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***When I am Laid in Earth*: a novel, and critical
commentary investigating ‘Evocations of the Gothic:
Creating “The Great Wrong Place’ and Material Evidence
in Contemporary Crime Fiction.**

A thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Creative Writing

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VOLUME 2: Critical Commentary

Abstract:

The thesis is in two parts: Creative Writing (a novel) plus a Critical Commentary. The novel is an illustrated crime thriller with three male protagonists. In 2016, historical novelist, Cathy Adams is murdered at her isolated home; in 1851, twenty-five indentured mill girls disappear without trace. How these events are linked is revealed through the documents and images illustrating the text; the reader is encouraged to become detective. Set in an isolated West Yorkshire mill town, the story follows the lives of the three men in Cathy's life - her son, ex-husband and her father-in-law - as they seek their versions of the truth. This is a novel of palimpsests, about the rewriting of history and the evidence that the dead leave behind.

The critical commentary is split into the four main areas explored through the writing process: establishing the key lineage of Domestic Noir in relation to Sensation Fiction and the use of Gothic tropes in the modern cultural setting; the creation of landscape and domestic settings with their own narratives, and finally, the nature, revelation and interpretation of material evidence in crime fiction.

The original contribution to knowledge in the creative work lies in the clues presented in the narrative and the included digital images; these give the female victim agency and reveal otherwise unexplored aspects of the male characters' lives.

In the Commentary, original contribution is found in the critical and personal examination of the importance of landscape and the 'Great Wrong Place' to crime fiction; it also offers new insights into the relationships between evidence, narrative, image and text in the digital age.

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INTRODUCTION

When the call comes, I am standing on a hill high above Halifax, a plateau of green, dropping down to Claremount Road. It's the end of November and temperatures have plummeted. A bitter wind scythes through my coat. The location is important: High Sunderland Road, or what remains of it. To my right stands a ramshackle cowshed, an iron gate, an old farm track; to my left waterlogged fields slope down to Bradford Old Road. Beyond, in the dip, lie Southowram and Law Hill. I fumble for my mobile, fingers clumsy with cold and hear the news I've been waiting for. My house in Hebden Bridge has been sold. It's November 22nd 2016. The same day I finish what I think is the final draft of my PhD novel, *When I am Laid in Earth*, marking the end of a journey that has taken thirty-three years. This commentary on the writing of this novel is in some ways an exegesis of these years, for as the project developed, it became clear that the emerging areas of research had been clamouring for attention all my adult life.

The research splits into four main topics: the first is the development of the crime thriller novel from its beginnings in the 19th century detective novel to its recent incarnations of Domestic Noir, a term I first heard used by Julia Crouch, in relation to her own work at the Harrogate Crime Fiction Festival, 2014. Her blog page states:

‘In a nutshell, Domestic Noir takes place primarily in homes and workplaces, concerns itself largely (but not exclusively) with the female experience, is based around relationships and takes as its base a broadly feminist view that the domestic sphere is a challenging and sometimes dangerous prospect for its inhabitants...’ (Crouch, 2013).

This view is often preoccupied with the depiction of woman as the hapless victim of violent men. It seems incongruent with the fact that the novels are largely written and read by contemporary women in the years since the third wave of feminism, which emphasises ‘the importance of individuality and diverse personal experiences’ when defining women’s politics. In doing so, these writers have ‘... promoted the belief that there is no set way to be feminist.’ (Mahoney, 2016).

The underlying subject matter of Domestic Noir fiction, of women being imprisoned, raped and murdered, in common with Victorian pot-boilers, invoke the fairy tale, *Bluebeard* as transcribed by Perrault in the seventeenth century (1697). A young woman falls in love and marries a rich man with blue facial hair. After a month of marriage, he informs his young wife

that he is going away on business. He gives her the keys to every room in his mansion, and access to his most valuable belongings but she is forbidden to enter a closet on the ground floor. In his absence, she opens the closet to find the corpses of her predecessors. She is horrified and locks the door. Upon his return, Bluebeard guesses that the door has been opened and tells her that she must die for her disobedience. There is a happy ending, but one that most forget. The young woman is rescued by her brothers who run Bluebeard through, and she inherits the house and everything in it.

In common with other popular folk¹ tales: ‘Cinderella’, ‘Red Riding Hood’, ‘Snow White’, the main female character crosses a threshold into a forbidden realm, where she faces a terrible punishment. In such folk tales, the heroine is rescued by a prince or a woodcutter who she marries, possibly losing the power she gained during the story. This model of the heroine’s trajectory has continued. Despite demonstrating more agency than a folk heroine, the modern Domestic Noir heroine is just as likely to be the victim of imprisonment, sexual violence or murder. Emma Chapman’s *How to be a Good Wife*, (2013) Paula Hawkins *The Girl on the Train* (2016), Linda Green’s *After I’ve Gone* and Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* (2012) all feature female characters who are persecuted by men. This suggests that women thriller writers in the twenty-first century have identified and wish to explore a deep-seated cultural belief in the powerlessness of women. Also, that their readers are thrilled and perhaps informed by such works.

In Chapter 1, the link between these early folk tales, through the gothic fiction of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the ‘marriage thriller’ films of the first half of the twentieth century (Joyce, Sutton, 2018, p.2) and finally to the contemporary domestic noir thriller is examined. These themes are revisited in Chapter 3, which focuses in more detail on the role of sexual politics in Gothic and Domestic noir fiction.

Back to 1983. I am nineteen, still living at home, an art student at Liverpool Polytechnic – in John Lennon’s old college. Mid-way through my foundation year, I am looking for somewhere to complete a degree in Fine Art. I’m hooked on Pop Art – Warhol and Hockney. New York is out of the question, so it has to be somewhere in Yorkshire. I travel up to Leeds with my boyfriend, Alan, in his dad’s old Renault 12; it is the colour of butter, with four bald tyres and

¹ ‘The term folk tale is reserved for any tale deriving from or existing in oral tradition and is generally preferred by folklorists and anthropologists. Literary scholars tend to use the word fairy tale to refer to a genre of prose literature, which may or may not be based on oral tradition.’ (Zipes, 2005) Good ref but why highlighted text?

only one working light. Crossing the Pennines, I feel a chill, looking out across Saddleworth Moor, thinking of Hindley and Brady and buried children. The heath is all ochre and umber, a sepia landscape so desolate it could be on the moon. We are flagged down by a couple of bored traffic policemen who tut over the tyres and refuse to believe that Alan's dad is called John Thomas. The light is fading, and I am gripped by an irrational terror that we will be stuck here on that grim stretch of the M62 all night, prey to all those Cathys and Heathcliffs and murdered children.

'Just drive!' I say to Alan when one of the policemen returns to the panda to take a radio call. 'I can't stand this place!'

Alan, the son of a bank inspector is as straight as they come, but he puts his foot down and roars off towards Leeds. Maybe he felt it too, that sense that the moors aren't just out there, they are invasive, a mental as well as a physical landscape. The police did not follow. It was my first encounter with what I later learned was *the sublime* and it produced in me a sensation Edmund Burke described back in 1756, a '... state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror' (Burke, 1757, cited in Landow, 1988) Saddleworth Moor may not be brimming with the Alpine splendour to which Burke was referring, but in the fading light of an autumn evening, it comes pretty close.

Months later, I am a bone fide Leeds Fine art student ensconced in a bedsit in Headingley, a stone's throw from Alma Road where the Yorkshire Ripper took his last victim, Jacqueline Hill. The memory of the murders is still raw. Yorkshire is full of eye witnesses and female students are advised to walk in pairs, even though Sutcliffe has been locked up for a couple of years. My art is all ruined abbeys in thick monochrome impasto: Casper David Friedreich meets Frank Auerbach. Since the M62 scare back in February, both my grandfathers have died, my beloved great aunt has developed throat cancer and my dad has left my mum for a woman he interviewed as his PA. She never even got the job. The foundations of my life are crumbling away. I am living on the breadline; my wealthy father refuses to relinquish any grant top-up money as he wanted me to go to Oxford and study English. I get a job, rag-rolling kitchens, and must be an artist at night.

But I love my bedsit life and painting. I love the Yorkshire moors which are never very far away. They fascinate and terrify in equal measure.

Since first reading *Wuthering Heights*, aged thirteen, Cathy Earnshaw and Heathcliff's brooding adoration of her had captured my imagination. My first trip to Haworth happens

during my first term in Leeds. I visit the Brontë parsonage with a couple of friends and marvel at the miniscule notebooks Charlotte, Emily, Ann and Branwell kept in their childhood, detailing the kingdoms of Angria and Gondal. Inspired, we decide to walk up to Top Withens, the supposed site of *Wuthering Heights*. We are foolish. It is mid-afternoon, mid-November, too late to walk there and back before night falls. We three townies set off in high spirits, negotiating the steep path along the moors and singing Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights* at the top of our voices. We are half way there when the winter sun plunges behind the steep hills and the temperature plummets. A black cloud hovers over the moortops, rain begins to hammer down. Seized again by the same sense of awe I experienced on the M62, this time the fear is a tangible presence. I am outdoors, unprotected, with the moors lowering around me, threatening to squeeze the life out of me. I am sure that Emily Brontë knew this feeling well. It is all-encompassing, oppressive but somehow exhilarating; the certain knowledge of an ancient power held by a dangerous, unpredictable landscape, a power that will be around long after you have ceased. As Mr Lockwood remarks in chapter 1:

‘Wuthering’ being a significant provincial adjective, descriptive of the atmospheric tumult to which its station is exposed in stormy weather. Pure, bracing ventilation they must have up there at all times, indeed: one may guess the power of the north wind blowing over the edge, by the excessive slant of a few stunted firs at the end of the house; and by a range of gaunt thorns all stretching their limbs one way, as if craving alms of the sun’ (Brontë, 1847, p. 2).

My friends and I never made it to Top Withens that day. It was too dark, and we were too frightened. (Years later, when I finally walked up there, the modest ruin of a farmhouse was deeply disappointing.) Without consultation, the three of us turned and ran as fast as we could back to Haworth and sat in the Black Bull (where Branwell supposedly sank into alcoholic decline) drinking Black Sheep Ale and laughing at our irrational fear. Years before I conceived *Laid in Earth*, the setting had its stranglehold on me. I continued to paint abbeys and dark clouds and stunted trees, wanting to encapsulate that raw terror.

It was the deluge of ‘Nordic Noir’ series on television that resurrected these memories: *Wallander* (2012), *The Bridge* (2013), *Trapped* (2016); Saturday nights were spent watching TV murderers tracked through acres of darkness as detectives’ breath billowed in the freezing air and secrets were imbibed with an evening whisky. The lingering shots of brooding seascapes or endless flat fields, leached of colour, felt curiously familiar. I became obsessed by these series. They invoked in me the same thrill as *Wuthering Heights* and the romantic

poets and painters I so admired as a student. This was a visual thrill, as much about the setting as the story. The idea of regional crime stories appealed greatly. The flat landscape and long winters of northern Europe give rise to very different crime stories to those explored by, for instance, Andrea Camilleri's *Inspector Montalbano* mysteries in Sicily (2012). It seemed evident that the geology, geography, weather and lifestyles of a specific location would affect the indigenous population, the crimes they commit and the way they are investigated.

In Chapter 2, the role of settings is explored. Films and television thrillers such as *Wallander* or *Hinterland* (2014) often employ a whole country or landscape (Sweden or Wales, respectively) as the 'great wrong place', as W.H. Auden referred to Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles settings, creating an atmosphere as constricted as any interior space (Auden in Rafferty, 2016). In Domestic Noir novels, however, the home is often used as the stage for violence, with suburbia looming large as a place of oppression and menace. I wanted to set up a tension between the small and confined domestic space and the open and sublime landscape in *Laid in Earth*. By choosing a real-life setting I knew well, incorporating aspects of its history and making this the backdrop of a failed marriage, I hoped to create a sense of the pressure that could lead to crime.

The setting is inspired by the Calder valley landscape around Hebden Bridge, only a valley or two away from Haworth, surrounded by its own eerie moors. In 2006 I had moved there on a whim, having visited the town on day-trips, made the pilgrimage to Sylvia Plath's grave up at Heptonstall, seen Ted Hughes' birthplace down the road in Mytholmroyd and enjoyed the Arts Festival. It is a place with a reputation for alternative lifestyles, for inclusion. Many professionals live there and the scenery, in the summer, is beautiful.

But there is another side to the valley. Many shops still display the tattered poster bearing the face of thirteen-year-old Lindsay Jo Rimer who disappeared back in 1993. The case is still open. Her body has never been found. Stories of the unnatural number of suicides in the young male population proliferate – many due to drugs and alcohol abuse (Corner, L. 2009). There are several contemporary witches' covens and older tales have been uncovered, of Victorian children indentured to local mills and killed through overwork. The landscape itself feels haunted. The town is jammed in the bottom of a steep valley, and in summer 2012, it began to rain, for days and days. People joked about building an ark, but the skies remained black. On the afternoon of July 9th, my back garden turned into a water feature. At the front, the road was a river. A pram bobbed by. Flood sirens screamed across the valley as it filled up like a bowl. Water lapped at my back door. I joined others on the street where we waded to the

worst affected homes armed with mops and brushes, a pathetic human attempt against a torrent on a biblical scale.

The water eventually receded, and no one was killed but my love of the place was quickly turning to fear. The deaths, the magic, and now the flood all began to coalesce into the setting and background for *Laid in Earth*.

In Chapter 3, the treatment of women in Domestic Noir contemporary thrillers links the idea of a setting like Hebden Bridge, that exerts a negative influence on its residents, with the nineteenth century preoccupation with the Gothic, defined as ‘... a language, often an anti-historicising language, which provides writers with the critical means of transferring an idea of the otherness of the past to the present.’ (Sage and Smith, 1996, pp.1).

This ‘otherness’ in the context of the contemporary thriller is self-evident. Crime and the circumstances leading up to it plunge the reader into a murky world where nothing is quite as it seems on the surface. The genesis of crime is always rooted in the – often distant – past. In this chapter, the use of Gothic themes and their influence on the structure and motivation in contemporary thrillers is explored.

As I was writing *Laid in Earth*, two real life Gothic crime dramas were unfolding in the news. The first was the attempt to recover the bodies of up to eight hundred babies that had allegedly been buried in a series of tunnels at a convent home for unmarried mothers in Tuam, Ireland. This notion of ‘otherness’ certainly seemed to apply here. The babies were buried beneath what later became a children’s playground. Some of the skeletons were found by locals in 1975, and a small shrine erected (Jordan, S. 2015).

The second drama was the Jimmy Savile case, which dates right back to the 1960s and 1970s. The revelations of his abuse of children, the old, the sick, even the dead, shocked the world. And this was close to home. Savile attempted to force himself on one of my friends when she was a ten-year-old audience member on the popular BBC television programme, *Jim’ll Fix It*, but no one believed her at the time. A student of mine showed me a photograph in which a clearly aroused Savile presents her brother with a badge. But Savile was not alone: members of the clergy had been abusing children in their care for years, there were teachers, scout masters, anyone it seemed, any *man*, in authority could abuse that authority.

There have, of course, been murderous and abusive women throughout history. Criminals such as Rose West and Myra Hindley, however, operated with a man and, in both cases, there is evidence that they were sexually abused as children (by men) and that men coerced them into abuse as adults (Sanghani 2015). There is a far more overwhelming record

of male abusers and in recent years there has seemed no end to the revelations. The ‘otherness’ of the past lies at the very heart of British society – the BBC, the judiciary, the police, all those who turned a blind eye to behaviour that today is deemed reprehensible. A Pandora’s box of the past has been opened and the lid will never be slammed down again.

It became apparent that many real-life news stories had a sense of Bluebeard about them. Jimmy Savile was a Bluebeard; the buried babies are victims of a Bluebeard society, albeit an institutional one. If contraception had been available to young women in Ireland at the time of their babies’ deaths, or, if the Catholic Church had not viewed pregnancy outside marriage as a sin, then there wouldn’t have been a convent home in the first place.

Hebden Bridge had also begun to feel a little like Bluebeard’s chamber, the landscape concealing stories of violence and death. Maybe the Bluebeard story had more resonance in our own times than I had previously given credit for. Maybe it was in our own homes. The impact of contemporary austerity measures on women of my own generation, brought up with the ‘superwoman’ myth (M.H. Shaevitz, 1984) was being examined by writers such as Crouch, Roberta Garrett, Tracey Jenner and Angie Voela. They mooted that clever, talented women were being incarcerated in relationships they could not afford to end, and this meant that some contemporary households were becoming pressure cookers of seething resentment. These theories will be discussed in Chapter 3.

The final area of research, discussed in Chapter 4, that of ways in which material evidence is revealed in crime fiction, was inspired by the 2012 Leveson Inquiry in which *News of the World* editor, Rebekah Brooks, and her journalist colleagues were questioned over their methods of obtaining information for newspaper articles. Phone messages, emails and other documentation were brought before the court and the public as evidence of their hacking (or breaking into) private communications.

On social media, intimate details of personal lives can be found. On the internet generally, bank account details, emails, and every website we ever visit can be traced. Unlike the babies of the Tuan Convent or their mothers, people living now, even those of modest means or intelligence, will leave often intimate evidence of their existence long after their death. In the Anthony Burgess Centre in Manchester, the writer’s typewriter is on display, alongside some of the many letters he wrote and kept, his books and other artefacts. Burgess was a prolific writer and left far more evidence of his life than others who died before the internet became

widely used by the public; but still, his traces are modest compared to many ordinary people now. Those who write blogs, use social media and email, generate more evidence of their lives than any recorder of a previous generation. Their writings, personal, creative, professional, are all out there on the world wide web, as are photographs – some of which we may not know have been taken, snapped by passers-by on their phones or on CCTV. Perhaps our very identity is now more clearly evidenced in our online persona than our real life one. Recently, a friend re-joined Twitter after a two-year absence, a period which saw a drastic reduction in his business bookings and his losing touch with many friends and colleagues. His reconnection with social media resulted in comments such as ‘we thought you’d retired’ or worse, ‘that you had died’.

There is a challenge with all this material generated; there is no quality control, no one to verify its authenticity. It is difficult to deduce reality from fiction. How would a detective sift through it? Do we need a detective at all, or can the public, the reader, do this work? Chapter 4 explores the construction of narrative from the images and documents – real and fabricated - garnered from social media, newspaper articles, photographs and other digital traces.

On Boxing day 2015, when Hebden Bridge flooded again, I decided to move away. I sold my house on November 22nd 2016: High Sunderland Road is just up the hill from my new house, leading to the site of a huge mansion that used to overlook Halifax. There are few photographs left, as it was demolished in 1951 by the town council. The remaining pictures, drawings and aerial photos show a foreboding place with black castellations, a doorway writhing with primitive carvings of naked men. The appearance of this house – it was depicted in John Horner’s *Buildings of the Town and Parish of Halifax*, a publication to which Emily Brontë’s employer at Law Hill school subscribed (Broadhead, 2000, pp. 52-55) – its proximity to Law Hill, on the opposite hillside and even some details of the interior, indicate that this was a major contributing inspiration behind *Wuthering Heights*. The inscription around the south door of High Sunderland read: ‘Patria Domus Optima coelum’ or ‘Heaven is the last country, the best home’. This may be echoed in the novel. Catherine Earnshaw’s ghost, of course, returns to her old home foreshadowed in a powerful nightmare she relates to Nelly earlier in the narrative when she says: ‘heaven did not seem to be my home’.

Although *Laid in Earth* has only a tenuous link – that of the landscape – to *Wuthering Heights*, in atmosphere it informs the whole narrative. Brontë’s novel has exerted a pull over my life and the research for this project. How apt, then, that as the novel is finished, I find out

that I will be living in a house with such a close connection to one of Emily Brontë's likely sources of inspiration.

1. FROM WILKIE COLLINS TO DOMESTIC NOIR

In a review written in the January 1927 issue of *The Criterion*, T.S Eliot claimed that ‘all good detective fiction tends to return and approximate to the practice of Wilkie Collins’ (Grimstad, 2016). Eliot’s point is further unpacked by John Mullen in a review of Paula Hawkins’s, *Girl on the Train* (2016): ‘Hawkins’s novel is one recent, hugely successful incarnation of a type of fiction that Collins invented.’

Girl on a Train is the story of Rachel Watson, an alcoholic thirty-two-year-old. Having been sacked from her job, she continues to take the train to work to spy on her former husband, Tom, and his new wife, Anna. During these journeys she becomes obsessed by an apparently happy couple, Megan and Scott, who live nearby. She is shocked to see Megan kissing another man, Kamal, a therapist. When Megan disappears, Rachel becomes implicated in their story due to her drunken harassment of her ex-husband, which she cannot remember. Later, when Megan’s body is found, Rachel contacts Kamal and goes into therapy, believing he is something to do with her death. It is then that she begins to understand Tom’s manipulation of her.

Mullen’s article largely concerns the technical decisions employed by Collins and Hawkins – the creation of multiple narrators, the ‘literary complexity’ of the plots and the reinvention of the ‘sensation’ novel. The rise in popularity of this type of literature in the 1860s was defined by Winifred Hughes who suggested that the sensation genre concerns: ‘... a kind of civilized melodrama, modernized and domesticated [...] a middle-class Newgate, featuring spectacular crime unconnected with the usual criminal classes’ (Hughes, 1980, pp.16).

This is certainly true of Hawkins’ novel, set in contemporary London, involving professional, well-educated characters and their sordid secrets which lead to murder. In *Laid in Earth*, the characters are also professional, a writer and an historian. Hawkins, however, involves another much-used trope of the ‘sensation’ genre – that of ‘gaslighting’, the psychological manipulation of one character (usually a woman), by another (usually a man). In *Girl on a Train* Rachel is controlled by Tom, as Laura in Collins’s *The Woman in White*, incarcerated in an asylum, is controlled by Sir Percival Glyde. Cathy Adams in *Laid in Earth*, however, is an intelligent woman, not someone who could easily be manipulated into a gaslighting situation; the only suggestion lies in Alex’s (possibly fabricated) hint that Cathy was isolated by her husband.

Laid in Earth began with a somewhat vague inquiry into whether it is necessary to resolve the crime at the heart of a contemporary crime novel or whether other issues of a social or political nature, are more important. The plot trajectory, the issues explored and the culpability (or otherwise) of suspects would be revealed through the process of writing. This process, for me is a method of discovery, of unearthing character and motive, of bringing into being the voices and stories that have been part of my dreams for as long as I can remember.

The main idea for *Laid in Earth* developed from an interest in crime writing by European authors. The novels of Stig Larsson and Henning Mankell have been translated into many languages and made into films and TV series. In these stories, the reason for the story opening – the murder, the missing person – becomes almost irrelevant compared to the larger social issues explored. I wondered if this was indicative of the relationship between real crime and the society that produces it and whether it is impossible for any society to exist without crime. Only by studying crime and the circumstances in which it was committed, can the failures of any society be redressed.

‘... [C]riminality is not simply one aspect of modernity, an inevitable by-product, but its underside, something from which it cannot be separated. Cultural depictions of crime frequently portray it as such. *Gomorrah*, Roberto Saviano’s 2006 study of the Camorra, the Neapolitan mafia, shows how uncannily organized crime mirrors the processes of capitalist production, capital accumulation, the mechanics of importing and exporting – in fact more efficiently and effectively than the legitimate businesses it shadows ...’ (Nicol, B. McNulty, E. Pulham, P. 2011, p.3).

One of the ‘by-products’ explored by crime fiction is the treatment of women in contemporary society. Larsson’s *Blomkvist* (2005), for instance, is a journalist and lead investigator in plot riven with violence against women; tellingly, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* was entitled ‘Men who Hate Women’ in the original Swedish: *Män som hatar kvinnor*. This harks directly back to Wilkie Collins’ exposition of injustice against women in his novels *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868) and to the story of Bluebeard. Such injustice also provides a major theme in many contemporary crime and literary thrillers, especially those in the crime sub-genre known as Domestic Noir.

The breed of British and North American crime fiction novels that deal with this subject matter: Gillian Flynn’s *Gone Girl* (2012), S.J. Watson’s *Before I go to Sleep* (2011), Emma Donoghue’s *Room* (2011), Paula Hawkins’ *The Girl on the Train* (2016) and Linda Green’s *After I’ve Gone* (2017), examine the frequently fatal plight of women (or ‘girls’ as women are termed in today’s high-concept marketing) in contemporary heterosexual relationships.

Women, it seems, don't need to be involved in drug trafficking or prostitution (as they do in the work of some European authors), to become victims of violence; the family home is dangerous enough.

Julia Crouch suggested that the Domestic Noir thriller has partly come about as a result of the austerity measures under which Western Europe has been living since the economic meltdown of 2007/8; middle class couples are living in penury and cannot afford to divorce: their homes have become pressure cookers of barely submerged bitterness and violence (2014). This is an idea borne out by Ruth Caine in her essay, *Just what sort of mother are you?* in which she discusses the societal expectations of modern mothers (2015).

Maria Tatar, discussing various twentieth century film versions of *Bluebeard*, suggests that, rather than being a helpless victim, the imprisoned fictional wife, forbidden to enter certain areas of her husband's life, is bestowed an active role to seek the key to her marriage, the reason behind her husband's unreasonable behaviour. And it is precisely because the women in contemporary Bluebeard stories have such agency, that the endings are often less than happy: 'When the secrets beyond the door to marriage are solved, there is real closure. The woman who has passed beyond the door is now permanently encased behind it, with nothing left to investigate, analyse, and interpret once she has figured out what is behind or at stake in her husband's threatening behaviour. No more secrets, no more mysteries, no more adventure' (Tatar, 2009, pp.23). She argues that once the wife can live 'happily ever after', either by escaping the abusive husband, or by learning that perhaps he is not so bad after all, then there is nothing left but for her to settle down to spinsterhood or married life: a dull and somewhat unsatisfactory ending.

Angela Carter in her seminal collection of short stories, *The Bloody Chamber* (1979), uses as its title a reference to Bluebeard. But her take on Perrault's tale (1667) is upbeat, perhaps reflecting the more optimistic period of Women's Studies in which she was writing. Marina Warner, Carter's biographer, discusses the way '... Barbebleue (Bluebeard) shapes Angela Carter's retelling, as she lingers voluptuously on its sexual inferences, and springs a happy surprise in a masterly comic twist on the traditional happy ending. Within a spirited exposé of marriage as sadistic ritual, she shapes a bright parable of maternal love.' (Warner, 2012). In Carter's fiction and essays lie the seeds of the current trend for Domestic Noir. As Warner states: 'Carter identifies the Marquis de Sade as an honest witness to the conditions of bourgeois marriage, the economics of sexual relations, and the collusion of women with their own enslavement and subjugation.'

This collusion suggests the apparent agency of the woman central to many popular Domestic Noir novels. It is worth returning to the ‘morals’ at the end of Perrault’s transcription of the story to explore the idea. The first, ‘Curiosity, in spite of its appeal, often leads to deep regret. To the displeasure of many a maiden, its enjoyment is short lived. Once satisfied, it ceases to exist, and always costs dearly....’ (1697) can be applied to Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* (2012). Disappointed with her unfaithful, unemployed husband, she stages her own abduction/murder, only to be imprisoned in a mansion by an ex-boyfriend. Like Bluebeard’s wife, Amy transgresses the boundaries of her marriage, then to save herself enters the ‘bloody chamber’ of a former relationship and walks into the arms of her abuser. Whether she is soliciting his violence, or so desperate to lay low that even an abusive ex is preferable to being found by her husband, remains ambiguous. This is why ‘much of the critical dialogue surrounding the novel has focused on the question of whether or not it seeks to deconstruct or reinforce a patriarchal narrative of victimisation and disempowerment’ (Burke in Joyce, Sutton, 2018, pp. 80).

The second moral, ‘No husband of our age would be so terrible as to demand the impossible of his wife, nor would he be such a jealous malcontent. For, whatever the colour of her husband's beard, the wife of today will let him know who the master is’ (Perrault, 1697) could equally be applied. Nick, Amy’s husband, also transgressed the marriage by having an affair with one of his students. At the end of the story, Nick is Amy’s prisoner, trapped in the marriage by her pregnancy, her lies, her superior handling of the media. On balance, however, Amy is the character who is forcibly locked away from the world by her former beau. Nick’s entrapment is entirely of his own making, and the fact he lacks the courage to be at fault in the eyes of the media and town (Flynn, 2012).

Johansson (2016) argues that Amy orchestrates her own downfall to condemn her husband and make herself into something of a hero. Her response to Nick’s affair – her fake kidnapping and murder, and the real murder of Desi, even her pregnancy is to ‘articulate herself as a subject for whom there is no authentic self, and thus one available for constant reframing [...] her “transgression,” yet simultaneously suggests how this transgressiveness is intrinsically linked to contemporary rationalities’. She terms this a ‘post-feminist performance.’

The first moral is the one most usually applied in Domestic Noir. In S.J. Watson’s *Before I go to Sleep* (2011) Christine Lucas is entombed in an amnesiac hell by a former lover and extreme ‘gaslighter’ – a psychological controller of a type first encountered in the film, *Gaslight* (1944) – who she believes to be her husband. Her memory loss every time she sleeps

brings a *Groundhog Day* (2002) feel to the novel. Instead, however, of endlessly repeating the same day, time is moving on, Christine is aging and must leave clues about herself to nudge her damaged memory. The suburban house is her Bluebeard room and excursions out are rare. Like Amy Dunne, Christine has had an affair, for which she has been punished for years. Finally, Anna Watson, the murder victim in *Girl on a Train* (2016), loses her life because of her extra marital dalliances. Amy Dunne, Christine Lucas and Anna Watson are punished by lovers for their disobedience and end up imprisoned or murdered.

Traditional Gothic stories tend to tap into primal fears contemporary with the times in which they were written. *Frankenstein* (Shelley, 1818), for instance, reveals a terror of the potential of technology, which was prominent in the nineteenth century and is still relevant today. Similarly, Linda Green's *After I've gone* (2017) follows a social media timeline to its logical conclusion – the future – and the details of the protagonist's own death. Cathy, the murder victim in *Laid in Earth* is the mother of Jake, an average seventeen-year-old and as such is prey to the fears all contemporary mothers suffer – relating to their children's diet, the use of social media, their academic achievement and other issues. Decisions had to be made on the type of parent Cathy might be – an over attentive 'helicopter' type (Haime, 1969) or the neglectful 'free range' mother (Widdicombe, 2015). It was also vital to determine whether a marital transgression results in her murder, or whether some other less obvious motive might lie behind the attack. I needed to determine whether she resembled the psychologically unstable Antoinette ('Bertha') Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847) or the innocent but somewhat needy Ma, in *Room* (2011). Or even like Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* (2012), where Cathy could emerge as an overindulged woman who wants everything her own way and will put herself at the mercy of Bluebeard to get it. I found myself in the role of the sleuth – trying to find clues about Cathy's personality. The order and manner in which these clues emerge are discussed in Chapter 4.

The sub-plot of the novel – that of the missing twenty-five Victorian mill girls being researched by Chris – came from a short story I had written several years before beginning this novel. I had seen a gravestone in Wainstalls' Chapel graveyard memorialising several indentured young workers who had died at a local mill. The age range was twelve to eighteen. This had prompted me to look into the treatment of such young workers in the nineteenth century and write a story about a terrible tragedy. I decided to develop this in *Laid in Earth* into an historical strand which would create a temporal shift, one in which the history of the town and its landscape could emerge. The way to achieve this became key. Kate Atkinson's *A God in Ruins* (2015),

the sequel to *Life After Life* (2013), is a novel which contains several different narratives and timelines. The story centres on Teddy Todd, a bomber pilot in the Second World War. Atkinson plays with time, flashing backwards and forwards, between childhood and old age and every age in between. As in all real lives, Teddy's has different narratives and contains different characters at different times. Teddy's appalling daughter, Viola, a child of the 1950s becomes a point of view character, as does, in parts, her mother, Nancy, and Teddy's Edwardian parents, giving four more narrative strands. The accomplishment of this novel lies in the way Atkinson conveys what it is to have consciousness. She shows that at any moment, the human mind is assaulted by memories— personal and cultural – or it is looking to an alternative present or the future. It is rare to be fully present. It echoes Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), in the way we are presented with set pieces, which include asides about the past and the future life of the character. With Teddy, his most dangerous moments on a near fatal bombing mission, are his most vivid, the only time in the novel where he is truly present. During the rest of his life, as the people around him rebel against what they consider their own captivity, Teddy enjoys an extraordinary detachment.

It was helpful to consider this temporal playfulness when exploring ways in which the Victorian section of *Laid in Earth* would operate alongside the contemporary elements and memories of Chris and Bony's late twentieth century experiences. Past and present stories flash back and forward in a series of dramatized set pieces. Working this way and including the range of different images and other textual evidence, a composite but fragmented picture of Cathy as a somewhat ambitious woman, frustrated with family life began to emerge. Bony's memories are key here, as he is the only character in the novel with a long view of Chris's life – and his own. The Victorian elements, as they developed, were equally hard to grasp. The written and visual evidence may have been changed or obliterated over time. Both past and present become a palimpsest – defined by the Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms as: 'A manuscript written on a surface from which an earlier text has been partly or wholly erased.' (Baldick, 2015).

As in Atkinson's novels, *Laid in Earth* explores different histories from varying perspectives. The histories explored in *A God in Ruins* range from 1920s to 1990s; a lifetime of three score years and ten that takes in three eras with three contrasting spirits. Atkinson reveals that the social class and the spirit of the time in which a character is born and raised will exert the most influence on their life. This was most helpful in the development of Cathy, the child of older middle-class parents, whose time as a university student in 1990s would have been hugely influenced by the women's movement, affecting her attitude to marriage and motherhood. Bony, too, born during World War Two, a hippy artist in the 1960s, is entrenched

in the attitudes of his generation, while Chris, damaged by the disappearance of his mother, shuns outside influence. Jake, the youngest character, is still a work in progress, and represents hope for the future.

Laid in Earth opens with the body of popular author Cathy Adams's body found in her own home. This home was never intended to become the only setting. Rather, the larger landscape was central to the atmosphere, affecting both character and plot. The characters needed to become embedded in the geology, the history, the natural world of their particular setting. Living in Hebden Bridge had demonstrated that a small valley town can be every bit as claustrophobic and oppressive as a suburban house. The vagaries of weather bring an additional pressure to any unfolding human stories. The landscape can invade the home – with floods or, landslides, for instance. The romantic creation of a sublime landscape, as described by Byron in *Childe Harold*: 'I live not in myself, but I become/ Portion of that around me; and to me, / High mountains are a feeling ...' (Byron, 1812-18, Canto 3, stanza 72), in which a wild and unpredictable setting can inform the lives of the characters, has been pivotal in the development of theme and plot. Ultimately, the Bluebeard's room of *Laid in Earth* would not be confined within a domestic space.

Many crime authors have become intrinsically linked with the setting of their novels: Ian Rankin with Edinburgh, Camilleri with Sicily and Jo Nesbo with Norway. Mankell's Wallander novels and TV series, Stig Larson's Millennium Trilogy of 2005-7 and the subsequent avalanche of Nordic and European Noir has made specific location the stock-in-trade of a whole milieu of television and book series. The Swedish Embassy website boasts portraits of Henning Mankell, Camilla Lackberg and other crime authors to entice the potential traveller, as though the country of Sweden would only be of interest to those with a penchant for crime fiction. The same phenomenon has visited the British Isles. 'Tartan Noir' – reputedly invented by William McIlvanney in 1977 with the first of his Laidlaw novels (1984) – is also enjoying the limelight; the Shetland Tourism Board offers an online guide to the locations Anne Cleeve's includes in her Jimmy Perez novels, while Val McDermid, Ian Rankin, and Denise Mina, among others, have also spawned their own Scottish literary tours. Grounding the characters into a physical space is an essential task in most fiction, of course, but to incite such interest, the settings in these authors' crime novels are doing more than providing a mere background against which the lives of their characters unfold; the settings must become characters in their own right. Ian Rankin discusses Edinburgh as a 'city that seems to sum up the human condition', in that it is a city of 'haves and have-nots', 'the rational and irrational',

light and dark'. In some ways it never changes. He jokes that Robert Louis Stephenson could return from the nineteenth century and find many of the famous landmarks and streets unchanged. (Rankin, 2015)

To return to Wilkie Collins, the major locations in *The Woman in White* (1860): a disconcerting and dangerous London, an asylum and a Gothic mansion, Blackwater Park, contrast with the beautiful and romantic Limeridge House, a place, we are led to believe, of resolution and eventual perceived safety. Again, Collins sets a precedent here. Marian, Laura's sister, is left to end *The Woman in White*. She rescues Laura but this once brave woman, who has previously been referred to as somewhat masculine in both appearance and behaviour, in Walter's opinion now exhibits, '... that sublime self-forgetfulness of women, which yields so much and asks so little, turned all her thoughts from herself to me.'(pp.558) This simultaneously hints at her trauma and the reversion of Maran to a gender stereotype. The effect of the terrible experiences in the novel have left their mark. The 'great wrong place' prevails, even if it is only in the imagination.

Similarly, there is no safety in *Gone Girl* (2012), though here the danger is more overt; the marital home in which both characters are left, is now a prison for both Amy and Nick. The same could be said for Christine's home in *Before I go to Sleep* (Watson, 2014); once her persecutor has convinced her of total memory loss, she can never feel safe again. The unhappily ever after ending, is frequently seen in this type of fiction. Characters are left traumatised, compromised, their lives in ruins.

The landscape setting of Rawton Bridge in *Laid in Earth* is inspired by the moors around Hebden Bridge, West Yorkshire. Jez Lewis's 2009 documentary film, *Shed your tears and walk away*, explores a group of disenfranchised forty-odd year-old locals, former classmates of his, whose decline into drink and drugs could be seen as the effect of the place that they live - Hebden Bridge in West Yorkshire. One interviewee calls it a 'black hole' another a 'coffin'. The rash of suicides in this 'drug town with a tourist problem' seems to be as much a result of living in a gloomy valley surrounded by moorland as it is about the decline of the cotton industry, unemployment and the taking over of the town by hippies and later, academics and latterly, BBC workers commuting to Salford. Glyn Hughes in his local history books, *Millstone Grit: A Pennine Journey* (1987) and Pete Barker in *Hebden Bridge: A Sense of Belonging* (2012) also evoke the beauty and the cruelty of the Pennine landscape. Both writers discuss their own experiences of the area and look at its history from geological formation to the building of mills and railways in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the 1970s when an

old weaver's cottage really could be bought for a mythical pint of beer; Barker's history comes right up to the present day. In these works, the sense of time and history layered like the rock of the moors is palpable. Other sources for historical information came from the 'Power in the Landscape' online project (2007), which uses local records, family history and other archive material to build a vital online picture of the development of water mills in the Calder Valley, including manufactory inspections carried out in the area at around the time the Victorian element of *Laid in Earth* is set. 'From Weaver to Web' (2014) provides an online visual archive of Calderdale history. Incorporating some of the elements of this history within *Laid in Earth*, much of which details the unfair treatment of women in the wool industry, the whole landscape – both physical and historical – becomes Bluebeard's bloody room.

Several British crime thrillers take the idea of Macbeth's 'blasted heath' (1992; Act I Scene III), the creation of a bleak and hostile setting which reflects the psychological journey of the main characters. In these novels, a sense of isolation has been created, the characters are cut off; this is the 'magic ground' of the novel (Brayfield, 1996). A phenomenological experience of the landscape is filtered through the characters in Mary O'Donnell's Irish thriller, *Where they Lie* (2013), in which a former IRA terrorist leads the main characters to seek the bodies of two of the 'disappeared'. Here, the fictional and isolated 'Resistance Causeway' on the Antrim Coast becomes a melting pot for past and future, rather like Romney Marsh in Dickens' *Great Expectations* (1860).

Anne Cleeves' Jimmy Perez novels are set in the remote Shetland Isles; they are often covered with mist and cut off from the mainland to provide the ideal conditions for murder and fear. This sense of island is also present in M.J. Hyland's *This is How* (2009), which takes as its location a fictional seaside town, reminiscent of an out of season Morecambe on the North-West coast. Despite most of the story taking place in rooms such as the boarding house or the pub etc. this landscape still exerts a subtle pressure on its characters. Dramatic Welsh scenery provides a perfect backdrop to the dark and moody TV series *Hinterland* (2014). Here, the very attractiveness of the countryside around Aberystwyth becomes sinister, hiding horrors and secrets that go back years. This is also palpable in David Peace's *Red Riding* quartet (2001-2009), set in the 1970s and 1980s West Yorkshire of decaying industrial towns and a very masculine culture of drinking and womanising. Peace's prose reeks of cigarette smoke and exhaust fumes. A sense of desperation and poverty pervades every word; corruption is laced through each novel as though the moral fabric of characters, like the old mills and factories of the area, is disintegrating. This chimes with Sally Wainright's grim, Calderdale-based *Happy Valley* (2014) TV series – set in the same area as *Laid in Earth*.

The Rawton Bridge of *Laid in Earth*, with its wild weather conditions and historical mysteries began to take on a life of its own. Like the characters, it began to develop a plot trajectory, one which puts additional pressure on the characters and the main storyline.

Evidence revealing the identity of the criminal(s) in crime thriller novels and screenplays is usually revealed through the detective work of an investigator. Investigators can range from Wilkie Collins' young art teacher, Walter Hartright in *The Woman in White* (1860), to Chandler's Philip Marlow (1939), Christie's Miss Marple (1930), right through to Peace's young journalist, Eddie Dunford (2009) and Larsson's Blomkvist (2005). The detective asks questions, makes a nuisance of him/herself in dangerous situations with dangerous people, and unearths evidence – fingerprints, letters, DNA, to reveal the identity of a criminal. There is usually a denouement of some kind – the suspects brought together while the detective reels off all he has learned, or a high drama finish where the detective almost loses his life as he confronts the criminal. In the recent spate of thrillers, however, it is often up to the victim to reveal the identity of the criminal or for the crime to be exposed as not a crime at all. Christine in *Before I go to Sleep* (Watson, 2011), must discover the wrong done to her by plundering her own past. Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012) is not, as suspected, a murder victim, but a runaway. By dispensing with the detective, the reader is cast in this role. No longer having the comfort of the perspicacious sleuth to light the way, the reader must muddle through, putting evidence together to try and make sense of the crime, and the world of the novel, along with the wronged character. T.R Richmond uses a similar technique in *What She Left* (2015), though he weaves clues through the narrative using letters, forum postings and other materials.

Taking visual evidence a step further, W.G Sebald's *The Emigrants* (1992) includes photographs of what the reader is led to believe are his short story subjects. These pictures both illustrate and tantalise with hints of the characters' former lives but remain indecipherable. Links's and Wheatley's *Murder Off Miami* (1936) goes a stage further by casting the reader in the role of detective by story-telling in the form of a crime dossier of documents, photographs, letters, even images of bagged artefacts. Feeling more like a game than a novel, the experimental nature of this work nonetheless appealed. It seemed prescient that such evidence be compiled in this way – a nod to a visual future of the 21st century, of social media and graphic novels.

Leanne Shapton uses a similar technique in her 2009 book, *Important Artefacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, including Books, Street Fashion and Jewellery*. Taking the form of an auction catalogue, this is the story of a

love affair and its demise in objects. The reader (or more appropriately, viewer) is lead through this doomed romance via a tour of such arbitrary objects as swimming costumes, kitsch ornaments, bottles of wine. There is something of the surrealist artist, Marcel Duchamp's 'ready-mades' about this work, as though Shapton collected them randomly, allowing them to say what they will. On scrutiny, however, it is possible to detect a controlling force behind each 'lot', with every object disclosing some evidence regarding the owner's taste, education, and the state of Doolan and Morris's relationship.

I decided to use digital images in *Laid in Earth* as a form of exposition or evidence. Our culture, with its increasing reliance on the internet, is incredibly visual and the drip feed of clues through a mixture of images, newspaper reports, interview transcripts and social media messages would replicate the information we are receiving all the time – the type of information that will remain after our deaths. In this way, the additional materials would not just operate as clues – to the identity of Cathy's murderer or the fate of the missing mill girls – but as insights into the characters and the place, giving a sense of atmosphere and backstory that perhaps is not present in the narrative.

To conclude, a Gothic line between Bluebeard, Wilkie Collins and some of the most popular Domestic Noir novels can be traced. Those imprisoned, abused and haunted heroines of the past have been reinvented for a new millennium, suggesting that many of the strictures felt by women in, for example, Victorian society, are still being experienced today. I felt uncomfortable with this helpless heroine model. Even Amy Dunne (Flynn 2012) ends up imprisoned by a man. The feminist writings of, for instance Tatar and Warner, mentioned in Chapter 1, and Cain, who will be explored in Chapter 3, offer alternative psychological, social and literary theories. Cathy, in *Laid in Earth* is murdered, but that does not mean that she is powerless throughout the story. Rather, I was interested in exploring the men in her life and how her success might affect them. Research into the history of the Calder valley threw up further themes, of the Victorian past informing the present, the treatment of women and children, of secrets that must come to the surface. This may be due to the area's part in the industrial revolution, a period well documented as barbaric to women and those employed in the new manufactories. Finally, the use of images in recent fiction, provided ideas about revealing clues without an investigator character who will be exclusively responsible for solving the murder. As the characters, plot and setting in *Laid in Earth* developed, the question of resolution, how it is reached and whether it matters, again began to rise.

2. THE GREAT WRONG PLACE

The geographical location of a crime story ‘... may facilitate or limit plot elements, reflect or illuminate characters, and reinforce mood and theme’ states *The Oxford Companion to Crime and Mystery Writing* under the topic of ‘setting’ (1999). The idea that some aspect of setting can chime with a human characteristic or mood is an enticing one. The Pennine setting in *Laid in Earth* is intended to operate as an external force which affects the behaviour of the characters and the trajectory of the plot. W.H. Auden states that Raymond Chandler wanted to ‘take the body out of the vicarage garden’ (Auden, 1948). He is speaking here, not just about a physical setting, but a society and of Chandler reacting to the mysteries written by e.g. Agatha Christie, whose work tends to be set in upper or middle-class environments. He speculates that Chandler was ‘interested in writing, not detective stories, but serious studies of a criminal milieu, the Great Wrong Place’

Terence Rafferty examines this idea in his discussion on the rise of Domestic Noir fiction. ‘... the Great Wrong Place is sometimes suburbia, sometimes social media, sometimes high school, sometimes the marriage bed—everywhere something feels missing in contemporary life’ (Rafferty, 2016). In such a setting, bad things can – and are allowed to –happen: cruelty, abuse, even murder. Setting is employed as a shorthand to understanding background, motivation and ultimately character. As John Martin, writing in *Crime Scene Britain and Ireland*, states, ‘a crime is often the product of the society around it, and that in itself is heavily influenced by the environment.’ (Martin, 2014, p.4) This could just as easily be the ‘magic ground’– so termed by Celia Brayfield as a place in which anything can happen (Brayfield, 1996, pp. 38-41). Whatever the location, it must be physically or psychologically remote, away from the influences of reason and common sense.

The landscape around Rawton Bridge in *Laid in Earth* is a country of wind-blasted moorland, dry-stone walls and rocky hillsides where water foams from becks and rivers, ruined mills lie concealed within acres of deciduous woodland and deconsecrated chapels brace themselves against the interminable wind. This is a place that has endured the extremes of wind and flood. Water has sculpted and polished its craggy forms and will continue to do so long after humankind has gone. How to portray this immutable landscape was always going to be a challenge; it was never intended to become what John Ruskin termed a ‘pathetic fallacy’

(Ruskin 1856 cited in Landow 2013), but a force in its own right. As my own experience bore out, nature has its own trajectory.

Discussing the first season of the Welsh Crime drama series, *Hinterland* (2014), Vicky Frost in the *Guardian* wrote, ‘... the county of Ceredigion feels like an actual member of the cast, a character shaping the actions of its inhabitants and serving as a reminder of how small man is compared with nature.’ (Frost, 2014). The environment here felt relevant to *Laid in Earth* in its themes and in the similarity of Calderdale to West Wales, where the series is set. *Hinterland* is moodily shot. The first episode, set near Devil’s Bridge Falls, is unsettling to watch; buildings are overgrown, graves lost. This is nature that both colludes with and exposes the crimes of men. It is the perfect character in a crime story involving the discovery of the graves of orphaned children murdered years before.

It is this very sense of isolation, I believe, that has attracted many regional British novelists to turn their own locality into a Bluebeard’s room. Britain is administrated from a small area of the south east of England; many people living outside of London and the South-East feel increasingly marginalised. Denise Mina discussed the subject of Scottish devolution months before the referendum, raising the connection between regional noir novels and the political and physical isolation felt by those who do not live in the South East of the British Isles. It seems no coincidence that Mina describes the crime genre and the current state of politics as, ‘the tragedy of the past being judged by the present.’ (Mina, 2014)

In his 1953 verse play, *The Minister*, R.S. Thomas explores the enduring qualities of the Welsh landscape, and the way in which those living in it are kept in check by its harsh demands.

‘There were people here before these, / Measuring truth according to the moor’s/Pitiless commentary and the wind’s veto. /Out in the moor there is a bone whitening, /worn smooth by the long dialectic of rain and sunlight.’ (Thomas, R.S. pp.7)

This play is about a young cleric who lands himself the job of providing spiritual succour to a dour hillside folk. The locals, like the landscape, are wild, a law unto themselves. The minister’s struggles to tame them result in his death. He becomes the whitening bone who has lost the battle with the elements.

This idea of a ‘long dialectic’ between weather and land and the fact that any characters are but brief visitors, is a facet of the work of several regional British crime writers. In Anne Cleeves’ Shetland novels, there is a sense of an eternal landscape; its climate moulding the behaviour of the characters. *Dead Water* (2013), the fifth book in the series, opens with a vivid description of Detective Jimmy Perez looking across the ‘sweep of the North mainland’ and

reflecting on ‘the bleakness and the beauty, the wealth that came from the sea and the hard, barren land, the past and the future.’ He then walks ‘down the hill into the fog. It lay like a pool over the lower ground, swallowing him up, so that he felt as if he were drowning.’(pp.1-3) Perez is grieving for his wife who died six months earlier. He has been away, off work but recently returned. The land, the sea and the fog here all increase the sense of dislocation he feels. The fog also represents the unknown – an ideal metaphor by which to begin a mystery novel. He is literally on an island, cut off from the mainland, on ‘magic ground’ (Brayfield, 1996, pp.38-41). As the story develops, the mystery of the landscape in which he finds himself gives rise to further mysteries, of character, politics and history, but there continues a sense that this landscape has existed long before him and will continue when he is gone.

The setting for *Laid in Earth* needed to be isolated and mysterious enough for the events of the novel to develop. The killer’s motive would emerge from the slow revelation of what was missing in the place and the lives of the central characters. As the writing progressed, it became clear that despite including the standard elements of Domestic Noir – a failed marriage, a difficult mother-son relationship – in its setting, the novel was borrowing from other genres and tropes, not least, as discussed earlier, the Gothic. Icelandic novelist, Yrsa Sigurðardóttir states that ‘not only can setting fix a mood’ but that ‘The characters can be made to feel (and seem) vulnerable alongside creepy natural formations; they can appear insignificant alongside majestic ones.’ (Sigurdardottir in Spring and King, 2013, Location 2571) Characters must arise from and belong to the setting in which they find themselves, they must also be diminished by it; their mortality reinforced. And of course, Gothic backdrops which reveal ‘Uncertainties about the nature of power, law, society, family and sexuality’ (Botting, 1996, pp.5) are perfect for crime novels.

The valley in *Laid in Earth* is steeped in the past and its tragedies. All the characters are affected by it, even if they are not as aware as Chris of its stranglehold on them, but, then, perhaps Chris is too damaged to fully engage with the present. Paul Schrader describes a hero who ‘dreads to look ahead, but instead tries to survive by the day and if unsuccessful, retreats to the past’ in his notes on Film Noir. (1971) Chris fails to confront his ex-wife’s murder as he failed to deal with the problems within their relationship when they were living together. Instead, he uses his energy tracking down the whereabouts of the missing Victorian mill girls.

The ‘magic ground’ of Scardale in *Laid in Earth* was formed during the Carboniferous period when deposits of silt and mud left by high sea levels solidified into the millstone grit band that runs from Wales through Northern England. (Hughes, 1987) It rains for much of the

year and although the inventive Victorians harnessed the power of the water for their mill races and ponds, channelling it away upstream so that in summer months, barely a trickle reached the valley bottom, many rills and water courses have long since silted up. Flooding has become common. In 2012, the town of Hebden Bridge flooded four times in a month. Inundation was always to be part of the trajectory of the setting in the novel but there was the danger that it might read as part of a moralistic flood narrative in which the characters are punished for their wrongdoing by some wrathful God or that the flooding, caused by man's violation of the planet, might be considered an ecofeminist device to mirror Cathy's murder.

At this point, it became apparent that it would not be possible to create a plotline for the landscape without first focalising it through the different characters' viewpoints. Only by determining their phenomenological experiences of their environment could the presence and actions of the place be developed as a separate entity.

The crime that kickstarts *Where they Lie* (O'Donnell, 2013) is the disappearance of two brothers from their home just outside Belfast during The Troubles. The story is set several years later and focuses on the men's family and friends as they attempt to come to terms with the event. Most of the novel takes place in Belfast or Dublin, the tension between the two cities is palpable in the language O'Donnell uses to describe them and in the relationship between the north-based Gerda and Dubliner Niall. Niall thinks of the north of Ireland as '... serene and self-confident. [...] a foreign country, the imagined loyal province of Saxon and Briton.' (O'Donnell, 2013, p.28). His description of Dublin is quite different: 'There were new people everywhere, streaming by his life, on the streets, in the shops and restaurants ...' (p.155). Each character in this novel has experienced a different Ireland. Gerda's Ireland is chaotic, confusing, and unreliable; Niall's is fickle, eclectic and shallow, Alison's steeped in fundamentalism. Each character deals with their survivor's guilt in their own way; there is no common ground. What comes through most strongly is the way in which the whole island feels compromised. This novel is not so much a comment on two murders committed during a sectarian war, as a lament for a land that has been torn asunder. Only at the end of the novel, when Gerda's contrite IRA informant encourages her to visit the fictional 'Resistance Causeway' up on the Antrim Coast, can any kind of resolution be reached. Here is nature as mysterious, nature continuing without man and here the characters can at last begin to see their native land from a shared viewpoint, which Niall sums up: 'In a place like this, he could see himself in all his smallness, but it was not a negative kind of smallness. It was the smallness of being a particle within a system, and he was necessary to that system' (pp.185).

The symbolism of the valley setting was a useful starting point from which to develop the *Laid in Earth* characters' phenomenological views of the valley. Rawton Bridge has two faces. Throughout winter the north face, where Bony lives, rarely sees sunlight. Jake's home faces towards the sunnier south. Chris is trapped on the valley bottom. Each character experiences a different landscape. This could provide a key to their psychological outlooks: Bony looks into the dark and faces death, Jake looks to the light of adulthood and escape, Chris remains in the cleft of the valley, unable to see outside. In some ways, all the characters are stuck. With only one road in and out of Rawton, which becomes impassable in the flood it will take a major catastrophe to free them.

M.J. Hyland in *This is How* (2009) uses an out of season seaside town in the north west of England as the setting to the first half of her novel. Throughout the novel there is the sense that her protagonist, Patrick, is missing out on something, that all the fun is to be had elsewhere, or has already happened. Despite the seaside location, this is a novel of interiors: the boarding house, the garage, the café. Patrick's repressed desires are reflected in the poverty of these surroundings, the cramped rooms, cloying atmospheres. The sea is only down the road, but Patrick tends to avoid it; when outside, he hardly looks up. He prefers the pub or his own bedroom. But that does not take away its presence. The location is dislocation; it feels like the edge of the world. There is a greyness beyond. It is only when all is lost, when Patrick has murdered Whelkin and has been arrested, that it seems he understands what it is to be without the seascape he has taken for granted. 'It's going to be a fine bright day and I want to be included, want to stand near the water and look out at the horizon and smell the salty air. I want to swim and go and eat down the pier. I want going back.' (Hyland, 2009, pp. 146) This is the first time, it seems, he has seen the landscape for what it is. He is heading, of course, for prison, his final, even more claustrophobic destination in the novel.

Chris, stuck in the valley bottom, fixated on the past, must also look up; up to where his own son is suffering and to where his own future lies. The landscape is there but he can only see one aspect of it – its grim nineteenth century history, mossy graves, ashlar clad chapels, a history of cruelty and exploitation, entwining with the tragedies in his own life. The crime on which he is fixated, that of discovering the fate of twenty-five missing indentured orphans, lies in the past. It takes the murder of his ex-wife to force him to look up. When he does, like Patrick, he is shocked at what he might have missed but, unable to cope with reality, soon retreats back to his historical research.

There is more than one version of the Calder Valley, as there is more than one Ireland in *Where they Lie*. There are also alternative views of Scardale valley in *Laid in Earth*.

Although its recent history is not so savage, it has had its share of tribulations and these have scarred the land. Due to the decline of industry during the twentieth century, different generations have very different experiences of the area, resulting in the town of Hebden Bridge suffering from something of an identity crisis. Once home to many cottage industries, during the Industrial Revolution it became a mill town, its burgeoning population and manufacturing output making it the heart of ‘Fustianopolis’, where Fustian, a strong cotton cloth for which the area was known from the late eighteenth century onwards, was produced. (*From Fulling to Fustianopolis*, 2017). The area went into steep decline in post war years when the British textile trade could no longer compete with that of developing countries. People moved to the cities, and for those who stayed, employment was scarce. By the mid-1960s there were many abandoned properties and the smoke-blackened walls of the town seemed destined to crumble back into the landscape.

Peter Barry discusses the ‘anthropomorphic’ view of wilderness in the writing of Melville, Mary Shelley and Milton as a place that is ‘entered as if instinctively by those who would “find” themselves’. (Barry, 2009, p. 244). To use a setting in this way, implies an element of self-discovery. For Bony, with his artist’s vision, a lifetime of experience and regret behind him, there was always going to be an element of self-examination in his appreciation of the landscape. When he begins to paint the rocky tor known as Cragside, he is painting over an earlier life – he reuses an old canvas on which he has painted a former lover. This brings another, more sinister aspect to his appreciation of landscape – that of conqueror. Just as he mastered the body of Ruby – the subject of his earlier portrait – so he must possess, in paint, the very ground beneath his feet.

But Bony is a late twentieth century embodiment of Romanticism, a hippy who moved from London to Rawton Bridge because of cheap housing and the attractive countryside around the town. He was looking for something that was out of reach in London, some spiritual enlightenment. By the opening of the novel, he is out of date, old fashioned, as are his attitudes towards landscape. In the end, he might be seen as on the continuum, described by Bate (in Barry, 2009, pp.247) as ‘the line from Rousseau to Romanticism [which] runs on ...’ exploring the well-trodden theme of ‘retreat from the town as return to a natural life in which the human spirit is integrated with its environment.’ His painting of Cragside is an attempt to achieve this integration, but like the subject of his earlier paintings, he can only manage a sordid kind of colonisation.

Glyn Hughes, writing in *Millstone Grit, A Pennine Journey* (1987), recalls the 1970s influx of hippies, like Bony, who moved into squats, or houses bought for next to nothing in

Hebden Bridge. This part memoir, part social history, misses the latter stages of migration, however. The town soon gained a reputation for attracting writers, artists and for its tolerance of people with alternative lifestyles; by the 1980s, Hebden was luring city dwellers from as far afield as London who bought and renovated derelict barns and mill buildings. By the turn of the last century, property, in whatever condition, was at a premium, causing a small housing bubble and pricing the locals out of the market. Different versions and opinions of the area have emerged over the years, versions that I wanted to explore in my fictional town of Rawton Bridge and in Chris's historical research.

Jez Lewis's film, *Shed Your Tears and Walk Away* narrowly focuses on a group of men who grew up in the 1980s, the period which saw the most radical shift in Hebden's population. Economic downturn, unemployment and the ready accessibility of drugs resulted in a spiral of addiction, homelessness and ultimately suicide for a disproportionate number of those who stuck around. But the film's writer, Lewis, also blames a condition he calls 'valley bottom fever', described as '... the sudden, urgent need to get out of the valley and get on to the top as you start to feel claustrophobic [...] you start to feel oppressed in this valley; it's total. It's very steep and when the clouds come down on top of the valley it's like a lid – you feel as if you are living in a coffin.' He also comments that, 'as a kid you feel you're living on an island; you don't realise there are other towns just a few miles away, because your whole world has these huge walls around it' (Lewis, *In Corner*, 2009).

It seemed natural to look to Jake, the youngest character, to embody the claustrophobia Lewis describes. Grief over the death of his mother triggers a longing to escape the oppression of his valley home. Filtered through Jake, the setting becomes a prison, stifling and isolated. Rawton Bridge is shaped like a coffin, its head facing Grimford, its feet, Blackstone. The leaden skies press down on the steep sides like a lid. And yet, the valley is his home, his rootedness, it has nurtured him, but it must let him go. It was important that Jake be freed of the coffin that was his home town, and important that the town itself, once its secret had been revealed, should become more accessible to the outside world. At the end of the novel, he climbs up to Crimsworth Moor with Maddie, his girlfriend, and looks down on the valley below, where he sees: 'The new gully, cleaving the crag in two, that had opened on the night of the great flood, had transformed the town. Where all had been contained and claustrophobic, the land had opened up, leaving Rawton Bridge at the heart of a cross, with arms extending north and south as well as west and east. The coffin had been broken. Only the lid of sky remained and for today at least, it was a clear and unbroken blue.'

Chris is the right age to be of the ‘lost’ generation of Lewis’s film, caught between mourning the industrial past of his home town and a bitterness over the wealthier white-collar newcomers to the area who are raising house-prices. But Chris has more in common with the latter group. He left the valley to go to university in the 1980s as many of his generation did. He has become cultured and lost his connection with his valley home. He is unable to see the landscape as a living presence, only as a resource for his historical research. David Peace’s quartet of West Yorkshire crime fiction novels explores the period in which Chris grew up. Although the main subject matter of these novels is a shocking exposé of the behaviour of the West Yorkshire Metropolitan Police, the place figures as a grim backdrop, even when Peace does little but cite the names of real West Yorkshire towns: ‘A four-hour tour of local hell: Pudsey, Tingley, Hanging Heaton, Shaw Cross, Batley, Dewsbury, Chickenley, Earlsheaton, Gawthorpe, Horbury, Castleford, Pontefract, Normanton, Hemsworth, Fitzwilliam, Sharlston and Streethouse.

Hard towns for hard men.’ (Peace, 2009, p. 49)

This litany conjures a brutal environment, shunning any need for the adornment of flowery metaphor. Peace’s West Yorkshire spawns unremittingly sexist, racist and homophobic characters who inhabit a post-industrial landscape that is as much an aural as a visual creation. The place names are real; hear them snarled in the local dialect and the reader is not surprised that the streets in his novels are crawling with pimps and dealers, paedophiles and violent thugs. Peace conjures the grimness of 1970’s Yorkshire; the fuzzy black and white misery of miners’ strikes and unemployment, towns still half-paved with cobbles, decaying brownfield sites, the wastelands between cities yet to sprout gastro pubs and farmers’ markets. Although Chris left the town of his birth and lost his connection with the beauty of the landscape, he never left post-industrial West Yorkshire; he shares something of the myopia of Peace’s hard living character: crime correspondent for the Evening Post, Eddie Dunford.

The BBC Crime drama series *Happy Valley* (2014), set in the contemporary West Yorkshire’s Calder Valley, was first aired as *Laid in Earth* progressed. Like Peace, the series writer, Sally Wainwright, chose to explore an underbelly of drug and alcohol dependency, child abuse and murder. Interviewed by the BBC in 2016, she revealed that she was inspired by Lewis’s film. *Happy Valley* does not particularly expose any link between the fluctuating fortunes of the area over the past forty years and the increase in substance abuse - though perhaps it assumes prior knowledge from its audience. Nor does it tackle, except tangentially, the power that the landscape itself exerts upon its characters. Where Lewis, Peace and Wainwright’s versions of

the area converge is in the way their characters seem hewn from the very rock their towns are built upon. The gloomy desaturated moorland shots - that owe much to the production values of the Nordic TV thrillers such as *Wallander* (2008) - are shown in sweeping vistas as the backdrop to *Happy Valley*. The weavers' cottages huddled into the hillsides are shown as poverty stricken (though in real life, they are much sought-after real estate, prime for renovation). Even the good guys do little more than eke out a living, scratched through illicit means. This is a place where cosy middle-class accountants become mired in murderous extortion. Like the Hebden of Lewis's film, *Shed your Tears and Walk Away* (2009), the West Yorkshire of Peace's novels (2001-2009), it is a place without hope. Character and landscape must endure together.

There is a good reason why crime thrillers have given rise to a whole new type of tourism. The settings explored here – and these represent only a few of the vast array of locations created by the authors and directors of contemporary crime – pervade our cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. The regional crime thriller has the power to transform workaday settings into dark forces that are shown not only through characters' experience, but as separate entities that exert their own pressure on the plot. Isolated environments are used to explore a sense of political isolation; settings are multi-layered, mired in history. The task of choosing the correct elements to develop for *Laid in Earth* was an onerous one. The landscape became a character in its own right, developing its own story and affecting the other characters in the novel. It has a history and its secrets, both of which needed to emerge during the story. The Rawton Bridge created is, in parts, Hebden Bridge; the valley, the feeling of claustrophobia and its history are all Hebden-inspired. But it needed to feel more isolated, more *magic* than any real-life town. This only began to happen as the other characters responded to it, bringing the valley to life as the 'great wrong place' (Auden in Rafferty, 2016), a setting where a murder can take place, where secrets are kept, sometimes for generations.

3. MATERIAL OPPRESSION AND PSYCHIC DISTURBANCE IN THE AGE OF THE SUPERWOMAN.

In accord with Sage and Smith (1996), and Denise Mina (2014), the *Oxford Companion to English Literature* defines the Gothic as: ‘a distinct modern development in which the characteristic theme is the stranglehold of the past upon the present, or the encroachment of the “dark” ages of oppression upon the “enlightened” modern era’ (Birch, 2009). This theme is embodied typically in enclosed and haunted settings such as castles, crypts, convents, or gloomy mansions, in images of ruin and decay, and in episodes of imprisonment, cruelty, and persecution.’

The gloom of the Rawton Bridge landscape, in *Laid in Earth*, explored in the previous chapter, was intended to imbue the novel with a Gothic feel. *Wuthering Heights* (Brontë, 1847), was set less than ten miles away. But, having been conceived as a crime thriller, it was essential to determine whether the characters and plot would fit into this genre and the nature of any contemporary fears which the novel might examine.

Gothic fiction has always been associated with the supernatural, but as Spooner comments, ‘Nineteenth-century Gothic from Poe onwards is often devoid of the supernatural altogether or evokes it to articulate psychological disturbance.’ (Spooner in Rzepka and Horsley, 2010). The supernatural is certainly an aspect of Jess Mount’s terror, in *After I’ve Gone* (Green, 2017). Her family and friends’ Facebook outpourings of grief over her murder are from the future. She is receiving messages from beyond her own grave. This is never explained, although the reader is privy to Jess’s previous history of paranoia and mental breakdown following the death of her mother. Suffice to say, the messages are a warning which save her from her possible fate. Whether figments of Jess’s own fevered imagination, or supernatural visitations, they operate as neat plot fixes, cranking the story into action, much as the memorable scene of Catherine’s ghostly hand at Lockwood’s casement window in *Wuthering Heights* prompts Nelly Dean to tell Heathcliff’s story.

The supernatural experiences of women in Gothic literature link closely with those of women in contemporary Domestic Noir thrillers. Ros Ballaster comments that Ann Radcliffe’s novels ‘importantly distinguish between material oppression and psychic confusion; her heroines are explicitly criticised for seizing on “supernatural” explanations which proves easier for them to accept than the realities of male power and material exploitation’ (Sage, Smith, 1996, pp.60). Jess Mount in *After I’ve Gone* is being controlled by an abusive bully of a husband; Christine Lucas in *Before I Go to Sleep* (Watson, 2014), suffers a rare condition

known as anterograde amnesia, the result of a brutal attack (she discovers later). Although not strictly supernatural, her forgetfulness brings a dreamlike quality to the story. She is being controlled by a male attacker, who is posing as her husband. Her condition clears up when she is able to remember the incident that caused her injury. Rachel's alcoholism in *Girl on a Train* (Hawkins, 2016) results in a similarly chilling forgetfulness, which again could be supernatural. She cannot remember harassing her ex – because of course she didn't, he is gaslighting her. Even Amy Dunne, who in *Gone Girl* (Flynn, 2012) appears to refute this helpless, haunted female archetype, leaves her marriage because her husband has controlled her by luring her from her city home, to the small town in which he grew up. She might have the money, but he is spending it in the local bar she bought for him. He is also having an affair with a much younger woman. In all these contemporary thrillers evidence of Ballaster's 'male power and material exploitation' can be found. Maybe this indicates why the Domestic Noir thriller is so popular and so many women are reading and writing them. Despite years of feminism, women still feel as controlled financially and sexually as they did when authors such as Emily Brontë and Wilkie Collins were writing. Writers in this genre are examining the reasons men exert such control – control that can become abusive, even fatal. They are warning their female readers of the danger signs to be found in the 'great wrong place' (Auden, 1948) whether that be online or in the home or workplace. They might also offer some hope that women can escape such situations.

Val McDermid, writing in response to the launch of the Staunch Prize, declares a more polemical view: 'My take on writing about violence against women is that it's my anger at that very thing that fires much of my work. As long as men commit appalling acts of misogyny and violence against women, I will write about it so that it does not go unnoticed.' (Flood, 2018).

In *Laid in Earth*, Cathy is disturbed by the landscape, but she is not ostensibly a helpless victim of men. Having inherited her parents' estate, and becoming a successful novelist in her own right, she holds the purse strings in her house. Like *Gone Girl*'s Amy, Cathy has moved from a city she loved to her husband's home town but unlike Amy, her success occurs as her husband's job is lost. There is a suggestion, however, that Chris rapes her in a desperate attempt to hold onto their failing marriage. Rather than subdue, this act precipitates the final dissolution of their life together. Cathy is not destroyed by his violence towards her. Rather, she retains the upper hand.

Chris's previous mental health problems make him a far likelier candidate for sinking into madness; his failure as a teacher, lack of earning potential and his house-husband role are all pressures that could overwhelm him. He is haunted by the missing mill girls. His obsession

with this Victorian mystery is a sort of madness that he embraced as a child to block out the reality of his mother's abandonment of him; now he does the same to avoid the issue of his ex-wife's murder. To understand and develop the characters of Cathy and Chris, it was necessary to consider their domestic situation and the elements that might contribute to their unhappiness.

Couples with children, even in contemporary Britain, experience considerable social pressure. The British Social Attitudes survey revealed that a third of those surveyed still believe women should stay home with their children and another third believe women should only work part time:

'For men, it's a very different story. Public support for dads staying at home is close to zero; only 5% of us think dads should work part-time and the vast majority of us (73%) say dads should work full time.' (Poole, 2014).

Ruth Cain suggests that in today's neoliberal western society, the figure most feared and yet abused is that of the mother (2015). This is hardly a new idea; the eponymous Medea in Euripides' tragedy, furious at being thrown over for a younger model, took her revenge by slaying her husband's lover and her own children. The mother in Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955), peeved that her middle-aged male lodger desires her teenaged daughter more than herself, responds by hating her daughter. More recently, in Lionel Shriver's *We need to talk about Kevin* (2005) the reader is left with the suspicion that Eva created the monster son who massacred innocent school children.

'The domestic thriller deals with the mother as both victim and source of terror' Cain argues (2015). In accord with Crouch (2013), she suggests that with the breakdown of the extended family, along with the austerity-measure of withdrawing much state support, puts pressure on all citizens – mothers, especially – to sort out their own family problems. Cain is talking specifically about contemporary middle-class women with successful professional careers, healthy children, comfortable homes; the women who seem to be the living embodiment of Marjorie Hanson Shaevitz's *Superwoman Syndrome* (1984), the 'having it all' myth of 1960s -1980s feminism. By taking on the roles of homemaker, mother, wife and wage earner, Cain argues, it is little wonder that most real-life mothers in this category are physically, emotionally and creatively exhausted. It seems that the Victorian idea of the 'Angel in the House', from Patmore's poem of the same name (1878), has been repackaged for the 21st century as an indefatigable, stoical consumer who is as adept in the board room as she is on the school run.

There are those who would refute this pressure on women, however. A study by Catherine Sofer and Sayyid Salman Rizavi suggests that the gender division of labour within the home

becomes fairer the more equal in qualification and paid working hours men and women might be. (Sofer and Rizavi, 2008).

Since that study, newspapers and magazines still claim that women assume an unfair share of the burden: ‘Analysis by the Institute for Public Policy Research thinktank shows that eight out of ten married women do more household chores, while just one in ten married men does an equal amount of cleaning and washing as his wife’ (McVeigh 2014). It comes as no surprise, then, that Domestic Noir thrillers have chosen to explore the considerable tensions within the contemporary marital home.

With Chris in *Laid in Earth* made redundant from his work and Cathy earning money from her writing, I wondered whether she would still be doing most of the housework and how her creativity might be affected. Perhaps the pressure to be so perfect would become so overwhelming that she neglects her son, forgets to show affection to her husband, or worse, reveals her monstrosity by abandoning them both as Chris’s own mother did.

The monster/victim mother is an archetype explored in many Domestic Noir novels. In Emma Donahue’s *Room* (2011), Ma is held prisoner by an obsessed sexual deviant. Having been abducted when still a schoolgirl and impregnated by her captor, she is ostensibly, an innocent victim. The narrator of the story, her five-year-old son, Felix, brings an additional sense of injustice, of pathos, to the story; he has known nothing but the lock-up in which they are imprisoned. And yet, Ma’s relationship with Felix can be viewed in two ways. On one hand, she is laudable, doing her best to bring him up in terrible circumstances. She even engineers his escape, knowing she may never see him again. On the other, her closeness to and seeming dependence on him (e.g. she is still breastfeeding him) encourages the reader to criticise her. Sarah Blackwood (2015), believes that this is, at heart, a misogynistic story, and states, ‘this metaphor (the room itself) is more of the usual double-speak that structures our understandings of motherhood. The room/womb extended set piece tracks our culture’s rose-tinted view of the mother/infant-child bond, while also allowing readers the satisfaction of judging the perversity of that bond when it (somehow, always) inches into the excessive ...’

This becomes even more apparent when Ma and Felix escape their prison and are forced to make a life outside. As Felix separates from his mother, he begins to thrive, but poor Ma, starved of the closeness to her son that sustained her during her years of captivity, fades away. *Room* taps into the fears of modern mothers, who are simultaneously accused of neglecting and smothering their children. Just as Shriver encourages readers to look to the neurotic mother in *We need to talk about Kevin* when seeking blame for the son’s appalling behaviour, in *Room*

the subtext is that mothers, given the chance, suffocate and damage their children. It is not Mum and Dad, (Larkin,1971), as Larkin stated, who fuck you up; only Mum.

Cathy in *Laid in Earth* has a growing son, an unemployed husband, a successful writing career and the usual pressures of modern motherhood to face. Her abortion of her second child (due to her disenchantment with Chris and her career plans) is an easy example of her monstrosity but also of the pressures she feels. She experiences a type of existential terror when picnicking up on the moors with her husband and son; there are hints that both these men were violent towards her. I wanted the truth behind these horrors to remain ambiguous. If the violence is real, then Cathy might be seen as an archetypal Bluebeard wife; if not, she might be revealed as a monster of a more dangerous type.

Having set up Amy Dunne in *Gone Girl* as being terrified of Nick's violence, Flynn reveals her to be a sociopath. I considered having Cathy develop similar character traits. By making Cathy appear terrified of Chris, but later revealed to be manipulating the way others think of him, then any Gothic terror in the novel would become a smokescreen. Like Amy Dunne, she would be orchestrating events, rather than a victim of them. This plot idea, however, was quickly discarded. The subversion of reader expectation by the revelation of Amy's disappearance being her own hoax can be viewed as pushing the boundaries of the thriller genre. The so-called victim is calling the shots after all. She is a post-modern heroine, sassy and one step ahead of the men in her life. Look more closely, however and Amy as victim resurfaces. Her need for public approval, to be the 'cool girl' (pp. 202), reveals that she is as much a victim of a patriarchal society as Marian in *The Woman in White*. Desi's rape and imprisonment of her might be manipulated but it is still rape and imprisonment; is this really the only way she can avenge her husband's affair? Johansson (2016), argues that Amy's fake kidnapping and murder, and the real murder of Desi, even her pregnancy, is to 'articulate herself as a subject for whom there is no authentic self, and thus one available for constant reframing ...' Her need to portray herself as 'cool girl' or victim, is surely proof of her attempt to fit a contemporary model of perfect womanhood, which is surely as pernicious as any gothic heroine. What is the difference between Amy's performance and her real life? The fact remains, that when the novel closes, she is pregnant and stuck married to the man who cheated on her

It felt urgent to create a picture of Cathy as mother, wife and writer that could give her murder some meaning. But as I developed the clues about her, the more it seemed that a series of flat reflective surfaces were emerging, behind which any truth was at best slippery, and at worst

non-existent. Like Professor Parkin, in the M.R. James' story 'Oh, whistle and I'll come to you, my lad' (1904), who tries to get a grip on a fear that is never made manifest, *Laid in Earth* began to feel more intrinsically Gothic than the moorland landscape alone could account for. Cathy was refusing to make herself and the reason for her death, known. The different plot ideas devised at this point – that she was murdered by a jealous lover, or by Chris, did not ring true.

'... contrary to vulgar psychoanalytic interpretations, the mask is more significant in Gothic discourse than what it disguises, the veil more interesting than what it conceals. Frequently, Gothic horror resides in the fact that there is *nothing beneath* the veil; that surface is everything' (Spooner in Charles and Horsley, 2010).

The original question behind this study – about whether it matters if the murderer is revealed – returned to the fore. By employing elements of Gothic literature: a dark and mysterious landscape that becomes a Bluebeard room, a hint of the supernatural and of a woman subject to 'material oppression and psychic confusion', a sense of the past still having a 'stranglehold' upon the present, the different veils had been layered in such a way as to completely conceal any truth. If there was to be 'nothing beneath the veil': no motive for Cathy's murder, no resolution for the missing Victorian mill girls, it became necessary to decide whether simply bringing these mysteries to the fore would be enough to satisfy any thirst for resolution.

The Victorian element of the novel was straightforward to negotiate. The abuse of workers in the early 19th century is well documented. Orphans from the workhouses of the big cities of e.g. Liverpool and Manchester were sold like slaves to anyone who would take them on. (Taylor, 1978). The 1832 Sadler Committee report into the working conditions in mills in the north of England and Scotland demonstrates the shockingly long hours and the brutality exercised by overseers towards workers who were often as young as eight. (Howe, 2014). In Halifax, young Patience Kershaw's hair was worn away to a bald spot; since childhood, she had been hurrying a heavy corve into Boothtown mine, as the tunnel was too narrow to accommodate a horse; this meant she was shoving a cart full of coal down a narrow tunnel with her head. The 'material oppression' here is clear and working on this section of the novel helped develop the history of cruelty and violence within the landscape, a history that exerts a subtle pressure on the current inhabitants.

Because so much is known about the social conditions of this period, it seemed fitting to offer some explanation for the mill girl mystery – even if it is not conclusive. The 'sexual double standard' of the Victorian era is well known. (Furneaux, 2014) and Elijah Thomas's

story of a man whose public reputation belies sordid truths is intended to reflect some more recent cases, such as the revelation of Jimmy Saville's sexual practices. Just as Flynn's Amy Dunne has much in common with Collins's Marian, in *Laid in Earth*, so the sexual politics of the past – as represented by Thomas – are still discernible in the present.

But the hypocrisies and wrongdoings of the present age are yet to be uncovered, thus Cathy's character is elusive; her murderer even more so. Her murder became less about resolution and more about the process of creating and analysing clues. In the image, 'Denouements' (pp. 138), Cathy quotes the low clear up rate of UK murder statistics in the Citizen's report of 2012. The murderer in her own novel goes unpunished. Although there is plenty of evidence relating to 'material oppression and psychic confusion' in Cathy's life, much of it is contradictory; there are and can be no certainties.

In the following chapter, I discuss the inclusion of digital documents as evidence and how this evidence could be read in different ways to illuminate or confuse the narrative and to shed light on Cathy.

4. EVIDENCE OF LIVES: WHAT IS LEFT

Hilary Mantel, in the first of her Reith Lectures, speaks of history as ‘... the record of what’s left on the record. It’s the plan of the positions taken, when we stop the dance to note them down. It’s what’s left [...] a few stones, scraps of writing, scraps of cloth. It is no more ‘the past’ than a birth certificate is a birth, or a script is a performance, or a map is a journey’ (Mantel, 2017) and of the role of the historical novelist as someone who ‘puts the past back into process, into action, frees the people from the archive and lets them run about, ignorant of their fates, with all their mistakes unmade ...’.

As discussed in the previous chapters, there are two central mysteries in *Laid in Earth* – one historical, pursued through Chris’s research into missing mill girls; the other contemporary, the investigation into Cathy’s murder, also requiring an exploration of the more recent past. As a further element, Cathy’s historical novel takes the mill girl mystery and fictionalises it, providing an answer to their disappearance – Plate 36, (p. 239) is a screenshot of Cathy’s novel referring to the mill girls being accidentally drowned. Bony’s painting also provides a record of the landscape, his own life and loves. These strands needed to work together, not only to provide resolution to the mysteries, but to reflect and inform each other, offering an alternative narrative that would exist in the interface between the hard evidence of history and the freedom of fiction, between the static historical facts and the process of past.

As Cathy is a novelist, it seemed logical to assume that she would emerge through her creative work. Her novel, *On Angel’s Wings*, owes much to the Brontës’s *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Frances Hodgson Burnett’s *Secret Garden* (1911); it is also a Domestic Noir novel in its own right. Originally, sections of this book were only written as part of the development of Cathy’s character, but as it emerged, the more these fragments of her writing began to operate as potential clues, not only to her state of mind, but possibly to the reason for her murder and the identity of her killer. Until these extracts of her work were written, she had stubbornly remained a shadowy non-person: the victim that no one knew. Suddenly, she was a writer of historical fiction, albeit in the pot-boiler genre.

One of the frustrating aspects, for me, of S.J. Watson’s *Before I go to Sleep* (2011) is the lack of detail about the novel the main character, Christine, wrote before her ‘accident’. *Before I go to Sleep* is about a woman novelist who forgets everything about her life every time she sleeps. It seems a waste that Christine’s novel is not used as a clue to her past, though of

course, her daily journal provides her with enough literary clues to eventually recognise her entrapment.

Cathy's writing in *Laid in Earth* and other elements of her public life became an opportunity to deliver some vital clues to her marriage and her state of mind. T.R. Richardson's *What She Left* (2013) centres upon Alice Salmon whose tragic drowning sends shock-waves through her community. Pieced together through a series of diary extracts, emails, letters and social media messages, this is essentially an epistolary whodunit. Sleuthing is provided by sinister professor, Jeremy Cooke, whose letters to various characters include Alice's mother and his friend Larry. We also hear from Alice and her friends through digital media messages. In this way, a picture of Alice's life emerges through 'scraps of writing' (Mantel, 2017). Similarly, *The Nineteenth Wife* by David Ebershoff (2008), an historical murder mystery providing an exposé of the Latter-Day Saints' cult of polygamy, is presented through a series of diary extracts, letters and pieces of academic research. Alongside the contemporary narrative these materials move the story along and act as witness to the experience of the historical characters as well as providing background for the present-day characters.

This method of revealing evidence offered the potential to provide a sense of continuity alongside the fragments of Cathy's work. Additional digital documents: magazine articles, interview transcripts, historical documents, letters and other materials, could become independent witnesses for the reader to study in order to gain insight into Cathy and other characters, the setting and the history of the area. From such evidence, I hoped Cathy would emerge as a rounded character, a writer, mother, wife, friend, and a woman with a public profile and that some insights into the reason for her murder might be revealed. But this was not the case. The fake documents created more surfaces under whose veil the horror of nothingness still lurked. No writer is just their writing or the writing of others about them. The mysteries – historical and contemporary – remained unsolved. Cathy needed to be revealed in a deeper way.

Joanne Reardon Lloyd studies the perceived role of the victim in crime fiction in her essay, 'Talking to the Dead: the voice of the victim in crime fiction' (2014). She discusses the 'transaction in crime fiction between the victim and the detective, which reveals the kind of intimacy that we are always craving as readers, an effect that is often achieved through the reader following the detective on his trail of discovery in which he has an ongoing conversation with the dead'. The real challenge in *Laid in Earth* lay in the lack of a formal detective or investigator character. Despite Stephens and Jones' inclusion as detectives, none of the

intimacy to which Reardon Lloyd refers is created. They only find out about Cathy's life and possible killer through the few clues with which they are presented. At no point in the story do they, or any of the other characters – who all operate on some level as investigators – possess all the evidence. The reader, who does have access to all the clues available must become detective. This meant that the clues created would have to be tangible enough to offer some real insights.

As some of these clues created took the form of written documents, they could be accused of being expositional – telling the reader how to think about the character(s) to whom they refer. Eoin McNamee's novel, *The Blue Tango* (2000), is a part fiction, part biographical story of the real-life Irish murder victim, Patricia Curran. Much of the information disclosed about Patricia, centres largely on her photograph, shown in newspapers at the time of her murder. This photograph appears on the front of the paperback version of the novel. McNamee uses this image and descriptions of others as a shorthand insight into her character. Patricia's face in the original black and white picture, becomes imprinted on the mind of the reader and details of the way in which she spoke or acted are not needed. The image is all, whether as a picture or a narrative description, it seeps into the reader's consciousness of her. Comparing an earlier photograph of the victim to the later newspaper image, McNamee writes: '... Patricia looked almost haggard, an essay in mortality. When he saw her debutante photograph in the paper after she had been killed, he realized that she had always been growing into this demeanour. The widow's dress, the tragedian's gestures.' (McNamee, 2000, pp.17).

The images of Patricia are used as evidence to support the view that she was somehow doomed from birth. Apart from the obvious Gothic aspect – the heroine's fatalistic entry to the Bluebeard room – this seems a superficial, if not lazy way of developing a character either in history or fiction. It appeared that McNamee had created nothing but another shiny surface. But there is an alternative viewpoint. Perhaps her pose was deliberate, that she personifies Barthes's argument that, 'In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art.' (Barthes, 1980). McNamee expects the reader will make assumptions from Patricia's face in her photographs – about her class, her sexuality, morality, personality and so on. But maybe she knew exactly how that picture would be received and it is not the beholder who determines her story, but her collusion with the photographer. Cathy's image as her character Donatella, appears on the front cover of her novel *On Angel's Wings* and is set against a background of stone angels in a cemetery. By making her seem brooding, tragic, it too might suggest her real life fate to those who viewed it after her death. The gravestones

underline the Gothic themes of *Laid in Earth* suggested in the repeated images of graves and coffins.

Marisha Pessl's *Night Film* (2013) is, ostensibly a traditional crime novel in which the daughter of an avant-garde movie director, Cordova, is found dead and local journalist, Scott McGrath, begins a maverick investigation with a couple of oddball sidekicks. Two elements take it out of the mainstream, however. Firstly, the genre bending nature of the plot, which is half horror, half crime, and secondly, the insertion of digital images into the text – a mix of newspaper clippings, magazine interviews and web pages created by the 'Cordovites' - the director's fans. The images provide additional information about the dead girl and her father but in some instances, they also become clunky expositional devices. When Scott is eventually allowed to access the Cordovites' website, for instance: 'To my amazement, the web page had actually loaded successfully, reading at the top: YOU MADE IT.'(pp.167) On the next page, an image from this website appears. I am unconvinced that the narrative needs to draw attention to the image at all. The reader will make the connection between the picture and the text whether a link is pointed out or not. This element of *Night Film* feels overwritten.

But the images in *Night Film* are not only about exposition; they also add atmosphere to the novel. The predominance of black, the pages of obsessive fan tributes and photos of the dead girl, all help reinforce the Gothic terror to which Scott is subjected. This recalls Sebald's inclusion of photographs in *The Emigrants* (1992), a novel of thematically linked stories of Jewish people forced to leave Germany during or after the Second World War. As well as offering a sort of 20th century scrap book addition to the stories, they bring the Jewish diaspora into sharp and personal focus. The author claims the photographs are, 'what you would describe as authentic' (Heidt, 2008). Sebald, however, was 'an exacting customer at the University of East Anglia copy shop, discussing what might be done with his images, adjusting the size and contrast.' (Homburger, 2001, in Heidt, 2008) which is a possible indication that the pictures were doctored. Such a questionable source calls the veracity of the narrative into question. But whether the photos and the stories are false or genuine, the reader is reminded that the Jewish victims of the German Nazi regime were stripped of their identity in concentration camps. They were and are not known as individuals but en masse inscriptions on Shoah memorials and in text book references.

The 'photograph' of Cathy in *Laid in earth* is a digitally manipulated drawing on a mocked-up cover of a novel, *On Angel's Wings*, that has never existed. The title of the novel refers to Patmore's poem 'The Angel in the House' (1858). The strapline, 'Not dead only sleeping' (Luke 8:52), a popular inscription on the graves of 19th century children, is intended

as a reminder that throughout the book, Cathy is being revealed – coming alive. It also refers to the subject of her novel, the twenty-five missing mill girls, an historical mystery which Chris is also researching. This mix of forgery and historical and biblical reference is designed to create a kind of palimpsest, the notion that ‘history itself is a fiction’ (Brooke-Rose, 1991) including the history being written in the course of the novel – that of the investigation into Cathy’s death.

There is an older precedent for using additional material within novels. In Nabokov’s *Pale Fire*, the fictional John Shade’s long poem is extensively critiqued in notes by self-appointed editor Charles Kinbote, providing a metafictional expose of the real plot – a murder mystery on one hand, a skilful biography on the other. Kinbote’s notes and appendices can be read alongside the cantos of Shade’s poem, or afterwards; the order in which reading takes place can be arbitrary. This brings an additional frisson to the novel – the reader can take part in shaping the evidence and thus affecting the plot.

Originally the images were inserted into *Laid in Earth* in a chronological fashion – 19th century first, followed by Bony’s artefacts and bringing the evidence up to date with the Twitter messages and texts. Using Nabokov’s model, they are now included in the different chapters without order or explanation. John Berger comments that, ‘The meaning of an image is changed according to what one sees immediately beside it or what one sees immediately after it. Such authority as it retains is distributed over the whole context in which it appears.’ (Berger, 2008, p.11) With this in mind, the image of Bony’s nude painting of Cathy (although it is not labelled as such) is inserted between a chapter in Bony’s point of view and the next in Jake’s, which is set in his design technology class, in order to suggest some connection between the two characters. Bony’s painting of Cathy is unfinished as is the cabinet Jake has been building in class. Both characters’ artworks involve Cathy in some way.

Umberto Eco’s *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) is another example of a novel that uses images to impressive effect. This story concerns Yambo, a man whose stroke leaves his personal memories (including his wife’s name) inaccessible - though he retains a striking ability to recall and recite long tracts of classic texts in their original languages. The discovery, in the country house in which he spent much of his childhood, of certain artefacts including comic books, posters, cocoa tins and movie stills, inspires Yambo’s quest for his own past. It is as though Yambo’s personal history has become the subject of his own archaeological research. These artefacts are explored within the novel in an attempt to discover whether Yambo’s personal identity can be found in the cultural artefacts he has consumed. The images do serve in some way as illustrations – though they preclude the need for lengthy descriptions.

It is helpful to the reader to have them as Yambo analyses them in detail. The innovative aspect of this novel is the way in which the reader comes to realise that such items could just as easily be their own. In a material culture such as ours, the objects and artefacts we consume are ubiquitous. We may not own exactly the same pieces, but in the end, whether you read the Beano comic, or Dandy, the overall effect is the same. In trying to discover that which makes Yambo an individual, he is unearthed as an everyman, someone whose identity could be mistaken for another.

This idea of a personal archaeology is explored in *Laid in Earth*. As in Shapton's auction lots, Cathy's identity as well as that of her killer is bound up in the artefacts revealed. Chris's search for the missing mill girls and the documents and photos he unearths, is intended to mirror and illuminate this theme of recovery, of the dead emerging from the traces they leave. Ultimately, the digital images are intended to be Mantel's 'scraps of cloth' (2017) that alongside the narrative bring 'process' back to the past to make it clear that the murdered do have a voice and in the 21st century it is a loud one that cannot be silenced.

CONCLUSION

David Lodge in his *Art of Fiction* quotes George Eliot's observation that: 'Conclusions are the weak point of most authors but some of the fault lies in the very nature of a conclusion, which is at best, a negation' (Eliot, 1871, in Lodge, 1992, pp.224). Research for *Laid in Earth* began as an inquiry into contemporary crime thrillers, specifically regional and Domestic Noir. The issue of resolution was foremost. Did the crime that kick-starts the storyline need to be solved or did the raising of other issues e.g. the treatment of women by men, sustain the reader enough to make any formal closure unnecessary? Amanda Boulter differentiates 'ending' from 'closure': 'Successful endings reach closure at the level of expectation, (of the reader) even if they do not reach closure on the level of questions.' (Boulter, 2007, pp.123) The questions to which she refers, are those raised by the novel as a whole; some of which may not be answered at all.

Gillian Flynn's *Gone Girl* (2012) sets up the mystery of a disappearing wife and the questions: was she murdered, did her husband kill her? Halfway through the novel, the reader knows she is alive, a manipulative psychopath and that her husband is an adulterer. We cannot trust either of them. The Dunnes end up back together and the novel reaches closure on the level of expectation. But the other questions Flynn sets up – about sexual politics, negotiating a long-term relationship and the way in which the media manipulates and portrays ordinary citizens – are examined in the second part of the story. And this, surely, is what the best novels do: hold up some aspect of contemporary life for inspection. Amy Dunne's trajectory from 'cool girl' to 'Average Dumb Woman Married to Average Shitty Man' to the '...long, frightening climax' (Flynn, 2012, p.222) she and Nick become by the end of the story, evokes the 'constant reframing' encouraged by the popular press and social media (Johansen, 2016), as well as the truth of her Gothic victimhood which has so much in common with Marion in *A Woman in White*.

The central mysteries in *Laid in Earth*, Cathy's death and the disappearance of the mill girls, had to be addressed to achieve closure on the level of expectation. The questions about the pressures on women within the nuclear family, the treatment of mental health issues, the changes in the environment, remain unanswered but they have been presented to the reader for consideration.

The link between Gothic literature, Domestic Noir and recent TV crime dramas is key. Gothic stories of the 18th and 19th century employ setting to create a sinister effect; decaying castles and haunted country houses hide grim secrets. Domestic Noir literature uses the family

home, casting the familiarities of suburbia in a new and terrifying light. Contemporary crime dramas employ the physical landscape of a specific rural/coastal region, as a haunted backdrop against which the human stories unfold. In doing so, the landscape becomes a character in its own right. These elements are explored in *Laid in Earth*. The moorland surrounding Rawton Bridge, is wild and hostile, rather like that of Ceredigion in *Hinterland* (2014). The floods that sweep through the town directly affect the human lives around it. Rawton Bridge itself is a Victorian town with its own mysteries and secrets, a traditional Gothic setting where the past exerts its 'stranglehold' upon the present. Finally, Cathy is murdered in her home; here, the married woman within the domestic sphere comes under scrutiny.

Developing the Domestic Noir element of Cathy and Chris's relationship provided an opportunity to consider why contemporary novels about trapped and abused women are written and read by women. Of the many fears that prevail in the 21st century, one of them remains the abusive treatment of women at the hands of men. Worrying facts lie behind these fears. The 2015 *Findings from analyses based on the Homicide Index recorded by the Home Office covering different aspects of homicide*, states: 'In particular, women were far more likely than men to be killed by partners/ex-partners (44% of female victims compared with 6% of male victims)...' Rape is also a very real cause for alarm. 'Between 2009/10 and 2011/12 there were an estimated 78,000 victims of rape per year in England and Wales - 69,000 females and 9,000 males'. (Burne-Murdoch, 2013). The huge disparity between female and male rape numbers demonstrates that women's preoccupation with sexual violence is as justified now as it was in Wilkie Collins's time. I agree with Val McDermid; when men stop raping and murdering women, then women will stop writing about it. I believe that women read such literature, because, it operates as a warning, just as the old fairy tales - *Bluebeard* among them - were handed down from mother to daughter to guard us against the pitfalls of marriage etc., so we read Domestic Noir to learn how to recognise a stalker or a gaslighter or understand the perils of social media.

During the writing process, it became clear that the absence of a formal investigator, meant that any resolution in *Laid in Earth* must be reached by the reader. This proved problematic; if I refused to take control of the story and reveal Cathy's murderer, then I would be abandoning my post and risking an unsatisfactory ending. Eventually, I did succumb to the pressure of resolution. Leaving the plot entirely open seemed more forced than attempting to solve - at least at a satisfaction level - the central mysteries of the novel. Although there is some ambiguity as to the identity of her murderer, Cathy is left to illustrate my findings about the

treatment of women in Domestic Noir novels: It wasn't that there is *nothing* beneath the veil, but that shockingly, nothing has *changed*. Years since the 'third wave' of feminism even successful women with agency, like Cathy, still feel trapped by marriage. Western women may not be forbidden to leave the house, or from entering their husband's private lair but they can be trapped in other ways: trapped into becoming breadwinners with successful careers as well as mothers and wives. Ruth Cain's suggests that women are increasingly expected to take full responsibility for the physical and emotional wellbeing of family members, while the state is slowly removing traditional means of support (2015). Alongside the breakdown of the extended family, this means that in real life as well as in fiction, we rely on the internet to provide us with clues on how to live, who to trust.

George Eliot was correct. The resolution in *Laid in Earth* is 'a negation'. There are no certainties for any of the characters, only evidence and counter-evidence, some real, some fake. From a dizzying choice of real clues and red herrings, the characters must map their route through a frightening world. And the past is only beneath the surface, always there, waiting to come back and knock on a casement window or sigh across the moors to remind them of who they really are.

Like us, they live in Gothic times.

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