these conventions in his study of TV detective series, and his comments are equally pertinent to fiction; he identifies the '"topophilic" character of the genre', and suggests it is 'characterized by an obsession with the physical. Each individual episode has a crime scene as a point of departure, from which the search for clues starts', and that search involves the detective figure being 'constantly on the move' across a city or region (176-77). As Waade states, again in an observation on TV that is applicable to novels: 'the crime series contains a particular contract of realism: the fiction of crime is tied to factual places' (10).

In crime fiction, the quest narrative is pursued through a sequence of locations, gathering up clues, examining crime scenes, and place becomes burdened with facticity. The location may be one that is invented by the author and based on aspects of the known world; creating somewhere that is realistic but not purporting to be real. However, as already noted, many contemporary series situate themselves more fixedly in actual places and are expected, novel after novel, to negotiate the 'bothersome' reality of a particular city or topography. The burden of facticity thereby gathers extra weight. As Effron states, in many contemporary crime series 'the settings are presented with near-cartographic accuracy, so the novels practically serve as street atlases', and she suggests that authors 'use the real settings as a means of establishing a realistic story' ('Fictional Murders' 331).

The series form makes place into a character that is authenticated through its facticity, but also – and this is crucial to my argument – it makes place into a character that *directly* influences how the narrative develops, because the events are tied to the sequence of places visited, these places often offering up answers necessary to the ongoing quest/investigation. This is reflected in Waade's observation that '[w]hen describing the place as a character, we emphasize the importance of the place in the plot – the place is the plot, so to speak' (13).

The 'Characticity' of Place

Place is not the inert background in crime fiction series. Place determines the plot and the unfolding narrative, and this signals its status *as* a character. Here is where I can pinpoint what literary character is – it is an identifiable element that shapes and influences the surrounding fictional material. Margolin's definition of literary character as a 'person-kind' helped establish the poetics of the protagonist in chapter one. With the focus now on place character, Margolin again offers guidance:

> In the widest sense, "character" designates any entity, individual or collective – normally human or human-like – introduced in a work of narrative fiction. Characters thus exist within storyworlds, and play a role, no matter how minor, in one or more of the states of affairs or events told about in the narrative. Character can be succinctly defined as storyworld participant (66).

These statements reflect my own inclusive understanding of literary character. A character is an entity that participates in a text, where 'entity' is a category that welcomes a host of interpretations, and where 'participation' is conceived as allowing for many modes of influence on the narrative, from relatively inactive to highly active. Margolin suggests that character – albeit 'normally human or human-like' – can take on this wide range of guises and roles within fiction. His established theoretical position supports the arguments being developed here. By considering place from the standpoint of storyworld *participant* rather than defining place as Lutwack's 'physical contexts', I can uncover new insights on the common notion that 'place is a character' in crime series. Fictional place will never be as easy to delineate as human figures – it tends to have the porous edges or overlaps apparent in the description of Rebus's chair.

Nevertheless, as my close readings will demonstrate, place does manifest as a literary character, albeit one with boundaries that fluctuate.

To examine the poetics of place as a character, I begin with the Rebus series, and a description of Edinburgh from *Exit Music*:

> King's Stables Road wasn't the busiest of thoroughfares. A No Entry sign prevented vehicles 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 (3).

Minimal but salient details are provided via the traditional synecdochic technique that 'names a part instead of the whole which includes it […] in the same way, a brick shelter or a hill is taken for the park in the narration of a trajectory' (Certeau 101). Rankin identifies streets and buildings, and the reader summons their own notion of a multistorey car park, combined with an image they might have of Edinburgh Castle, in order to 'picture' a visually rich scene that carries many more qualities than are given words in the text.[19] Plain observes, of the Rebus series, 'a gradual departure from conventional representations of the city and a movement towards an almost obsessive naming process, as Rankin's detectives traverse a city described in ever-increasing detail' ('The map' 16).

This 'naming process' and use of mapping is evident in *Black and Blue* when Rebus meets a former colleague 'in the car park at Newcraighall. Lights were on in the UCI cinema complex, some late showing. The Mega Bowl was closed; so was McDonald's' (46). Elsewhere in the novel there is a description that is less reliant on brand naming:

> In the sky, fading roseate was fighting a losing battle with encroaching dark. And below it all, halogen orange. The street was noisy. The cinema up the road was probably emptying, and the first casualties were tearing themselves away from still-serving pubs. Night-cooking in the air: hot batter, pizza topping, Indian spice (10).

[19] This approach relies on a shared understanding of the labels. Mention cemetery and the reader will likely assume gravestones/statues/grass/trees. The reader would not picture a fairground carousel in the middle, and – trusting in the contract between reader and author – would expect to be told if there was.

Rankin brings in sounds and smells to augment the visual details, which here are rendered in a more evocative fashion. Vignettes of the city feature prominently throughout the series, and Geherin notes that 'Rankin's detailed portrait of this complex city remains one of the most effective ever painted in crime fiction' (135). Descriptions of the centre and the suburbs combine across the megarrative to convey the character of Edinburgh, but also help construct Edinburgh as *a* character. Harris and Effron suggest: 'Rankin's Edinburgh emerged as a central character within the books. That character was secretive, volatile and enigmatic, with a turbulent current of darkness concealed by a façade of gentile [*sic*] calm' (177). Sloma also notes the emergence of the city as a character, observing, 'in Edinburgh, Rankin has created such a real, active setting that it has become a character, and it develops just as much as, if not more than, John Rebus' (53).

That Edinburgh is a character in the Rebus novels is a widely held view, but this chapter addresses the poetics. I argue that Edinburgh emerges as 'a character' because it is modelled in the text using techniques associated with the modelling of *human* character. The descriptive vignettes give the city certain characteristics, and Edinburgh is also presented as ageing and changing over time, novel to novel. Rankin himself observes, in his 2005 introduction to a re-issue of his 1987 series opener, that: 'Already, *Knots and Crosses* feels like a historical document, written in and about an Edinburgh that no longer exists' (xi).

Here I arrive at a key point. Schooled, as readers, to understand the presentation of human characters, via the portrayal of personality traits and the ageing process, when these techniques are used in the modelling of place via vignettes and an unfolding chronology, then place inevitably develops *charactericity* – a term I have coined to convey the presence of character-creating qualities.

I now turn to Tana French's Dublin Murder Squad series, which, as the name suggests, declares itself as rooted in topography. How is place figured in this series, and does it display charactericity? Johnsen observes that:

> Stepping back from the absorbing crime plots of her individual novels, we might perceive Tana French's oeuvre as taking readers on a noir tour of Dublin-area housing. Following the rotating first-person narrators, all detectives from the fictional Dublin Murder Squad, readers move from the established suburban housing developments of *In the Woods* (2007) through the historically infused Anglo-Irish Big House of *The Likeness* (2008), working-class, urban, row houses of *Faithful Place* (2010), and post-Celtic Tiger "ghost estate" of *Broken Harbour* (2012) to the boarding-school faux-domesticity of *The Secret Place* (2014) and the Victorian terrace cottage row of *The Trespasser* (2016) (220).

Straightaway, it is apparent that each of French's novels is attached to a distinct location, thereby foregrounding the importance of setting. The series also, via its 'noir tour of Dublin-area housing', offers a critique of contemporary Ireland before and after the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy. Note that four of the six novels have titles that refer to a place, establishing from the outset that, for French, place *matters*. While the 'rotating first-person narrators' give each novel a distinct tone, it is the individual locations – rather than Dublin as a whole – that define them and form the primary focus of the text. Nevertheless there are occasional passages that offer a wider evocation of the city, such as this one narrated by Detective Frank Mackey, the protagonist in *Faithful Plac*e:

> The City Morgue is a quick walk down the quays from my apartment, round the back of the bus station, in a beautiful piece of red brick more than a hundred years old. I don't often have occasion to go in there, but usually the thought of the place makes me happy, the same way it makes me happy that Murder works out of Dublin Castle: what we all do runs through the heart of this city like the river, we deserve the good parts of its history and its architecture (150).

Dublin as macrocosm is largely absent from French's novels, but stray details of the city do amass across the series, such as these glimpses, also from *Faithful Place*: 'I took my mobile out on the balcony, above the dark river and the greasy orange lights and the running snarl of the traffic jams' (13), 'The streets were shining wet and empty, bells ringing for early Mass and nobody much paying attention' (147); and a further example, this time from *Broken Harbour* and narrated by its protagonist, Detective Mike Kennedy: 'We had hit the quays and

were heading towards the M1. The wind was blasting up the Liffey from the sea, making the pedestrians lean into it heads-first' (8).

By comparison, Rankin achieves his more macrocosmic portrayal of Edinburgh because the narrative presents Rebus as perpetually on the move through it, visiting crime scenes, tracking down suspects, and the naming and describing of streets and neighbourhoods allow the reader to construct this whole. As Rankin observes – and here he extends his reach to the whole country – the novels 'weren't intended that way at the start, but I do think that, when the series does eventually finish, you will have a kind of fairly complete jigsaw, of the way Scotland was at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century' (Interview).

The desire to create a 'fairly complete jigsaw' is not evident in French's series. Dublin is not modelled as a cohesive macrocosm that ages and changes between novels. Unlike Rankin, there is no insistence on topical details and cartography, because factually vouchsafed realism is not a strong component of these novels. French's primary focus is on the specific locations that house her murders. While Rankin constructs the characticity of a city, in the Dublin Murder Squad series this characticity is more localised. I contend that French's ambition is to examine subjectivised places rather than objectivised spaces. Drawing on my findings from chapter two, I suggest that gender is shaping the poetics. This may or may not reflect the gender of the authors, but it is worth noting the different ways that place character is constructed. In the Rebus series, it is presented primarily at an urban scale – Rankin acknowledges that, embarking on each new novel, 'I've got a big map of Edinburgh on my wall and I'll think, okay, where's this murder going to happen' (Interview) – and much of the narrative is devoted to movement through public places, conveying, I argue, a masculine interpretation of the poetics. Whereas in the Dublin Murder Squad series, the city is less evident, and place character is vested in more intimate domestic places – those iterations of 'house' listed by Johnsen – thereby communicating a feminine interpretation.

In contemporary crime series, gender is integral to how place character is modelled. Place may be feminine or masculine, but as a character what it always does – as I established above via

Waade and Margolin – is actively shape the narrative. This prompts me to ask – *why* has place come to acquire such an active role in the crime genre? I argue that the answer lies in crime fiction's origins as a variation and continuation of the Gothic novel. Spooner states, '[w]hile the Gothic novel in its original form fell out of favor [*sic*] after about 1820, its distinctive tropes continued to influence other forms of nineteenth-century fiction', and she lists a number of off-shoots including the detective story (246). One of the 'distinctive tropes' that went on to shape the crime genre is, I contend, the significance of the built and natural environment as protagonists. Durot-Boucé notes, in her study of the Gothic novel:

> Haunted or haunting, architectural or vegetal—the forest stands out as an influential actant endowed with a will and powers of its own—the setting is of major importance, becoming as much a protagonist of the story as the characters themselves (210).

Place is operating as an actant, the term used within structuralist theory to define particularised actors or characters. This actant is perceived as having 'a will and powers of its own'; it is accorded *agency*, which Herman defines as the 'ability to bring about deliberately initiated events, or actions, within a storyworld' (275).[20] Agency, a term usually associated with human characters, is also perceived by Chandler in her observations on place in American Gothic literature: 'the house is invested with far more than literal significance and in varying degrees is personified, animated or even anthropomorphized' (18).[21]

The Gothic setting performs the role of a character, but this living fictional environment is also full of creatures, both natural and supernatural. As further close readings will show, this legacy of place conceived as alive and teeming with life is clearly discernible in French's series, Teel noting that she 'has created a unique blend of the police procedural with the gothic, a mode that always hovers on the edge of the irrational and unexplainable' (21). An 'unexplainable' quality prevalent in Gothic literature, and subsequently exploited in the crime genre, is *the uncanny*, which Bennet and Royle define as follows:

[20] This is from Herman's 'Glossary'. In the original some of the terms are fully capitalised, to reference other entries, but for ease of reading I have transferred these to lower case.
[21] Chandler makes her observation with respect to authors Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James.

> The uncanny has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness. More particularly it concerns a sense of unfamiliarity which appears at the very heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity which appears at the very heart of the unfamiliar (35).

As apparent in Chandler's example of the personified house, it is often via the de-familiarising and making strange of *place* that one encounters the uncanny. However, the uncanny is not so much in the text, but in the reader's reaction to it (Bennet & Royle 42). Whilst acknowledging that the uncanny is a significant aspect of place character, my focus here is on poetics not reader response. Nevertheless, it is worth stating that when seeking to establish *why* there has been a transference, from Gothic fiction into crime fiction, of place conceived as active, the answer lies in the 'ambition' that both literatures share to exploit the uncanny.

Covert and Overt Relationships

Through my analyses thus far, I have established the concept of characticity, and seen it at an urban scale in Rankin's series, and at a local scale in French's series. I have also traced the Gothic roots that contribute to place being figured as 'an influential actant'. But where – in a series such as Rankin's, exemplary of so many – is there evidence of place as influential and active? I argue that the particular method used in the Rebus series and others like it, is to model the main location as being an entity – a 'personality' – that is in an ongoing *relationship* with the protagonist. This is acknowledged by Rankin, when he says of Edinburgh:

> It's a major character because it has influenced Rebus. The real mystery in these books isn't the crime. OK, it's a crime novel, with a crime, an investigation and a resolution, so it's got the structure of the crime novel. But underneath, the real mystery is Rebus coming to terms with Edinburgh ('Gothic').

This echoes the point I made in the thesis introduction, that the focus of a crime series is not crime and its solutions, but the investigation of *character*. And in Rankin's words Edinburgh is designated as a major character 'because it has influenced Rebus'. Sloma suggests, 'Rankin not only uses Edinburgh as the setting for these novels, but he also allows the city to help form the protagonist, making the city a character in the novels as well' (53). Building on Sloma's observations, I argue that a key aspect of the poetics in many contemporary series is the

fostering of a determinative place-protagonist relationship. The meganarrative is a record of their joint trials and tribulations, and place becomes active through how it shapes the trajectory of the protagonist; evident in a passage from *Exit Music*, where Rebus and Edinburgh are shown to be inextricably linked:

> [H]e couldn't see himself ever leaving Edinburgh. It was the oxygen in his bloodstream, but still with mysteries to be explored. He'd lived there as long as he'd been a cop, the two – job and city – becoming intertwined. Each new crime had added to his understanding, without that understanding ever coming near to completion. Bloodstained past mingling with bloodstained present; Covenanters and commerce; a city of banking and brothels, virtue and vitriol… (439)

This constitutes a metafictional account of the poetics of the Rebus series; a man-cop 'intertwined' with a city across the duration of a series, each new crime adding to his understanding, 'without that understanding ever coming near to completion'. The extract captures what Plain describes as 'Rankin's palimpsestic evocation of place' ('The map' 27). It also conveys how protagonist and place are 'indelibly associated' (Geherin 7); Edinburgh is 'the oxygen in his bloodstream'. Rebus's life and past are intertwined with Edinburgh's life and history, a message which underpins the series, and is made explicit here: 'The city fed on its past like a serpent with its tail in its mouth. And Rebus's past seemed to be circling around again too' (*Black Book* 53).

There is, as I stated earlier, an inevitability to place assuming the role of a character in a long-running fiction; the meganarrative records changes over time, it captures the biographic qualities of place, endowing it with characticity. To this I can now add that place becomes an *active* character via the dynamics of an ongoing relationship. My close work on Rebus's characterisation, in the previous two chapters, established that he is figured as a loner, but here I can modify such a reading. The long-term relationship he sustains across the series is with *Edinburgh*. Their co-dependency is shaped by violent crime, beset by uncertainties/hardships/ordeals, and inevitably affected by Rebus's attitude toward the city: 'It was a crime scene waiting to happen' (*The Falls* 153).

Rankin, too, is in a relationship with Edinburgh, though a more positive one, evident in his observation that:

> I've been kind of lucky that […] I chose to write about Edinburgh, or Edinburgh chose me to write about it, and it's a city that seems to me to be endlessly complex, so I don't seem to run out ever, run out of things to say about Edinburgh […] Things from the present, things from the past, things that might be about to happen in the future, and it does seem to be a very nurturing city from that point of view (Interview).

Since 1987, the relationship with Edinburgh has nurtured Rankin and 'troubled' Rebus, providing an endless source of narrative material: 'Things from the present, things from the past, things that might be about to happen in the future'. Geherin notes that 'Rankin has systematically constructed a large-scale portrait of his native Scotland. In addition to regularly exposing vital connections between past and present, he has also addressed important contemporary issues' (135).

This temporally extended engagement with place is particularly suited to the series form. Rankin shows readers an Edinburgh that changes year by year with each novel, but he also presents an urban entity that has a history reaching back through the centuries. The long lifespan of the city is, I suggest, made comprehensible by making Edinburgh person-like, and by calibrating it to the 'life' of Rebus and indeed the life of the author. The long sweeps of history are then absorbed into this more human-scaled and humanised representation of Edinburgh.

Rankin says, 'I didn't sit down with some great overarching plan to create this character that would sort of mirror the city, or a city that would mirror the character' (quoted in Sloma 72), but Rebus would not be Rebus without the Edinburgh constructed by the series; just as this fictional Edinburgh would not be the city familiar from the novels without the presence of Rebus. Note too that Edinburgh also *frames* the protagonist, reflecting the technique examined in chapter one, of Rebus asleep in his chair being a topos that maintains character continuity. But crucial to how framing operates at this urban scale is the particular version of Edinburgh being portrayed. As Bell observes of the Rebus novels: 'Plots may converge, yet crime is

uncontainable. Much like the world of the American private eye in the Depression era, Rankin's texts often depict a chaotic and challenging terrain for his contemporary readers where crime is a continual and unsettling force' (57). The Edinburgh that frames Rebus is a place where 'crime is uncontainable…a continual and unsettling force'.

Rebus and Edinburgh are two storyworld participants that figure in the series – intertwined, mirroring each other, married to each other. The meganarrative presents 22 novels with the same location and the same protagonist,[22] set across a timespan of over three decades. The city acquires a history, it accumulates fictional material, in the same way that the protagonist does, and the two characters – Edinburgh and Rebus – have become so entangled and mutually dependent, that they begin to appear as one.[23]

The bonding of a protagonist with the primary setting of a series, and the figuring of that place as active through how it participates in and shapes the relationship, is a technique prevalent in many contemporary crime fiction series. The Rebus novels illustrate an approach typical of the genre, but the Dublin Murder Squad novels present an alternative way of making place active. As mentioned above, in French's series the focus is on *subjectivised* place, and this already raises the prospect of a more participatory aspect. French creates for each novel a discrete and boundaried location, and attention is firmly directed at *how* that place shapes the plot. In Rankin's series, the agency of place is more covert, couched as it is in the relationship between protagonist and city, which develops at a slow pace, novel by novel. In the Dublin Murder Squad novels, place is shown to *overtly* influence the events that unfold in each individual story.

The boundaried locations in French's series are wholly fictional (i.e. invented by the author) and inserted into the fabric of present-day Dublin and its surroundings; evoking a typical 'ghost

[22] The exception is *Tooth and Nail* (#3), set in London.
[23] The bonding of Rebus and Edinburgh is less marked in the novels that follow *Exit Music* (#17). In these later novels, the narration is shared between Rebus, Clarke and an additional character, Malcolm Fox. This three-way split results in a reduced focus on Rebus's relationship with Edinburgh, particularly evident in *In a House of Lies* (#22).

estate'[24] north of the city (*Broken Harbour*) or the essence of a typical cul-de-sac in the Liberties neighbourhood of Dublin (*Faithful Place*). French herself acknowledges that in *Faithful Place* she 'played fast and loose with Dublin geography'.[25] The author then makes these locations appear active by modelling them in such a way that they exhibit *animism*, which Bennett and Royle define as: 'what is inanimate or lifeless is given attributes of life or spirit' (37). French says, 'I'm a big believer in the power of place […] I'm a big believer in places having that charge' ('Q&A'). This animated power is evident in an extract from *Faithful Place*, when protagonist Detective Mackey narrates his perceptions, after his brother is murdered in the cul-de-sac where they both grew up:

> The world felt lethal that night. Normally I enjoy danger, there's nothing like it to focus the mind, but this was different. This was the earth rippling and flexing underneath me like a great muscle, sending us all flying, showing me all over again who was boss and who was a million miles out of his depth in this game. The tricky shiver in the air was a reminder: everything you believe is up for grabs, every ground rule can change on a moment's whim, and the dealer always, always wins. It wouldn't have startled me if Number 7 had crumbled inwards on top of the Hearnes and their Santas, or Number 5 had gone up in one great *whoof* of flames and pastel-toned yuppie dust (269).

'The world' has been radically altered by violence, but where its impact is felt is within the confines of the cul-de-sac. Crime is the catalyst that has brought this place 'to life', an effect captured by Martin and Murray in their discussion of the phenomenology of place: 'The active quality that a locale acquires is inflected by events that have taken place there – indeed, have *taken* the *place* into the ambit of particularized meanings' (42; emphasis in original).[26] In French's novel, place is 'boss', 'the dealer', 'a great muscle' capable of 'sending us all flying', and throughout her series there is a sense in which place is a numinous entity that can engender evil: 'The world felt lethal that night'.

[24] The name used in the Republic of Ireland for the half-built and semi-inhabited housing estates that were a legacy of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger economy.
[25] 'Author's Note' by Tana French on last (unnumbered) page of *Faithful Place.*
[26] On the phenomenology of place, Martin and Murray acknowledge Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Stijn Reijnders.

In the Dublin Murder Squad series the shock and devastation of violence are typically expressed via the animism of place. Reijnders identifies, in TV detective series, the 'everyday locations, which are suddenly transformed into a macabre counter-world by the discovery of a body' (177). This can be seen in *Broken Harbour*, when protagonist Detective Kennedy enters the crime scene; before his gaze fixes on the victim, his attention is caught by the view beyond the kitchen windows: 'And the sea, high today, raising itself up at me green and muscled. The weight of what was in the kitchen with us tilted the world, sent the water rocking upwards like it was going to come crashing through all that bright glass' (23-4). The 'weight of what was in the kitchen', namely the dead body, has 'tilted the world', implying that the murder of a single individual has elicited a response from a vast world that is *capable* of response.

In terms of what French brings to the ideas I am developing here, it is clear that her fiction offers a different understanding of literary character. Margolin's description of character as 'any entity, individual or collective' is one that acknowledges structuralist theory – character has a function in the text, and place can step in and fulfill a number of those functions. The Rebus series and Dublin Murder Squad series both demonstrate that place can perform the designated role of 'character'. However, what emerges in French's series is a conception of character that moves beyond this structuralist account. Margolin's language stresses the textual nature of character as a fictional entity with a job to do. In French's series, via her exploration of animism in the treatment of place, the author is, whether deliberately or subconsciously, expanding what literary character can encompass while at the same time underlining that it is the seeming *aliveness* of character that is its defining trait.

French's approach could seem, on the surface, to be a technical/artistic exploration of the possibilities inherent in the form. However, as will become evident, her reconfiguring of place as an 'alive' character can also reconfigure where a narrative directs the reader to seek the 'culprit' responsible for crime.

Can a Place Commit a Crime?

Through close reading of the Rebus novels, I have uncovered how place character is created in many contemporary series, via a poetics that constructs a macrocosmic topographic entity (i.e. Edinburgh) which is in a relationship with the protagonist, one that shapes each party in positive and negative ways. This covert approach was then contrasted with the overt methods used in the atypical Dublin Murder Squad novels. Prominent in French's series – and clearly displaying the Gothic roots that are more suppressed in Rankin's series – is place performing as 'an influential actant endowed with a will and powers of its own'; it is the imprisoning cul-de-sac that gives rise to two murders in *Faithful Place*; it is the 'broken' house that precipitates three murders in *Broken Harbour*.

French inflects the core poetics typified by Rankin's series, and this prompts me to ask – echoing a similar question from the previous chapter – what are the benefits of putting more emphasis on the role of *place*, within a quest-based narrative, where the focus is traditionally directed at a protagonist/detective figure solving a crime?

To answer this, I begin by examining in more detail how place acquires such significance in the Dublin Murder Squad series. Jameson's observations on Raymond Chandler's fiction can serve a double purpose here; they shed light on French's treatment of place and also underscore the Gothic inheritance referenced above. Jameson identifies 'a kind of substitution of an architectural language for that of individual characters: it is not so much that these "people" in Chandler are their spaces, as that in Chandler these spaces are "characters" or *actants*' (71; emphasis in original). Via 'a kind of substitution of an architectural language', place becomes the *uber*-character in the Dublin Murder Squad series.

Animism, as discussed above, is one of the means French uses to give place this prominence. The other method by which she makes it the uber-character is to invest place with a psychological dimension. Margolin states that the 'prototypical literary character' will be figured as having 'internal mental states' (73). Place as possessing 'internal mental states' is less evident in Rankin's series, although later I cite some examples. In French's series, on the

other hand, a psychological dimension is highly conspicuous, and it is integrated with her treatment of place as an 'influential actant'. Tindall acknowledges that fictional place has the potential to be 'psychologised' when she refers to 'the literary uses to which places are put, the meanings they are made to bear, the roles they play when they are re-created in fiction, the psychological journeys for which they are destinations. Actual countries become countries of the mind, their topography transformed into psychological maps, private worlds' (9).

Fictional place can, as Tindall suggests, reflect the psychological journey of a (human) character, but in French's series place is modelled as equipped with its *own* psychology**.** One of the techniques applied in literature is the evocation of a (human) character's thoughts and feelings, and Herman offers a definition of 'experientiality': 'The dimension of narrative by which it conveys what philosophers of mind term qualia, or the sense of what it is like for an embodied human or human-like consciousness to experience the situations and events recounted in the story' (277).[27] In the Dublin Murder Squad series there is evidence of how narrative can communicate the qualia of *place*. In his review of Moore's *Ecology and Literature*, Norden notes that:

> Moore asserts, correctly, that the personification of nature need not be of the naïve sort, in the manner of Ruskin's well-known pathetic fallacy. He argues instead that personification of the non-human world can suggest that the non-human world is alive and perhaps possessed of a consciousness not inferior to that enjoyed by human beings (228).

This is the approach encountered in the Dublin Murder Squad series; a reaching beyond the human to a territory that is non-human – to evoke the 'consciousness' of place, how it might 'experience the situations and events recounted in the story'. There is an example of this in *Faithful Place*, when Detective Mackey accuses his brother Shay of murdering their younger brother. Mackey tries to goad Shay into a confession, and the room itself appears to react: 'Slowly, in the corners, the shadows clotted into thick dark lumps' (384). When Shay then

[27] This is quoted from Herman's 'Glossary'. In the original some of the terms are fully capitalised, in order to reference other entries in the glossary. For ease of reading, I have transferred these capitalised terms to lower case.

accuses Mackey of being 'the same as me', with the same potential to kill, the room again reacts: 'Silence, just the shadows seething and heaving in the corners' (385).

French models human psychology onto place in order to make this imaginative leap and evoke what place might be feeling. But I argue that what she achieves is not the human-shaped experientiality of Norden/Moore's personification, it is animism – the term I have used throughout this chapter in relation to French's fiction, to evoke an aliveness in place that is *not* human-like, but something else unique to place as an embodied topographic entity.

In the Dublin Murder Squad series, inert matter is imbued with emotion, intellect, a conscious and subconscious, a set of desires. The murders and their perpetrators are almost incidental; these are stories about place as an all-powerful malevolent being that can make, unmake and outlive humankind, the earth 'showing me all over again who was boss and who was a million miles out of his depth'. The question asked by these novels is – can a *place* commit a crime?

To address the culpability of place, French brings a temporal span into each novel, to show that the corrosive impact of environment takes affect slowly, across years and decades. Her novels often feature a past tragedy, and it is place that binds this historic death to the murder in the present day. In *Broken Harbour*, Detective Kennedy investigates three murders in a new-build house on a ghost estate, which is located next to the bay where his mother drowned herself, during a family holiday, when Kennedy was in his teens. His mother's suicide tarnishes the landscape as well as Kennedy's life, and he is fated to return there; and this tarnished landscape in turn blights the new housing estate. French, in modelling this fictional place, is drawing on a phenomenon recognisable from the real world. As Reijnders notes:

> Some landscapes or spaces appear to be more 'active' than others. The power of a landscape clearly rises to the surface when events occur that generate negative associations. Think of old war zones […] or places where major disasters or serious traffic accidents have taken place. Although the 'guilty landscape' [Armando] frequently has few physical indicators that remind us of its past, the place will always retain an important, sometimes even traumatic, significance (176).

The suicide of Kennedy's mother makes Broken Harbour a 'guilty landscape', but woven into this is the trajectory of the Celtic Tiger economy. Kennedy's childhood memories portray Ireland before the boom; his family was low-income, the mother's depression cast a shadow over their lives, and the most precious time in the year was their two-week holiday in a caravan. Moving to the present day of the novel, the reader pieces together the history of a more recent generation of family, the Spains; they benefitted from the Celtic Tiger, but after its collapse are stranded in a semi-derelict housing estate. Both parents are jobless, in a 'perfect' but worthless house, their finances and future dreams in ruins. The father descends into 'madness', the mother, in extreme despair, murders him and their two children, and tries to kill herself. The lives of Kennedy and the Spains are woven into the material and financial circumstances of Broken Harbour. But French also shows the dark 'gothic' underside of Ireland's economic disaster, through the brooding presence of the Spains' family home; if the landscape is animated, then their house is doubly so. Kennedy's investigation establishes that the Spain father believed a creature was living in the attic of the house; the creature is speculated as being a mink or otter (274), but the text offers no substantiated evidence of its existence, and the reader is left questioning whether the animal is real, or a product of mental illness, or whether the house is alive. The narrative contains the father's increasingly desperate pleas, sent to an online chat room:

> *This thing has got out of the attic. Its going down inside the walls. Started hearing it in the sitting room* […] *so I made a hole in the wall right there + set up a monitor. Nothing, just the thing moved to the hallway wall – when I set up another monitor there it moved to the kitchen – etc etc etc. I swear its like its deliberately messing with my head for a laugh – I know it cant be but thats how it feels. Either way its definitely getting braver* […] *should I be worried that its going to attack us??* (359)[28]

At the end of the investigation, as Detective Kennedy stands on the first-floor landing, the house remains an unsettling presence:

[28] The text contains errors in grammar and spelling to evoke online communication.

> Up in the attic, the wind poured in at the hole under the eaves with a high fluttering wail like a fox or a banshee. I squinted up into the open hatch. For an instant I thought I saw something move – a shifting and coalescing of the black, a deliberate muscled ripple – but when I blinked, there was only the darkness and the flood of cold air (518).

Broken Harbour weaves together Ireland's economic history with the Gothic uncanniness of 'the creature in the attic'. French captures the interconnection of both, in her remarks on Ireland's ghost estates: 'They're deeply frightening: what they say about us as people, what they say about our society, what we as a society are willing to buy into, what illusions we're willing to believe out of desperation. Those houses were charged up with some of the most frightening things underlying our society' (Q&A).

In the Dublin Murder Squad novels, French exploits the narrative potential of place as a complex protagonist. I established above that her series is not directed at making a macrocosmic character called Dublin. Instead, each novel creates its own *malevolent locus*, a character that is smaller, more intense, isolated. There is the 'quiet' suburb, the 'beautiful' country house, the 'cheery' working-class cul-de-sac, the 'shiny' new housing estate, the 'cloistered' boarding house, the 'cosy' Victorian cottage, and *none* of them are safe. The reiterated message is – *place is out to get you*. These malevolent loci have an incendiary quality; at the end of *The Likeness* the large country house burns to the ground, and this is emblematic of French's series, where an intensely felt place is created for a novel and subsequently destroyed by the events of that story. French understands that people's relationships with place are capable of breaking down, with tragic consequences, and I contend that she models her fiction upon her own conception of actual place as a psychologically active agent.

Unlike French, Rankin rarely animates place in this direct manner, although there are instances, such as the image quoted earlier: 'The city fed on its past like a serpent with its tail in its mouth'. However, rather than evoking the animalistic animism of the Dublin Murder Squad series, this image is operating as a figurative device. Rankin also employs figurative devices to personify the city in a specifically human way, such as this description of Glasgow and Edinburgh: 'Scotland's two main cities, separated by a fifty-minute motorway trip, were wary neighbours,

as though years back one had accused the other of something and the accusation, unfounded or not, still rankled' (*Black and Blue* 54). Personification is prevalent in Rankin's series, where, as discussed above, Edinburgh is modelled as being in a relationship with Rebus. I can now clarify that the author uses two modes of personification; within individual passages there are examples of it functioning as a figurative device, but across the series arc, there is the construction of a personified Edinburgh that presides over the meganarrative. As Pittin-Hédon remarks, Rankin has created 'a personified city' (254), a view that Sloma supports when she states that Rankin 'makes Edinburgh not only the setting, but a current living character' (60).

In terms of how this personified city 'behaves' in the text, even at key points where a heightened portrayal might be anticipated, Rankin does not resort to the more overt animation of place practised by French. In *Exit Music*, when Rebus and Clarke view the body of a dissident Russian poet, note how place is depicted:

> Spectators had started gathering, drawn to the scene by the patrol car's blue beacon. [...] The two detectives fell silent, studying the figure and its surroundings.
>
> 'Someone's done a job on him,' Rebus eventually commented (5).

Place is described as 'scene' and 'surroundings', inert background to the human drama. At a potentially fraught moment, the language is unemotive. The emotion lies in the *gaps*, the silence that lasts till Rebus finally comments, 'Someone's done a job on him'. The above extract can be compared to a passage from *Faithful Place*, when the body of Rosie Daly is discovered, the former girlfriend of Detective Mackey. Prior to this point, the narrative has established that she disappeared 22 years ago, the night they were due to run away together. Mackey has always believed that Rosie left without him, to make a new life in England:

> Me, Mr Street-Smart Cynic giving newbies my savvy little spiel about how the world is always two steps more vicious than you plan for, I never believed it would do this […] Right deep down, deeper than everything I'd learned before or since, I still believed Rosie. I believed her all the way down the crumbling stairs to the basement and I believed her when I saw the circle of masked faces turned upwards to me in the white glare of their lights, the concrete slab uprooted and skewed at a wild angle on the floor between cables

> and crowbars, when I smelled the rich underground reek of something horribly wrong (89-90).

Mackey knows that 'the world is always two steps more vicious than you plan for' but he 'never believed it would do this'. The world has dealt him a blow by 'killing' Rosie. French co-opts place as a vehicle for *transmitting* emotion. Rankin, on the other hand, maintains a relatively even tone across his descriptions of place, be it a vignette of Edinburgh or a crime scene. There are, nevertheless, moments in the Rebus series where place does acquire a psychological and emotional depth, for example this scene featuring Rebus and Jean Burchill:

> '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 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 (*The Falls* 153).

Unlike some of the more topographic and cartographic descriptions of Edinburgh quoted previously, here the city is aligned with the protagonist's mental outlook. Throughout the series Rebus is modelled as possessing attitudes and feelings, and in this extract they are mirrored in the 'mental outlook' assigned to the city itself; Edinburgh is 'a state of mind, a juggling of criminal thoughts and baser instincts', a place of suicides, and 'a crime scene waiting to happen'. Passages such as this are present in Rankin's series from the very start, for example in *Knots and Crosses*: 'Edinburgh was a schizophrenic city, the place of Jekyll & Hyde sure enough, the city of Deacon Brodie, of fur coats and no knickers' (193).[29] There is an allusion to the novel's Gothic roots in the fiction of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rankin himself stating: 'My own first crime novel, *Knots and Crosses*, was (in part) an attempt to update the themes of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde'* ('City of Stories'). Rankin also contends that Edinburgh itself has invited comparison to the human psyche: 'This geographical dividing of the city—into the rational and planned (the New Town, where the wealthy made their homes) and the mazy, dark,

[29] 'Fur coats and no knickers' is a phrase used by Glaswegians to describe the people of Edinburgh.

and nefarious Old Town—gave rise to literary metaphors for the human condition and provided Stevenson with his major inspiration' (Ibid.).

In Rankin's novels much of the textual material about place is focused on cartography and descriptive vignettes, but in certain passages there is the self-aware use of a psychological dimension; Edinburgh is treated as a metaphor for the human condition, consistent with Tindall's observation, cited above, that in literature, '[a]ctual countries become countries of the mind'. Across the Rebus series, specifically via these more psychological descriptions, Rankin's personification of the city conspires to pathologise and medicalise Edinburgh, calling attention to the city's (split) personality, seemingly respectable but hiding its true nature.

In the Dublin Murder Squad series, French does not give place 'a personality', such a word is too human-centric for her malevolent loci. Instead, as shown above, she uses a psychological dimension to convey the subjectivity of place and emphasise its role as *antagonist*: 'the world is always two steps more vicious than you plan for, I never believed it would do this'. In *Broken Harbour* this is expressed explicitly, when Kennedy recollects the 'summer haven' of his childhood holidays: 'For the first time in my life, I saw the place for what it was: lethal, shaped and honed for destruction' (482).

At key moments in the novels, French fully exposes the conflict between the human characters and their surroundings. As a narrative device this creates drama, but the author's primary intention is, I suggest, to transmit her vision of place as a *catalyst* of crime. French herself states: 'Murder happens everywhere, but the reasons it happens are completely informed by the time and place, by that society's priorities and its tensions and its fears and its dark places' ('Q&A'). Through constructing place as antagonist in the Dublin Murder Squad series, French conveys the social, temporal, cultural, economic and political factors that contribute to crime. As the author observes of the financial crash she documents in *Broken Harbour*: 'People were left on half-built estates in the middle of nowhere […] The devastation wasn't just financial, it was psychological. I don't know how you recover from something like that, when everything you've built your life on suddenly turns out to be not just non-existent, but actively destructive

[…] It's a solid bricks and mortar socio-political commentary every time you go past one of those ghost estates' (Ibid.).

In the previous chapter I established that the core poetics can be inflected to create the feminist and feminised figure of Bengtzon. It was also shown that this female archetype in turn reshaped the narrative, establishing a pattern of mirroring, whereby violence in the home was used to comment on crimes in the public sphere. My study of gender revealed that violence is more general and structural than many 'traditional' crime novels suggest. Turning to place in this current chapter, it is clear that the same complicating of guilt and blame is present in the Dublin Murder Squad series. While Marklund directs attention to gendered inequality, French creates narratives where *place* is the guilty party, endowed with animist (and criminal) properties.

The Dublin Murder Squad series shows how the acknowledged status of place as a character in series fiction can be reworked and given a political edge. Earlier I posed a question about the benefits of emphasising the role of place within a crime narrative. This question has taken me through a set of arguments, which I now conclude: when the poetics is inflected in ways that intensify the significance and agency of place, the narrative can focus attention on structural factors that contribute to crime and are embedded in topography – shifting the focus away from conservative notions of a guilty individual, toward a more nuanced account of the wider culpability of the physical and socio-political environment.

The Metaphysics of Place

As my analyses in the last section have shown, the more typical poetics of place character evident in Rankin's series can be modified in a series such as French's, in ways that highlight the inherent politics. Each author conveys a different understanding of place, and I now want to focus attention on the 'type' of world found in these fictions. Open a Rebus novel or a Dublin Murder Squad novel, and the reader knows immediately that they have entered a particular world, uniquely created by the author. And in each subsequent visit/novel, the reader will recognise the physical details of that fictional world. They can also recognise the *meta*physical dimension of that world; how the author has sought to convey their conception of the nature of

being and time and space. The world of the Dublin Murder Squad series is interior, claustrophobic, emotionally intense, immersive, inescapably fateful, implicated in the human violence. The world of the Rebus series is exterior, a broad canvas, at times brooding and gothic, at other times a mute backdrop for the horrors that people inflict on each other. The two series each present a different metaphysics of place, requiring a process of initiation:

> But "space" must be read […] the reader may expect to pass through an initial period of programmation, through some inaugural entry chamber in which the appropriate decoding techniques are taught and learned. Even as far as the category of space itself is concerned, it cannot be assumed to preexist the text either, but must be projected by the latter as that "code" of space which the reader must learn to read […] this is a kind of phenomenological training (Jameson 31).

In a crime series, I contend that the same 'code' of place is reiterated in each successive novel, such that the meganarrative becomes an extended form of 'phenomenological training'. Through the language of place that models these worlds it is possible to capture certain textural and noumenal qualities. These metaphysical aspects of place character are also, I suggest, structured into the narrative using, once again, techniques associated with human character. Chapter one established that the crime series protagonist reflects certain models of (real) human character, through the counterpointing of essentialist/existentialist understandings. This same method is applied by Rankin in the modelling of place character; there are the core traits of Edinburgh ('a schizophrenic city, the place of Jekyll & Hyde') but there is also the Edinburgh that becomes an ever-shifting sum total of its own history ('Each new crime had added to his understanding, without that understanding ever coming near to completion'). And yet the fictionality of this history must not be forgotten, as Pittin-Hédon notes when she names Rankin among a group of Scottish authors who 'have over the years produced historiographic reconstructions of cities, a kind of "unreal realism"' (254).

Rankin takes great care, via his use of street names and topically accurate descriptions, to create a 'realistic' portrayal of Edinburgh. However, Rankin's Edinburgh will always be imbued with his metaphysical conception of place, his own shaping of this world to suit authorial intent.

Here is where myth can be seen to impact on the realism of place. Rankin constructs an alternative Edinburgh that acquires, over the meganarrative, its own independent status as an Edinburgh of *fable*; a city that seems real on paper but whose topography is built from castles in the air. These 'historiographic reconstructions' are distorted facsimiles of real places. Rankin's Edinburgh only exists in the Rebus novels.

This fabular quality is also evident in the Dublin Murder Squad series. French, as cited above, 'played fast and loose with Dublin geography'. Each of her malevolent loci is an invented location inserted into the city and its surroundings in a manner that obfuscates where they are. 'Real' Dublin has been augmented and made mythic by these fictional places that, with each successive novel, further distort the 'reality'. The specifically *mythic* aspect of these alternative realities – be it Edinburgh or Dublin – is discernible in how the author uses place as a character that can instruct; place becomes a means of relaying 'life lessons' to the reader. Bell suggests 'Rankin's fiction refuses to depict Scotland in stark terms of black and white, offering instead an implicit directive to engage with its gray areas, to dig beneath the surface' (58). This 'implicit directive' is, I contend, apparent in Rankin's creation of a *mythorealist* Edinburgh. In chapter one I cited Moyers who defines myth as an expression of the 'need for life to signify, to touch the eternal, to understand the mysterious, to find out who we are' (Campbell & Moyers 4). This desire for a deeper understanding is evident in Rankin's merging of myth and reality in the fictional topography he constructs. The Edinburgh of the Rebus novels is expressly designed to comment upon the actual city, the author's intention being, I argue, to reveal new truths to the reader.

As with human character in the series form and the promoting of the mythic mode, there is also the privileging of place in its on-duty state, under duress. These places are only on the page because a crime has been committed. Rankin notes, of Rebus: 'To him, Edinburgh is a series of crime scenes that have either happened, or will happen in the future' (Interview). As a corollary to this, there is the suppression of place character in its mundane, off-duty mode, both within and between novels. The narrative typically does not devote words to places that are

irrelevant to the criminal investigation. For example, the protagonist's home is rarely described in detail, an exception being Marklund's Bengtzon series, examined in chapter two.

In the Dublin Murder Squad series, French, with her malevolent loci, creates extreme iterations of on-duty, crime-infused place. The transition from off duty to on duty can be examined by looking at a place which is *not* cast as one of her malevolent loci – namely Dublin Castle, where the Murder Squad have their HQ. It appears in all six novels, and is usually described in a relatively neutral way, such as the brief reference quoted earlier from *Faithful Place* (150), or this extract from *In the Woods*, narrated by the protagonist, Detective Rob Ryan:

> We work out of the grounds of Dublin Castle, and in spite of all the colonial connotations this is one of my favourite perks of the job […] the outsides of the building are listed and still intact: old, ornate red brick and marble, with battlements and turrets and worn carvings of saints in unexpected places (94).

There is none of the animism that French reserves for modelling her malevolent loci, but a change occurs when, later in the novel, a prime suspect in the murder investigation is summoned for questioning, and Ryan watches him approach the Garda HQ:

> Jonathan Devlin was coming across the courtyard, his shoulders set forward and his hands deep in the pockets of his big brown overcoat. The high, arrogant lines of the surrounding buildings should have dwarfed him, but instead they seemed to me to align themselves around him, swooping into strange geometries with him at their crux, imbuing him with some impenetrable significance (350).

Note how place transforms in response to a suspected killer: 'The high, arrogant lines of the surrounding buildings…swooping into strange geometries'. Place is catalysed from off duty to on duty, from subjectum to a subject that 'aligns' itself with Devlin, 'imbuing him with some impenetrable significance'. This shift from off duty to on duty can now be added to all the other equivalences established above, between human character and place character.

When studying their respective poetics, there appear to be few distinctions between how place and (human) protagonist are created as characters in the series form. This chapter has added to current scholarship by setting forth the literary techniques that make place 'a character' in the

contemporary crime fiction series. Indeed, I go so far as to argue that the form itself 'teaches' the reader to understand place as a character, by establishing it within the ongoing narrative as an entity that has certain characteristics, that ages, changes, acts and reacts.

Via the atypical Dublin Murder Squad series I have demonstrated an approach to place that harks back to the roots of the crime genre. At the same time French is opening up new possibilities in the form by showing how the gothic animating of place can exploit its potential as antagonist. 'Place character' is portrayed at a local scale. It is imbued with emotion and actively shapes the events of the story, drawing the reader's attention to the wider causes of criminality. The Dublin Murder Squad novels also highlight that, when reading a series by a particular author, the world encountered is *metaphysical* as well as physical.

Via the more typical Rebus series I have examined 'place character' at city scale, and the cultivation of characticity. The timespan of a crime series plays into the construction of place as humanised and in a relationship with the protagonist. Neither Edinburgh nor Rebus can escape their co-dependency, and it is contaminated by the detective's vision of the city as 'a state of mind, a juggling of criminal thoughts and baser instincts'. Bell observes of the Rebus series, '[w]hile there is a strong concern with mapping Scotland as a "knowable" space, there is also simultaneously an awareness of the dark, unconscious, threatening forces at the heart of society' (59). These forces are, I suggest, rooted in environmental, political, cultural, economic and historical factors. In Rankin's series, these structural factors pervade the complex storyworld he has constructed in a meganarrative spanning 33 years. In French's series, via an inflection of the poetics, such structural factors are brought to the fore through the animism of specific loci; loci intended to reinforce the importance of place as both a repository for and a catalyst of the 'threatening forces at the heart of society'.

In the words of Most, cited in the previous chapter, crime fiction's 'ultimate subject is the society in which such murders are performed' (365). One of the ways that the genre offers a critique is through the treatment of place. This chapter has established the literary techniques that underpin place in the contemporary crime fiction series, and its acknowledged status as 'a

character'. I have examined subjectivity beyond the human, and demonstrated that traditional conceptions of literary character can be extended to include place. This expanded poetics can, in turn, be modified to further amplify the significance of place; thereby innovating the crime genre, and offering fresh insights on society and our ever-changing world.

CONCLUSION TO CREATIVE-CRITICAL THESIS

Character Poetics in the Contemporary Crime Fiction Series and a series novel: *Dog & Bone*

This thesis has articulated a new poetics of crime series character, and established a conceptual framework for understanding the literary entities, both human and topographic, that populate the meganarratives of contemporary crime fiction. Through my close readings of Ian Rankin's Inspector Rebus series and Lee Child's Jack Reacher series in chapter one, I determined the techniques used to construct the (human) protagonist typical of many contemporary series. I showed the iteration novel to novel, via recurring motifs/vignettes, of a set of realist attributes that display and promote character stability. There was the privileging of character in their active on-duty mode, under duress, in pursuit of a quest catalysed by violence/rupture/death. This I linked to the suppression of character in their mundane off-duty mode, within and between the novels. The protagonist was seen to reflect certain metaphysical models of human character, through the counterpointing of subjectum/subject and essentialist/existentialist understandings. It was also established that the protagonist accrues character density, and displays a limited degree of consistent change (modelled on realist notions of ageing/maturing) and inconsistent change (incorporation of errors and/or the trialling of new attributes). In addition, the protagonist was shown to exhibit amnesia regarding their own life story and the events recorded in the meganarrative. A series character has the phoenix-like capacity to be 'reborn' for each new novel, having survived the traumas of the last. I determined that amnesia and this iterative re-incarnation of character are connected to the mythic template that underlies the protagonist. The chapter concluded by identifying that the typical crime series protagonist is mythorealist, and combines the invincibility, immortality, and pre-patterned destiny of a mythic hero, with the conflicted real-world concerns, fallibility, and unforeseeable trajectory of a realist literary figure.

Chapter two of the critical thesis examined the gendering of this mythorealist crime series character. I established, via the Rebus novels and further study of the core poetics of chapter one, that the series form tends to produce a character that reflects masculine norms, regardless of whether the protagonist is female or male. This masculinity is constructed by promoting traits associated with the mythic, by avoiding significant relationships or family ties, by de-emphasising the ageing of the protagonist, and by negating their domestic existence – the primary focus being the imperatives of the quest. However, through comparing the Rebus novels to Liza Marklund's Annika Bengtzon series – which critically reworks the genre – I demonstrated that the series form can accommodate a female archetype, by an increased narration of private life and relationships, alongside the crime quest. This feminised protagonist tends more to the carnal human, a greater acknowledgement of the passage of time, more emphasis on home and on relationships/family/offspring. I showed that a feminised protagonist modifies the narrative via a contrapuntal structure, where the mirroring of private life and public life can redirect the account of blame in the narrative from the individual to wider societal factors. These findings were tested against the mythorealism of chapter one, and I identified a spectrum from the masculinised and more overtly mythic (Reacher), to the still masculinised but less mythic (Rebus, Clarke), to the feminised and more overtly realist (Bengtzon). This range of expressions of gender is available to female and male protagonists alike. However, even with a procreative figure such as Bengtzon, the mythorealism of the core poetics still prevails, along with the irredeemable isolation of the protagonist, who is perpetually driven to pursue the quest.

Chapter three of the critical thesis interrogated the commonly held but untested concept that 'place is a character' in crime fiction series. I extended my prior definition of character – established via the figure of the protagonist in chapters one and two – and created a broader category for crime series character that includes the topographic. Citing the Rebus novels I determined the characteristics of this expanded poetics and saw place acquire 'characticity' through being modelled 'like' a human (Rankin's Edinburgh). Accruing in the meganarrative there is an iterative build-up of (topographic) characteristics, such that place displays many of

the traits associated with the poetics of human character. I then established how the Gothic roots of the crime genre have contributed to the creation of place as 'an influential actant' within contemporary series. The Rebus novels allowed me to identify the technique found in many series, where place becomes 'influential' and active through how it affects the protagonist, with the series then becoming a record of their ongoing relationship and its associated ordeals. Through Tana French's atypical Dublin Murder Squad series and her malevolent loci, I showed how the genre's Gothic inheritance could be intensified. French thereby inflects the typical and more covert poetics evident in Rankin's series, by putting more overt emphasis on the agency of place and its negative impact on the human figures. This demonstrated that the figuring of place as a character in crime series – so prevalent in the genre – could be modified to convey a politics. Like Marklund's series, but from the starting point of place rather than gender, in French's series the focus shifts from the often conservative individualism in crime series – where a sole perpetrator is guilty – toward a more structural and historical account, where culpability resides in a range of interconnected factors. Crime fiction has always been an instrument for critiquing society, but the series by Marklund and French have shown how an inflection of the poetics can amplify and extend such a critique. Chapter three concluded by examining the metaphysical modelling of place and its mythorealism, demonstrating the extent to which place character emulates human character, substantiating my argument that the poetics can encompass non-human subjectivity.

This thesis has established the literary devices and techniques that create and maintain character in the contemporary crime fiction series. The core poetics was defined in chapter one, via the protagonist. Chapter two investigated the inevitable masculinity of this core poetics, but then explored how it could be inflected and challenged by feminine patterns. Chapter three augmented the core poetics to include place as a character, and showed that this expanded poetics could in turn be modified, in ways that further innovate the genre. As my analyses and close readings have shown, the poetics generates a character that combines mythic and realist modes of representation. Existing literary-critical accounts of character do not fit the fictional entities found in crime series. The crime fiction series takes 'protagonist' and 'place' and – by

biographicising and iterative framing, by catalysing and mythicising, by mirroring, merging and accumulation – it creates a type of character that is unique to the series form. Via the detailed findings of this thesis, I have reconceived current thinking and established new theories on character poetics in the contemporary crime fiction series.

My thesis novel, *Dog & Bone*, has been another means for conducting research, and is an imaginative response to the poetics. Through the creative and the critical writing of this joint thesis, I have become acutely aware that the series form pushes the boundaries of literary character. The very act of putting marks on a page that bring both humans and places 'to life', this act of calligraphic re-creation seems strange enough as it is. But when you extend that act across multiple novels, in a meganarrative with the potential to always keep growing, to pass from author to author, then these characters take on new extremes of strangeness. I will never not be fascinated by the poetics of crime series character, whether human or place. In my fiction and my research, I will always be drawn to the gravitational pull, the life-affirming longevity, of these mythorealist figures. Characters that endure against the bounds of reason, and against the odds of fictional possibility.

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