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“Polarities within an Entity”: The Case of Burke and Hare and Ian Rankin’s *The Falls* (2001)

Silvia Mergenthal

1 In the opening paragraph of his 2011 article “Geocriticism, Geopoetics, Geophilosophy, and Beyond”, Eric Prieto acknowledges the debt which scholars interested in literary representations of space and place owe to the fields of “cultural and social geography, urban sociology, environmental studies, and the phenomenology of space” (2011: 13). He goes on to ask what, in their turn, literary studies have to offer these fields, and cites as one example Bertrand Westphal’s “geocentred” (2007) approach which

> is not organized around texts or authors but around geographic sites. Rather than studying, say, the representation of Dublin in *Ulysses* or Thomas Hardy’s Wessex, the geographical space itself will become the focus of attention and the texts of Joyce or Hardy will be brought into dialogue with as many other texts as possible that deal with that space. (2011: 20)

2 While Westphal, as Prieto explains, has tended to concentrate on the *hauts lieux* of literary tradition, that is, on places that have given rise to a large body of literature – Lisbon, Rome, Venice and so on – he himself proposes two additional foci: first, on a particular *type* of place such as squatter cities around the globe (Prieto 2016), and second, on spatial practices which, for instance in the case of spatial orientation, may be bound up with the theme of (collective as well as personal) identity. Although Edinburgh can undoubtedly be classified as one of Prieto’s *hauts lieux* of literary tradition, it is a specific mode of spatial practice which will be foregrounded in the following essay, together with the type of spatial and temporal real-world referentiality in literary texts which this spatial practice has engendered: namely, the tendency to experience, and subsequently to represent – or, conversely, to represent and subsequently to experience – the space that is Edinburgh in terms of sets of dualities.

3 One particular strand of Edinburgh literature which embodies these dualities is that which revisits the case of nineteenth-century murderers William Burke and William Hare. Drawing on the work of, in particular, Lisa Rosner (2010) and Caroline

McCracken-Flesher (2012), this essay will first provide a sketch of the actual facts of the case and a brief survey of relevant Burke and Hare texts. It will then discuss one recent text from the Burke and Hare corpus in more detail, Ian Rankin's *The Falls* (2001); this discussion is intended to situate Rankin's text in its literary environments, the genre of the police procedural and Scottish literature, and to explore the similarities between these two environments.

4 On 1 November 1828, William Burke and William Hare, together with their partners, were arrested in Edinburgh and charged with the murder of an elderly Irishwoman, variously named Mary McGonegal, Campbell, or Docherty. Her body had been seen by neighbours in Burke's lodging house in the slums of the West Port, and was later retrieved by the authorities from the dissecting room of Dr Robert Knox, Fellow of the Edinburgh College of Surgeons, Conservator of the Museum of Comparative Anatomy and Pathology, and Lecturer in John Barclay's School of Anatomy. William Hare and his wife turned King's evidence, and upon having been promised immunity, Hare confessed to a total of sixteen murders, a number which was corroborated by William Burke after he had stood trial and been convicted. Apparently, in the Edinburgh of Burke and Hare, there was a segment of the population so destitute and rootless that, if they disappeared from the face of the earth, they would not be missed: vagrants, beggars, prostitutes, ex-soldiers, or recent immigrants from Ireland. Burke and Hare, themselves Irish immigrants, had hit upon their scheme almost by accident: when one of Hare's lodgers died owing his landlord some money, Burke and Hare decided to make him pay his debt posthumously by selling his corpse to an anatomist. Their method was simple: to select a victim, invite him or her into the lodging-house, ply them with drink, and suffocate them as this leaves no obvious mark on the body.

5 Amidst enormous public interest, Burke was put on trial before the High Court of Justiciary at Edinburgh on 24 December 1828, and formally charged with three murders: as the Docherty case was the strongest of the three, given the evidence of the body, it was heard first, and Burke was found guilty and sentenced to the gallows. He was executed on 28 January 1829, in the presence of thousands of spectators and afterwards publicly dissected by Professor Alexander Monro *tertius*. Those good burghers of Edinburgh who could not gain admission to the anatomy theatre and who expressed their displeasure at this by rioting were given the opportunity to view Burke's dissected body; an estimated 25,000 filed past the dissecting table. His death mask was taken by the son of Madame Tussaud and displayed in Liverpool a few weeks later. His skeleton, together with a wallet fashioned from his skin, can still be seen in what is now called the History of Surgery Museum at Edinburgh's Surgeons' Hall.[1] Monro himself allegedly kept some hair from Burke's leg, and before disposing of the cadaver, dipped his quill in Burke's blood, "recording that 'this is written with the blood of Wm Burke [...] taken from his head on the 1st of Feb. 1829'." (Quoted in Rosner 2010: 244)

6 Of the other protagonists of the story, Hare – whom the Edinburgh mob would have torn to pieces after his release from prison – was smuggled out of Edinburgh by the authorities. He was last sighted in the West of Scotland, presumably on his way home to Ireland. As to Dr Robert Knox, he was not even called as a witness at Burke's trial, which again incensed the Edinburgh mob: a few days after the execution, it congregated in front of his house and burned him in effigy. Clearly, in the public's perception, justice had not been done and the case was not yet closed. An informal

inquest conducted by Knox's peers returned the carefully worded verdict of having acted in a "very incautious manner" (quoted in Rosner 2010: 255): the medical profession believed that, if Knox went down, he would take his colleagues with him. These may not have been guilty of acquiring their anatomical "subjects" from murderers, but their sources of supply were equally suspect. Although, in the century preceding the Burke and Hare case, anatomy had been established as one of the key medical disciplines and become central to the teaching of medicine, bodies on which anatomists could conduct research and which they could use for teaching purposes, were notoriously difficult to come by as only the bodies of murderers could be lawfully dissected. Hence, as Ruth Richardson puts it, human corpses underwent a process of "reification and commodification" (2000: 72). To some extent, the anatomists, together with their students, solved the problem by removing – "resurrecting" – freshly interred bodies from graves in local cemeteries. There, the corpses of the poor were particularly at risk: whereas wealthy families could afford double and triple coffins with zinc and lead linings, or else buried their dead in heavily fortified vaults, the bodies of the destitute, wrapped in their shrouds, were disposed of in shallow pits.[2]

7 Robert Knox himself, incidentally, appears to have disclaimed any responsibility as to the provenance of his specimens. Edinburgh historian Owen Dudley Edwards describes Knox's position as follows:

> Knox simply did not regard the Burke and Hare murders as criminal: on the contrary, he looked on them as an enlightened method of disposing of worthless derelicts with ultimate betterment to the more desirable segments of humanity by reason of the benefits conferred to the study of anatomy. (1980: 135)[3]

8 According to Edwards, it is, therefore, no coincidence that Knox's book *The Races of Men* of 1850 became one of the foundational texts of British imperial racism. The most penetrating comment on Knox can be read in the journal of Scottish historical novelist Walter Scott, who was among the crowd of spectators at Burke's execution:

> [Knox] cannot have it both ways: either he had his suspicions, and failed to stop the traffic; or he – *primus et incomparabilis* – was so ignorant of his art as to believe that every one of them died a natural death. (1936: 93-4; italics in the original)[4]

9 It is because of comments such as these that Caroline McCracken-Flesher argues in her *The Doctor Dissected. A Cultural Autopsy of the Burke & Hare Murders* (2012) that it might have been Scott who could have told the Burke and Hare story so as to instantly integrate it into Scottish culture: however, because he chose not to "bury the tale's unpleasant parts in acceptable story" he kept "exposed the tissue of memory that (should) interconnect doctor, students, and society across the bodies lying on Doctor Knox's dissecting slabs" (2012: 46). Instead, Scott bequeathed the task of exploring the relationship between the living and the dead bodies in the dissecting room to successive generations of Scottish writers: from Alexander Leighton's *The Court of Cacus; The Story of Burke and Hare* and David Pae's *Mary Paterson; or, the Fatal Error* in the 1860s to Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* in the 1990s, and from Henry Lonsdale's hagiographic *A Sketch of the Life and Writings of Robert Knox the Anatomist* of 1871 to James Bridie's *The Anatomist* of 1930. Tracing the transformations which the Burke and Hare narrative has undergone in these texts since 1828, McCracken-Flesher suggests that "the story of Burke and Hare has taught Scots to privilege not just the memories by which we live, but the disruptive experiences that undermine meaning." (2012: 23)

10 Ian Rankin is among the most recent authors whom McCracken-Flesher discusses in *The Doctor Dissected*; his "'Burke and Hare' novel" (2012: 225), *The Falls* (2001), is the twelfth

of his police procedural series featuring Edinburgh Detective Inspector John Rebus.[5] In the "Introduction" to the 2005 edition of the novel, Rankin recounts an anecdote about liaising with a French film crew at the recently opened Museum of Scotland on Chambers Street, where he is accosted by a member of staff who suggests that he go and have a look at the "little dolls". This is how he makes

> the acquaintance of the Arthur's Seat coffins. They are tucked away at the back of the fourth floor, in a section dedicated to religious beliefs and the afterlife. As soon as I saw them, I knew they would make a great story, especially as no one had come up with an incontrovertible interpretation of their meaning. (2005: xii)

11 The "little dolls" were discovered on the north-eastern slope of Arthur's Seat in 1836; placed in seventeen miniature coffins, which had been arranged in three tiers, they wore hand-sewn clothes, and had painted-on black boots. Of these seventeen coffins, which had initially been housed in a private collection, the eight remaining were gifted to the Museum of Scotland in 1901. What interpretations there are of their 'meaning' is rehearsed by historian and curator Jean Burchill, together with Rebus, during the latter's visit to the museum: witchcraft, good luck charms for sailors prior to sea voyages, or else surrogate, or mock, burials for the victims of Burke and Hare (Rankin 2005: 95-6). The latter theory, as Rankin explains in the "Afterword" to the 2005 edition of *The Falls*, has proved to be far the most likely (at any rate, the most popular):

> After the first draft of this book was written, I discovered that in 1999 the Museum of Scotland commissioned two American researchers, Dr Allen Simpson and Dr Sam Menefee of the University of Virginia, to examine the Arthur's Seat coffins and formulate a solution. They concluded that the most likely explanation was that the coffins had been made by a shoemaker acquaintance of murderers Burke and Hare, using a shoemaker's knife and brass fittings adapted from shoe buckles, the idea being to give the victims some vestige of Christian burial, since a dissected *corpus* could not be resurrected. (2005: 479)[6]

12 In *The Falls*, John Rebus and his colleagues investigate the disappearance of student Philippa Balfour, who, unlike the victims of Burke and Hare, *is* missed by her family and friends and whose body will eventually be found on Arthur's Seat. While the police are still looking for her, a miniature coffin, modelled on the Arthur's Seat coffins, turns up in a scenic spot outside Edinburgh, near the eponymous falls and the Balfour family estate. This coffin, it later transpires, has not been placed there by anyone associated with Philippa or her killer (her boyfriend, David Costello), but by a local potter trying to attract the tourist trade.

13 In the course of the investigation, John Rebus is alerted to the existence of yet another miniature coffin and eventually, of a whole set of them; aided by Jean Burchill, with whom he has become involved, he can align this set with the unexplained deaths of four women in various locations around Scotland over a period of more than three decades. Because of the Burke and Hare connection of the coffins, Rebus studies the Burke exhibits in the History of Surgery Museum, that is, the skeleton, the wallet and "a plaster cast of Burke's head – the marks of the hangman's noose still visible" (Rankin 2005: 135), and is introduced to portraits of Knox and his (fictitious) colleague Kennet Lovell by retired anatomist Donald Devlin, known to Rebus in his professional capacity:

> 'Sixteen murders,' Rebus said, 'in an area as confined as the West Port.' 'We can't imagine it happening these days, can we?' 'But these days we've got forensics, pathology…' Devlin unhooked the finger from his cummerbund and wagged it before him. 'Exactly,' he said. 'And we'd have had no pathological studies at all had

> it not been for the resurrectionists and the likes of Messrs Burke and Hare.' 'Is that why you're here? Paying homage?' (Rankin 2005: 136)

14 At this point, of course, Rebus does not yet know that Devlin's "homage" to his role models has already taken on a rather more sinister form. Devlin is the killer responsible for the deaths of the four women and has left, in his own words, the coffins as a "*memento mori*" for his randomly selected victims (Rankin 2005: 453), and to honour the memory of Knox and Lovell, the latter possibly another serial killer of women: "Who better", Devlin remarks, "than an anatomist to get away with murder?" (Rankin 2005: 446) When Jean Burchill, on a visit to Devlin, comes across his set of woodworking tools hidden underneath a table supposedly crafted by Lovell, Devlin very nearly murders her as well, and is, in turn, almost killed by Rebus.

15 From the perspective of the twenty-fourth Rebus novel, *A Heart Full of Headstones* (2022), *The Falls* exhibits all the features – features interrelated, and indeed, as will be shown below, mutually re-enforcing – for which the Rebus series is known. Although it is in the American hard-boiled novels of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett that setting first becomes, as Malcah Effron puts it, "the crucial component to writing reality" (2009: 330; see also Highmore 2005: 95), the protagonists of police procedurals inhabit similar, decidedly un-picturesque cityscapes; their job provides them with access to a wide range of heterogeneous sub-settings as well as to the socially and economically unequal milieus associated with them. Within their secure generic boundaries, police procedurals thus respond to real-time issues and developments not only in the protagonists' lives but also in the city and country in which they live. They can be used to convey a sense of place, especially when, as is the case for Rankin's Rebus novels, they unfold over many volumes:

> Simply put, 'sense of place' answers the question, what is it like. And the answer to that question includes all the physical and human characteristics of the place – the physical and human landscape, the ways in which people interact, the formal and informal institutions that structure the society, including family, church, and political and economic institutions. (Hausladen 2000: 23)

16 Rebus novels have variously highlighted environmental problems caused by the North Sea oil industry, sectarianism, police corruption and drugs and people trafficking, along the timeline of the first Scottish independence referendum of 1979, Devolution (1997), the building of the new Scottish Parliament (1999-2004), or the G8 summit at Gleneagles (2005). As a result, these novels, in their near cartographic accuracy, evince a high degree of both spatial and temporal real-world referentiality (Anderson and Loxley 2016: 58).

17 In *The Falls*, Rebus traverses Edinburgh from New Town to Old Town and back again, and ventures into the East Lothian countryside, with its upmarket commuter residences, but also run-down 1930s council estates. Most conspicuously, though, he pays visits to institutions such as the History of Surgery Museum and the Museum of Scotland, while his colleague Siobhan Clarke has a meeting at the Botanic Gardens: all three sites are dedicated to the gathering and dissemination of knowledge, the first and third linked to New Science and Enlightenment projects, the second adjacent to what is now known as the "Old College" of the University of Edinburgh (a building completed by architect William Henry Playfair between 1819 and 1827, only a few months before the Burke and Hare case was heard). This interest in the history of Edinburgh and, specifically, its often violent past and its legacy of crime, is another typical feature of the Rebus series: references to Burke and Hare also occur in *Set in Darkness* (2000) and

Resurrection Men (2001) (Wanner 2015: 144-5; McCracken-Flesher 2012: 221), while other notorious Edinburgh criminals, Thomas Weir and William "Deacon" Brodie,[7] are alluded to, respectively, in *Fleshmarket Close* (2004) and *Knots and Crosses* (1987).

18 Like other crime fiction, then, Rankin's Rebus series is obsessed with space and time, that is, with establishing the spatio-temporal coordinates of a criminal action. While the spatial dimension of this criminal action can be pictured as a series of concentric circles, with the actual scene of crime at their centre and the culture in which it takes place as their outer periphery, its temporal configuration is axial in nature: axes, unlike vectors, are not unidirectional and, unlike bounded lines, they do not terminate at fixed points but extend beyond them, so that, from the starting-point of the actual criminal action, one needs to trace, in one direction, its pre-history (which can go far back into the past) and in the other, its post-history of detection, punishment and the restoration of social order. Additionally, correlations between the space(s) and time(s) of the text and the space(s) and time(s) of the world inevitably become intertextual in nature, as fictional characters[8] explore Edinburgh in the footsteps of their (real and fictitious) predecessors and real crimes circulate between a wide range of literary texts, predominantly from the canon of Scottish literature. The term "circulation" is used here in the sense in which Stephen Greenblatt, following Jacques Derrida, applies it in his seminal article "Towards a Poetics of Culture", namely, to describe "a powerful and effective oscillation between the establishment of distinct discursive domains and the collapse of these domains into one another" (1989: 8). Other crimes which circulate between canonical texts are, as has already been indicated, those of Weir and Brodie.[9] Arguably, given the phenomenon of the Rebus tours, it is also "real" people who participate in the interplay between textual and "real" spaces: starting in 2000 and continually modified, the "Hidden Edinburgh" walking tour to sites associated with the Rebus novels now includes Rebus's police station, St. Leonard's, while the "Secret Edinburgh" tour also takes in the city mortuary.

19 In *The Falls*, Rankin's contribution to intertextual processes accumulating down the generations, is – with the exception of his re-circulation of the Burke and Hare material – slightly less obvious than in some of his other novels, but, as Devlin reminds Rebus, Lovell, the fictitious anatomist,

> 'was a craftsman, too. He worked with wood, as did Deacon William Brodie, of whom you will have heard.' 'Gentleman by day, housebreaker by night.' Rebus acknowledged. 'And perhaps the model for Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde.* As a child, Stevenson had a wardrobe in his room, one of Brodie's creations...' (2005: 138).

20 Another Stevenson reference is provided by Philippa Balfour's last name, which she shares with the protagonist of Stevenson's *Kidnapped* (1886) and *Catriona* (1893), while her mother's maiden-name is Gil-Martin, after the mysterious doppelgänger figure in James Hogg's novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*.[10]

21 It has frequently been pointed out in Rankin criticism (see for instance Plain 2007; Ward 2010; Verrier 2016) that there is a thematic and structural characteristic which crime fiction, whether hard-boiled or police procedural, and Scottish canonical texts such as Hogg's *Justified Sinner* (1824), Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) or Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1960) share, namely, an interest in dualities: dualities, furthermore, which they typically present in bifurcated narratives of good and evil, appearance and reality, public and private, or day and night. In the context of the Scottish literary canon, these dualities are frequently subsumed under

the – notoriously controversial – term of "Caledonian antisyzygy", that is, of polarities within an entity. Coined by G. Gregory Smith as early as 1919, the term may, as Matthew Hart has suggested, still be useful for literary history once it has been stripped of its ethnonational(ist) connotations and considered as a "formal and taxonomical notion" to categorise a "tradition characterised by contrariety." (2010: 69-70)

22 However, in Rankin's novels – and in many other Edinburgh-centred texts – it is not only genre fiction and canonical Scottish literature which can be seen as interconnected, but also genre fiction and the Scottish literary canon on the one hand, and spatial and temporal real-world referentiality on the other so that, according to Anderson and Loxley,

> [t]he Edinburgh that might be evoked through this intertextual and referential toponymic play undoubtedly belongs amongst the sites classed by Eric Prieto as 'the *hauts lieux* of the literary tradition: places that have a distinct cultural and topographical profile and that have given rise to a whole body of literature.' (2016: 59)[11]

23 Regarding temporal real-world referentiality, configurations of split or double identities can be found in Edinburgh's criminal histories from the original court records to twenty-first reworkings of the material. What changes across time – in a dialectic of continuity and discontinuity – are the terms in and through which duality is conceptualised. Early Thomas Weir and Deacon Brodie narratives employ, for Weir, metaphors taken from clothing – the coat which conceals the sinner's hypocrisy, the veil behind which he tries to hide from the eyes of God – while, for Brodie, the central antithesis is, for obvious reasons, between his legal day-time and illegal night-time activities. By contrast, what is emphasised in early responses to the case of Burke and Hare as it unfolds are the antitheses between more or less advanced levels of civilisation, and within the Enlightenment project of the former, between scientific progress and respect for the individual human life. To quote, once again, Walter Scott:

> *Here* is a doctor who is able to take down who is able to take down the whole clockwork of the human frame, and may in time find some way or repairing and putting it together again; and *there* is Burke with the body [of his] murdered countrywoman on his back, and her blood on his hands, asking his price from the learned carcass-butcher. (1936: 128; italics in the text).

24 Considering spatial real-world referentiality, these antitheses are (literally) grounded in the changing topographies of Edinburgh: until the mid-eighteenth century, their physical embodiment was the socially stratified multi-story tenement of what is now called the Old Town, with its aboveground floors open to view, and its cramped vaults out of sight (Cork 2014: 133-4). Since the construction of the neo-classicist New Town (from the late 1760s onwards), they have come to be represented, horizontally, by the juxtaposition of Old and New Towns, facing one another across what was the North Loch (Godard Desmarest 2019b: 13-28; Godard Desmarest 2019a); vertically, the views from South Bridge (completed in 1788) and from George IV Bridge (constructed between 1827 and 1836) reveal the Cowgate far below. The latter was, for much of the eighteenth and nineteenth, and indeed, into the twentieth centuries, an overcrowded slum area which was home to Edinburgh's Irish immigrant community. From the Cowgate, it was only a few hundred yards, across the Grass Market, to Burke's and Hare's dwellings in West Port's Tanner's Close. Robert Knox, by contrast, lived in a posh suburb of neo-classical houses just south of the Old Town.

25 And yet: dualities have the unfortunate habit of collapsing into one another, in spite of the authors' best efforts to shore them up. Crime cuts across these dualities and destabilises them in the process, as when medical progress depends upon the poor, who will at least initially not profit from it, yielding up their dead bodies – bodies which are, in turn, consanguineous with those of the anatomists who dissect them. Quoting, once again, *The Falls*' serial killer, New Town resident Donald Devlin (who, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, has been given an Irish last name),[12] "we'd have had no pathological studies at all had it not been for the resurrectionists and the likes of Messrs Burke and Hare." (Rankin 2005: 136) – and, one might add, no stories to tell, no cases to dissect.

26 Rebus, standing (of all places) on North Bridge, which links Old and New Towns across the valley where the North Loch used to be, both subscribes to the duality paradigm – appearance versus reality – and hints at its instabilities when he muses:

> To him, Edinburgh had become a state of mind, a juggling of criminal thoughts, and baser instincts. He liked its size, its compactness. He liked its bars. But its outward show had ceased to impress him a long time ago. Jean wrapped her coat tightly around her. 'Everywhere you look, there's some story, some little piece of history.' She looked at him and he nodded agreement, but he was remembering all the suicides he'd dealt with, people who'd jumped from North Bridge maybe because they couldn't see the same city that Jean did. (Rankin 2005: 153)[13]

27 On 2 July 2022, a new exhibition opened at the National Museum of Scotland. Entitled *Anatomy: A Matter of Life and Death*, it invited its visitors to "explore the history of anatomical study, from artistic explorations by Leonardo da Vinci to the Burke and Hare Murders". As has been shown in this paper, for Edinburgh, the Burke and Hare murders are, quite literally, a matter of life and death: while Edinburgh's criminal past shapes – and its unresolved conflicts haunt – its present, any reconstruction of this past is, conversely, shaped by present concerns. Furthermore, in Edinburgh, this past is, perhaps uniquely, inscribed in its physical environment, its cityscape scarred by the traumatic events for which it provided, and continues to provide, a setting. One of the most pressing of these concerns is the quest for a stable Scottish national identity, a concept which Rankin, like many other Scottish authors past and present, interrogates by drawing on the Scottish literary canon and on traditional perceptions of Edinburgh (Heyl 2005). It is an interest in dualities which these two conventions share – and for which, in the case of Burke and Hare, they have found a perfect embodiment. Perhaps, then, every culture gets the crimes it deserves, so that, as Eva Erdmann has observed, "[t]he reading of crime novels becomes an ethnographic reading, the scene of crime becomes the locus genius of the cultural tragedy." (2009: 19)

Coda

28 When, in *The Falls*, Jean Burchill discovers Devlin's woodworking tools under the Lovell table, she has bent down to pick up the missing piece of an Edinburgh puzzle, which is a slightly too obvious gesture towards her role as an unofficial co-investigator. As a historian, she shares, with Rebus, a professional interest in the material traces of the past; in fact, in an earlier Rebus novel, *Black and Blue* of 1997, Rebus, who "lived in people's pasts", claims to have become a historian (Rankin 1997: 127). But this same professional interest is also shared by anatomists dissecting a corpse – and by crime novelists such as Rankin: intent on probing the underside (or even underbelly) of

society and on exposing the dark skeletons beneath the flesh, their narratives range across the sites of body and city – and of the city *as* body.

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NOTES

1. In an earlier incarnation, this was the Museum of Comparative Anatomy and Pathology, established in 1699, of which Knox had been one of the "Conservators".

2. Churchyards near medical schools, such as Edinburgh's Greyfriars Kirkyard, are still full of these heavily fortified family plots, while less affluent citizens could hire so-called mort-safes (also still in evidence at Greyfriars), iron contraptions which were placed over coffins and padlocked. Edinburgh's New Calton and St. Cuthbert cemeteries have watchtowers.

3. In addition to Edwards' (1980) and Rosner's (2010), the most comprehensive (recent) account of the Burke and Hare case and its aftermath is Bailey's (2002); see also Crawford (2015: 159-64).

4. Scott also discusses the Burke and Hare case in a number of his letters, for instance to his sons Charles and Walter (Grierson 1936: 89 and 93-4, respectively), and to Irish fellow novelist Maria Edgeworth (Scott 1936: 124-8).

5. McCracken-Flesher links *The Falls* to two other Rankin novels, *Set in Darkness* (2000) and *Resurrection Men* (2001), the eleventh and thirteenth in the Rebus series, arguing that, in all three novels, Rankin "works his way through the issues underlying the national metaphor posed by Scott and enacted through Burke and Hare." (2012: 221)

6. For a summary of the Simpson/Menefee findings see Dash (2013). In 2014, the Museum of Scotland received a package containing a replica of one of coffins, entitled "XVIII", and with a label quoting from Robert Louis Stevenson's Burke and Hare-inspired short story "The Body Snatcher" of 1884 ("The Mystery of the Miniature Coffins" 2022)

7. Thomas Weir (1599-1670) was a Covenanter executed for bestiality, incest and adultery, with a posthumous reputation as warlock. William Brodie (1741-88) was "Deacon" (president) of the Incorporation of Wrights and Masons and city councillor. He was able to use his day-time activities as a cabinet maker in Edinburgh to pursue criminal activities at night and break into the houses of his clients.

8. For a particularly striking example of a fictional character – Rebus – walking in the footsteps of, in this case, a "real" person, Robert Louis Stevenson, see *Knots and Crosses* (Rankin 1987: 218-9) and a passage from Stevenson's *Edinburgh: Picturesque Notes* which Robert Crawford discusses in *On Glasgow and Edinburgh* (2015: 66). For additional references to Stevenson in *The Falls* see Nicole Neveling (2006: 122-3).

9. For further examples see Anderson and Loxley 2016 and the website created as a result of the Palimpsest digital humanities project "Litlog: Edinburgh".

10. Rankin himself has, of course, repeatedly acknowledged the impact of the Scottish literary canon on his own work, citing, in addition to Stevenson and Hogg, Muriel Spark (see for instance Rankin 2006: 85-92; Geherin 2008: 123-35)

11. The embedded quote is taken from Eric Prieto (2011: 22).

12. As has David Costello, Philippa Balfour's boyfriend/killer, who lives in the Old Town, while Philippa, thanks to her very wealthy family background, is one of Devlin's New Town neighbours.

13. Andrew Monnickendam, incidentally, has suggested that the instability of the duality paradigm is inherent in the very term "Caledonian antisyzygy", the first component of which implies cohesion, the second its opposite. (2011: 100)

ABSTRACTS

The cultural profile of the literary *haut lieu* that is Edinburgh is marked by a strong interest in the violent history of the city, specifically, in its legacy of crime. This legacy is preserved in a variety of material and immaterial archives, including a substantial body of fictional and non-fictional literature, and inscribed in the Edinburgh cityscape. It is also commodified so as to attract the international tourist trade. Using as its prime example Ian Rankin’s 2001 Rebus novel *The Falls*, this paper sketches the cultural history of one notorious criminal case, that of William Burke and William Hare. In particular, it discusses the spatio-temporal referentiality of texts about Burke and Hare and situates them in the wider context of the Scottish literary tradition.

L’identité culturelle de ce haut lieu littéraire qu’est Édimbourg se caractérise par un intérêt marqué pour l'histoire violente de la ville, et en particulier pour son passé criminel. Cet héritage est conservé dans un ensemble d'archives matérielles et immatérielles, y compris un corpus substantiel de littérature fictive et non fictive, et est inscrit dans le paysage urbain d'Édimbourg. Cet héritage est également exploité pour atteindre le marché du tourisme international. Utilisant comme principal exemple le roman Rebus *The Falls* de Ian Rankin (2001), cet article esquisse l'histoire culturelle d'une affaire criminelle notoire, celle de William Burke et William Hare. Il analyse, en particulier, le cadre spatio-temporel des textes de Burke et Hare qu’il situe dans le contexte plus large de la tradition littéraire écossaise.

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Mots-clés: sentiment d’appartenance au lieu, référencement spatio-temporel, intertextualité, procédure policière, littérature écossaise, « disjonction écossaise », histoire de la médecine, dissection
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