

**Peter May's *The Lewis Man* and Rebecca Wait's *Our Fathers*:
A Scottish Gothic Reading of Island-Set Crime Fiction**

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the intersection of crime fiction, the Gothic, and the Scottish island setting through Rebecca Wait's psychological thriller *Our Fathers* (2020) and Peter May's detective novel *The Lewis Man* (2012). The analysis illustrates how the two novels incorporate selected elements typical of the Scottish Gothic: the taxing process of the construction of identity, the notion of the divided self, the impossibility of forgetting the past, and the ways in which history can be written on and read from the body. In *Our Fathers*, the fictional island of Litta becomes a claustrophobic space that reinforces the protagonist's haunted inheritance and struggle with paternal legacy. In contrast, *The Lewis Man* situates its mystery within the sublime landscapes of the Outer Hebrides, where peat bogs and fragmented memory render personal and national histories simultaneously fragile and recoverable. Ultimately, both texts illustrate how Scottish island-set crime fiction mobilizes Gothic aesthetics to interrogate questions of history, identity, and place. The paper suggests that the island setting not only supports but intensifies Gothic concerns, making the island a particularly productive locus for contemporary Scottish Gothic and crime writing alike. (ŠD)

KEYWORDS: Scottish crime fiction, the Gothic, island poetics, divided self, *Our Fathers*, *The Lewis Man*



The affinity between the Gothic mode and crime fiction as a genre has been well documented by Maurizio Ascari and Catherine Spooner, among many others, which demonstrates a new approach in the critical reception of crime fiction introduced at the turn of the twenty-first century.¹ The presence of Gothic elements in, specifically, Scottish crime fiction has likewise been a topic of discussion in recent years, at least since Alan Bissett's introduction to his anthology *Damage Land: New Scottish Gothic Fiction* (2001), in which he notes the prominence of Gothic tropes in the works of best-selling crime fiction author Ian Rankin (5). In 2017, Timothy

C. Baker also commented on this aspect of Rankin's Rebus novels and added a short commentary on Val McDermid's detective novel *The Skeleton Road* (2014), in which, he argues, the author "uses Gothic tropes to reflect on the constitution of both individual and national identity, and the way bodies do and do not speak. The secrets of the past . . . are revealed in the physical body" ("New Frankensteins" 204).

In his 2014 monograph on contemporary Scottish Gothic, Baker devoted an entire chapter to Gothic narratives set on islands and, three years later, Monica Germanà noted that "[t]he island setting [has become] a frequent locus in contemporary Scottish Gothic" (224). A comparable development can be observed in twenty-first-century crime fiction, whose authors also show an increasing tendency to employ islands as the setting for their mysteries. Various Scottish islands, both real and imagined, seem to be a popular choice, especially for Scottish- and English-born writers.

The present paper is devoted to two products of this three-way intersection between crime fiction, the Gothic, and the Scottish island setting: *Our Fathers*, a 2020 psychological thriller by London-based author Rebecca Wait, set on the fictional Inner Hebridean island of Litta, and the Scottish-born (though France-based) author Peter May's 2012 detective novel, *The Lewis Man*, the middle installment of his trilogy set in and around the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. Acknowledging the fact that the selected texts belong to different subgenres of crime fiction, this article does not aim to provide a comparison of the two novels. Instead, it seeks to illustrate the pervasiveness of what appears to be a trend in contemporary crime fiction with Scottish locations, that is, the consistent use of the island setting as a way of providing a frame which highlights or reinforces the well-established Gothic tropes. Of these, three are of specific interest: the "notion of the 'divided self'" and "the impossibility of forgetting the past," identified by Baker ("New Frankensteins" 204) as the two most typical preoccupations of the contemporary Scottish Gothic, as well as the importance of reading the topography of the body, which Baker pointed out in Val McDermid's *The Skeleton Road* (204). Similarly to McDermid's detective novel, May's *The Lewis Man* offers a physical body which is "read" for evidence during an official postmortem, and this way of reading the body is exactly what Baker had in mind. In the case of *Our Fathers*, however, in which Wait does not present an official investigation by the authorities, it is best to extend Baker's method of reading the body to also include Nicolas Abraham's notions of "mental topography" and the phantom in order to interpret the psychological body of the protagonist (Abraham 173).

The divided self, arguably the most Scottish of all the Gothic tropes, has its antecedents in such classics as James Hogg's *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) and Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (Baker, "New Frankensteins" 200). Both of these, along with some works by Walter Scott and J. M. Barrie, have been discussed at length by David Punter, Angela Wright, or Ian Duncan, who have considered these works to be the cornerstones of Scottish Gothic writing. Various divided selves also occur in crime fiction, often ranking among the most popular albeit very controversial characters, such as Hannibal Lecter or Dexter Morgan.

Carol Margaret Davison and Monica Germanà, Duncan Petrie, and Timothy C. Baker—see his monograph *Contemporary Scottish Gothic* (2014)—also relate the fascination the divided self has for Scottish authors to the "Caledonian Antisyzygy," a phenomenon described over a century ago by G. Gregory Smith, who argues that the Scottish mind is bifurcated due to Scotland's complicated political and religious history (4). Scottish literature, then, reflects this bifurcation by employing "two aspects which appear contradictory" (5) and are pertinent to the present discussion of the connections between crime fiction and the Gothic. On the one hand, there is the desire in Scottish literature for detailed realism, which "leaves nothing to the imagination" (6)—a feature frequently appreciated in or even expected of most subgenres of contemporary crime fiction. On the other hand, Scottish literature has the propensity to depict the fantastic and the marvelous, or, it might be said, to employ the Gothic mode.

The second main theme of contemporary Scottish Gothic is that of "the impossibility of forgetting the past" (Baker, "New Frankensteins" 204), which can likewise be traced back to the nineteenth-century Scottish Gothic classics, including Walter Scott's *The Antiquary* (1816). Scott and other nineteenth-century authors frequently remind the reader that, after the Union of Parliaments in 1707, Scotland's history is "a history that is constantly under the threat of erasure" (Punter 105) as official historical narratives reflect the perspective of those in power. The Scottish Gothic, in other words, voices the desire to set the record straight and tell the story the way it actually happened to the losing side—frequently Scotland as a whole. This concern with recovering silenced histories resonates strongly with postcolonial critiques, particularly in the context of Scotland's historically complex relationship with Britain. One might add that this is another obvious feature the Scottish Gothic shares with crime fiction, the goal of

whose plots is usually to establish how the powerless (that is, the murder victims) came to suffer their fate and to bring the guilty party to justice.

In *Our Fathers*, both the Scottish Gothic tropes mentioned above are linked to the protagonist Tommy Baird. He is described as the “uncanny” double of his father, John, due to their striking physical and apparent psychological resemblance (Wait 30). Tommy is also the seeker of the truth behind John’s shooting of his wife and Tommy’s mother, Katrina, and Tommy’s two siblings, Nicky and Beth. As Tommy gathers information by talking to his uncle and his childhood neighbors, he is forced to realize that what can be read in his mental topography—what he considered to be his memories of the murders—does not correspond to how the others remember the events. Even though in the end Tommy finds inner peace, his recovery of the erased history is not complete. It is only the reader who, through the novel’s multiple narrative perspectives, is told the full truth. A crucial piece of information known only to Tommy’s deceased parents and the Bairds’ neighbor, Fiona McKenzie, remains a secret, since Fiona feels too guilty to confess that Tommy’s mother told her about wanting to take the children and leave her tyrannical husband. Fiona, who thought John was a flawless man, deemed Katrina selfish and divulged her plan to John, who then murdered his family out of jealousy.

The Lewis Man presents a more straightforward story of an investigation into the identity of a young man murdered over fifty years before the present time of the novel. The seeker of truth is the series protagonist, former police detective Fin Macleod, while the “divided self” is represented by Tormod Macdonald, an old man with dementia, who is proven by DNA to be a relative of the murdered man. Due to his worsening condition, Tormod cannot assist the investigation, except by providing incoherent fragments of a past life which are initially incongruent with the person everyone holds him to be. Since the key to the dead man’s identity is hidden in Tormod’s disintegrated mind, at first the investigation only relies on what can be read from the dead body itself. That, in turn, is highly readable, thanks to its being preserved in a peat bog. The texts found on the body include the dated metal plate used for the victim’s cranioplasty, the tattoo of Elvis Presley on his arm, and the imprint of a peculiar, knitted pattern made right after his death, which is still visible on his skin. After correctly read, these traces allow Fin Macleod to not only piece together the victim’s story, but also to discover the true identity of the man who now calls himself Tormod Macdonald. Like Wait’s novel, *The Lewis Man* employs

multiple narrative perspectives; however, May makes the full historical truth known to both the investigator and the reader.

***Our Fathers*: Entrapment and isolation**

As far as the island setting is concerned, the covers of numerous Scottish island-set crime fiction novels—for example, works by Mark Douglas-Home, C. L. Taylor, and Susan Hill—promise to take the reader to a “remote Scottish island” and give them a genuine taste of island life by conveying the experiences of boundedness, isolation, fragmentation, and smallness—in other words, the four main features of “islandness” as described by sociologist and Island Studies scholar, Godfrey Baldacchino (xxv). The most common method of creating an impression of islandness in a reader’s mind is naturally the visual description of scenery. In the case of the Scottish islands, the sense of isolation is brought about by descriptions of when (or whether) it is possible to see the mainland and how frequent the ferry connection to it is, while boundedness is highlighted by the descriptions of the island’s steep cliffs or the strong currents in the surrounding sea. The sea often hides perilous rock formations right under its surface; these can in turn be seen as exemplifying the feature of fragmentation. The reader’s final impression of islandness, however, depends most on how the author decides to present the island’s smallness. When smallness is perceived through a character’s consciousness as extraordinary and refreshing, the visual descriptions, together with the often multi-sensory experience of the windy and stormy weather, convey to the reader the sense of openness and the sublime. Conversely, when smallness is perceived as extreme or unwelcome by a character, the prevailing impression of all the other features of islandness is that of confinement and claustrophobia. As will be shown, both impressions function well as supportive elements, or even amplifiers, of the Gothic tropes.

Litta is a fictional island allowing Wait to create the setting of *Our Fathers* as claustrophobic and unpeopled as she needed. Based on the few geographical references in the text, the island may still be placed on the map, the most likely location being between the two Inner Hebridean isles of Mull and Jura. Measuring only eight by three miles (Wait 52) and with a ferry connection which does not run daily, Litta—whose name perhaps sounds like a mangled version of the word *little*—is constructed as an ideal setting for the domestic Gothic subplot concerning the lives of the Baird family before the murders. As is clear from the first pages of the novel, Fiona McKenzie’s unfortunate opinion of John Baird as a flawless husband

and father is in sharp contrast with his true nature. Especially in the chapters focalized through Katrina, the majority of which can be found in Part 2, John is portrayed as nothing short of a Gothic villain and Litta is a stand-in for the castle in which he entraps his naïve newlywed wife.

In studying literary islands, Graziadei et al. suggest that it is crucial to single out for analysis especially the reader's first encounter with the island. They refer to the "precise moment in the narrative in which the island emerges as a specific place or thing" as the island's point of conception, and they also highlight the significance of the narrating or focalizing characters' sensual perceptions (240). Katrina grew up on the mainland and moved to the island with John soon after their first son was born. With an inconsolable newborn and no local friends, and her husband staying over on the mainland on most days due to his job, Katrina's first experience of Litta is that of loneliness and entrapment. "Sometimes," she reflects on the very first page of the novel, "the isolation of the place appalled her. Even on the clearest days, you could not see the mainland, thirty miles distant to the east. To their west, the Atlantic stretched out blankly, nothing but a lighthouse standing between them and Canada" (Wait 1). This short passage focuses heavily on visual imagery of remoteness and isolation. The notion that there is nothing between the island and North America is a common one employed to highlight the status of the island as a lonely outcrop, the last bastion of civilization between the great non-place of the ocean (Cresswell 9) and the civilized place—the mainland—which, however, cannot be seen either. Litta's smallness is presented by Katrina as both extreme and unwelcome from the very beginning of the novel, and in combination with the description of its remoteness and isolation, the island is likely to be conceived of by the reader as a trap throughout the whole novel, even though other characters hold more moderate opinions of it. Against this backdrop of anxiety, Wait lists further examples of both physical and emotional entrapment and isolation.

The house to which John and Katrina move is draughty, does not have central heating and seems utterly unsuitable for a newborn (Wait 244), to which John appears oblivious, spending most of his nights away from home. As a result, Katrina passes her days in solitude until Fiona, the Bairds' only neighbor, reaches out to her, starts bringing her food, and the two women bond over their shared experience as new mothers. Their friendship, however, does not last long past the birth of the Bairds' second son, Tommy. Already during their courtship, John successfully limited Katrina's circle of friends and her other activities, and was not careful

during sexual intercourse, frequently citing superficially charming but ominous reasons such as that “they’d be married soon anyway” (235). He also frequently criticized the way she dressed and demonized the men around her, saying they could easily take advantage of her (239). Therefore, when he found out how much Fiona was doing for Katrina during Tommy’s infancy, he demanded she tell Fiona her help was no longer needed because the situation made him look “like he wasn’t caring for his wife” (251). Significantly, it was always Katrina who had to end her friendships or change her attitudes to suit her husband’s wishes without any explanation to others, and the Littans, thinking that she simply “was not the type to have close friends” (268), soon ceased to show interest in her. As the boys aged, John grew increasingly cruel to her and started moving his things around the house only to blame her for misplacing them, which made Katrina question her very sanity (255). In this way, John manipulated and systematically isolated his wife, starting long before they moved to the island, and continued doing so there until she felt her world visually “contracting and narrowing” (250). When, in the moment of greatest despair, Katrina confided in Fiona about her wish to escape the island, Fiona, still bitter about the unexplained termination of their friendship, betrayed her plans to John, who shot Katrina dead three weeks later.

It is no surprise that observing such behavior at home, Tommy grew up with the impression that “all fathers were like this, that behind closed doors this was how all men treated their wives” (Wait 155). As an adult, he finds himself being intentionally cruel to his girlfriend Caroline, and with no desire to have children of his own, since he fears that they would inherit “[s]ome kind of family *disorder*” (135, emphasis in the original). Tommy is aware of the undesirability of his actions and their consequences but cannot seem to control himself. He blames this on being haunted by the legacy of his father, to whom he bears a visual resemblance, which is described in the novel with the quintessentially Gothic adjective “uncanny” (30). What Tommy experiences resembles the presence of the phantom as theorized by psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham. Nicholas T. Rand, editor and translator of Nicolas Abraham’s essays, points out that “Abraham’s theory of the phantom enlarges upon Freud’s metapsychology by suggesting that the unsettling disruptions in the psychic life of one person can adversely and unconsciously affect someone else” (166), especially their child (Abraham 172). The phantom’s manifestations, Abraham writes, are “periodic and compulsive,” working “like a ventriloquist, like a stranger within the subject’s own mental topography” (173). Tommy indeed

perceives a foreign presence within his body, likening it to a tapeworm, “coiled up in his guts” (Wait 156), and after he mistreats his girlfriend, he feels sorry but at the same time knows that he feels the compulsion to do it again (157).

From the memories of Tommy’s paternal uncle Malcolm, it is clear that this phantom was transmitted across at least two generations. Already Tommy’s grandfather is described as a hard-working but unpredictable drunken crofter who would “take out his exhaustion and rage on his wife and children” (Wait 69) by beating them and belittling them, especially his wife, who was “the chief object of his hatred” (70). The physically sturdy, though more sensitive Malcolm was less frequently abused than the slighter but more cold-blooded John. In spite of this, it was John who defended their father’s strictness and always took their father’s side against their mother, at whose funeral he commented, “She was an old bitch . . . I’m surprised Dad put up with it” (74). Hearing his uncle’s childhood stories, Tommy is convinced that the evil in their family “gets passed on” (147) because it is written in his psyche as well as in his DNA, and that he is doomed to be his father’s double, both physically and psychologically.

Tommy begins to be disabused of this notion, however, when one of his strongest childhood memories is proven to be false. It is a memory from the day his family was murdered and one he always used to prove to himself that he was born bad. Crucially, this memory is also strongly connected with the sense of sight and visual isolation which permeates the entire novel. Tommy survived his father’s murderous rampage by hiding in a bedroom closet, and he remembers watching through the slats of its door how his older brother ran into the room, as if looking for a place to hide, found none, and so ran back out again seconds before being killed (Wait 205). For over twenty years, Tommy reproached himself for merely watching his brother from safety, for not pulling him in the closet to save his life. According to the written account of the crime scene, however, this could not have happened based on where the bodies were found, and Tommy realizes that the core memory on which he constructed the notion of his inborn badness was merely the product of his survivor’s guilt.

The final step in Tommy’s recovery from the phantom haunting is his deep pondering over a photograph of his mother—a strong visual stimulus accompanied by next to no verbal information from Malcolm who knew Katrina very little. Because of how much John isolated her in life, Katrina remained a mystery to most Littans, including Malcolm, her brother-in-law, so he is unable to describe her character to Tommy very

well. He does, however, own a couple of photographs of her, which he shows to his nephew. Tommy asks Malcolm to give him the photograph of himself and his brother with their mother, and returns the one featuring their father (Wait 195). He reflects on his childhood love for Katrina which is pictured in the photograph as “[h]is small arm . . . outstretched, reaching for his mother’s hair” (194), and he stops blaming her for making his unstable father angry by seemingly always “ma[king] things difficult when she didn’t need to” (155). After reliving his early memories of Katrina, Tommy ceases to masochistically identify himself only as his father’s double and realizes he does have a choice in what he becomes in life because he also carries the genetic legacy of his mother, whom he adored as a boy “even more than God and Jesus” (85).

Just like the very beginning of the novel, its final pages are devoted to a visual description of the island. Conceived for the reader through the eyes of the entrapped Katrina, it is, in the words of Graziadei et al (240), reconceived by Tommy as he is leaving it on the ferry. Achieving what his mother was never allowed to do, he observes the island recede into the distance, “its ragged moorland rising up in crests and ridges, its cliffs leaning over the sea . . . , its terrible beauty fading” (Lewis 333). Unlike Katrina, Tommy sees the sublime beauty of his birthplace and feels as if he left the phantom of his father behind, on the island.

The Lewis Man: Openness and movement

While like *Our Fathers*, *The Lewis Man* opens with a conception of an island, May’s description incorporates more types of sensual perception than Wait’s. The first paragraph of the short Prologue is a neutral description of a “storm-lashed island three hours off the north-west coast of Scotland” (May, *Lewis* 1). What follows is focalized by a five-year-old girl called Annag, who does not figure in the rest of the novel. Annag is to witness her first peat-cutting and leaves the house “barefoot, the bog’s waters squishing between her toes as she runs ahead over prickly heather” (1). She observes the sky “torn and shredded by the wind,” which completely fills her field of vision (1) and hears the distant voices of her relatives carried to her ears on the wind (3). Before it concludes with the discovery of a body in the peat bog, the Prologue creates a sense of the bleak island landscape of the Isle of Lewis which, however, sharply contrasts with the conception of the isle of Litta. While Wait’s description focused solely on the island’s visual remoteness and isolation, the attention May pays to the clouds opens the island upwards to the sky and Annag’s

tactile sensation of the peat bog brings the reader into closer proximity with the physical reality of the island (see Bal 125). Her visual perception of overwhelming openness, of both the “shredded” sky above and the “brown . . . wastes” below (May, *Lewis* 1–2), colors the reader’s impression of Lewis as barren yet sublime, which, I would argue, lasts until the very end of the novel: unlike *Our Fathers*, *The Lewis Man* does not re-conceptualize the island in its concluding passage. The sense of openness is highlighted in the plot by the physical mobility of the investigator-protagonist Fin Macleod, whose search for historical truth takes him from Lewis in the north of the Outer Hebrides as far south as Eriskay. He makes with multiple stops on the islands in between, during which he recovers bits and pieces of the history he is trying to set straight.

Like in the rest of the Lewis Trilogy, May creates the sense of Scottish islandness for the reader not only by providing evocative descriptive passages, but also through thematizing different historical and geographical realities of the Outer Hebrides. In fact, using real historical events was a self-confessed goal for May since before he started working on *The Blackhouse* (2009) (May, *Hebrides* 103). The plot of *The Blackhouse*, of which I have written elsewhere (see Dvořáková), is centered around the traditional yearly gannet hunt organized by the Lewismen. In *The Lewis Man*, May explores the religious divide between the Protestant northern Outer Hebrides and the Catholic southern isles, as well as the moving history of the “homers”—orphaned children whose personal histories were overwritten after they were sent from the mainland to the southern islands by the Catholic Church, and simply given away to the locals, who worked them hard on their crofts and often treated them terribly (*Hebrides* 168). Just like he does with the island setting, May employs the three Gothic tropes under discussion in this paper with historical and geographical verisimilitude in mind.

The readable body in *The Lewis Man* is made possible by a peat bog, a typical feature of the Outer Hebridean landscape. The investigators originally suspect the body’s age will be impossible to determine, but the uncertainty only lasts until the Elvis Presley tattoo is discovered on its skin. The unknown man’s DNA then leads the police to Tormod Macdonald, a living relative, who, even though alive and therefore able to speak, is in many ways more reticent than the dead body because he is losing his ability to make sense of his memories and the world around him due to rapidly progressing dementia. Tormod’s sensitive condition makes Fin careful not to upset the old man, and instead of questioning him, Fin decides to recover

Tormod's personal history from the records at the registrar's office, so he travels to Tormod's birthplace in Seilebost on the Isle of Harris. After he is offered a copy of both the birth and death certificates of Tormod Macdonald, deceased at the age of eighteen in 1958 (May, *Lewis* 186), Fin reaches a dead end and is left only with the traces read from the corpse: the dated metal plate, the tattoo, and the knitted pattern imprinted on the skin, which he needs to use to figure out not only the identity of the bog body, but also that of the mysterious man who has been pretending to be Tormod Macdonald for fifty years.

"[T]he impossibility of forgetting the past" (Baker, "New Frankensteins" 204) represented by the sudden emergence of the dead body is battling against the very real "threat of erasure" of history (Punter 105), both personal, taking place in Tormod's mind, and national, taking place across all the islands, mainly due to population decline. The clues the body offers cannot be read by the protagonist without the help of passionate yet amateur record keepers and antiquarians, who protect minute details of the quickly disappearing island history from complete erasure. Finding out that the real Tormod Macdonald is dead, Fin decides to try to at least contact the Macdonald family, who had emigrated to Canada. To find out where exactly they went, he visits a genealogist who collected the traumatic family histories of those who lived in and emigrated from Harris after the nineteenth-century Clearances, and later, due to poverty. "These are our croft histories of Harris," the genealogist Bill Lawson tells Fin. "We do it by village and croft. Who lived there, when and where they went. Everything else changes, but the land itself stays in the same place" (May, *Lewis* 248–49). In other words, the only way to protect these personal histories is for Lawson to capture the moment when they were written on the land before they disappear forever. At the same time, the implication is that the personal histories Lawson keeps are the only written records of the large, abandoned areas of the Outer Hebrides.

Another amateur antiquarian who helps Fin on his quest to uncover the true identity of Tormod Macdonald is a Catholic priest who devoted his old age to documenting the traditional art of knitting on Eriskay. The significance for the novel of this nearly lost island art is a typical example of the minute details of Outer Hebridean culture and history May works with in order to give his setting a rare sense of verisimilitude. Like the gannet hunt in *The Blackhouse*, the Eriskay knitting is an art on the verge of disappearance because the twenty-first century no longer needs it. Hunting gannets used to be essential for the islanders' survival, and so were good

quality knitted clothes, especially for the fishermen. The clothes knitted in this specific way were basically waterproof (May, *Lewis* 266), and because each woman had her own distinct knitting pattern, the clothing could also serve to identify the corpse of a male relative lost at sea and made unrecognizable by the elements (308). The priest is able to compare the photographs of the imprint on the bog body and identify who knitted the blanket which became the body's eloquent shroud.

The "divided self" (Baker, "New Frankenstein" 204) of May's novel, Tormod Macdonald, had been divided, or rather splintered, repeatedly in his life. The most obvious fault line is his rapidly proceeding dementia, which breaks his sense of self to the point he sometimes says nonsense (such as the phrase "Donald Duck") and then, surprised at himself, he attempts a feeble cover-up to save face (May, *Lewis* 9). The memories of his previous life, however, reveal that he had not felt a whole person since very early in his childhood. Aged four, he lost his father in the Second World War, and he was orphaned in his early teens, left to fend for himself and his mentally handicapped brother, Peter in a mainland Protestant orphanage, where they, being Catholics, were far from welcome. From this orphanage, the two McBride brothers were sent by the Catholic Church to Eriskay as "homers." Their adoptive family, the Gillies siblings, showed no interest in their previous lives, unceremoniously demanding they "[f]orget wherever it is [they] came from" and start answering to their new names Donald John and Donald Peter Gillies (207). Becoming Tormod Macdonald was therefore no difficult task for John, barely an adult then, whose final connection with his past was severed by the traumatic death of his brother. After Peter is murdered in front of John's eyes as a punishment for a crime he never committed, John removes his body and buries it in the peat on Lewis in order to buy time for revenge. He later shoots Peter's murderers, but is never caught, and to his own surprise continues living his life under a borrowed name, until Peter's body is rediscovered at a time when John is no longer able to make sense of the difference between his past and present.

Conclusion

Unlike *Our Fathers*, which opens with a visual conception of the island and closes with its visual reconception, the closing paragraphs of *The Lewis Man* can be read more as a tactile reconception of Tormod Macdonald as John McBride. After being placed in a home by his wife, who was no longer willing to take care of him, Tormod/John is reunited with his

adolescent love Ceit, a fellow homer, who spent as much time as John living under a fake name. Now an aging woman herself, she offers to take care of her old lover in his final years. Tormod/John gratefully squeezes her hand in the final sentences of the novel, realizing who she is and what she means to him in what seems to be one of the final moments of wholeness when it comes to his half-erased personal history (May, *Lewis* 418).

“Gothic is about breakdown, about terror, about the collapse of territory, structure, order, authority. Gothic does not believe in the unity of the self or in the safety of the flesh,” Bissett has written (5). As can be seen from the two novels discussed above, the desire for answers and solutions typical for crime fiction eventually prevails over the Gothic fragmentation and uncertainty. The divided selves of both Tommy Baird and Tormod Macdonald are made whole after Tommy’s “mental topography” (Abraham 173) and Peter McBride’s corpse—the novels’ respective victimized bodies—give their testimonies. The records of personal histories are finally protected from erasure and become sources of either a new identity, as for Tommy, or enablers of a return, even though brief, to a long-lost identity, like in Tormod/John’s case. In both novels, the island setting can be said to supplement and amplify the significance of the Gothic tropes they employ, albeit in different ways. In *Our Fathers*, the descriptions of Litta serve to evoke the feelings of entrapment and claustrophobia, which provide a backdrop to the protagonist’s quest to heal his internal divisions by probing his own memories and reconciling with them. The barren yet sublime landscapes of the Outer Hebrides in *The Lewis Man*, in contrast, create a sense of temporal and spatial depth, which enables Fin Macleod to recover the histories of John and Peter McBride, as well as the nearly erased pieces of national history represented by the lost art of Eriskay knitting and the homers’ stories.

The island setting, whether fictional or real, has a lot to offer to both crime fiction and the Gothic mode. As this paper has hopefully demonstrated, the three-way intersection between crime fiction, the Gothic, and the (Scottish) island setting is an especially intriguing and productive one, undoubtedly worthy of further research.

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This essay is part of the block *Hybridisation and Generic Experiments in Crime Narratives*.

Note

1. This publication was made possible thanks to targeted funding provided by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports for specific research, granted in 2023 to Palacký University Olomouc (IGA_FF_2023_062).

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