‘More Books About Buildings and Crime’: The Architecture of Scottish Crime Fiction

By Liam McIlvanney

Shortly after moving into our current house in Dunedin – a house named ‘Dunnottar’ by a possibly homesick previous occupant – I found the architectural blueprints in a drawer. As I studied the floorplans, with their doorways and windows and hallways and stairs, what popped into my mind was Agatha Christie, closely followed by the board game, Cluedo. *Murder in the Library*. *Colonel Mustard in the dining room with the length of rope.* My main previous experience of floorplans, I realised, had been in the opening pages of Golden Age crime novels. In very few fictional genres is it quite so important to know the number of steps between the master bedroom and the broom cupboard, or how many doors communicate with the rose garden. I began to sense the intimate connection between architecture and crime fiction. If the house is, in Le Corbusier’s famous phrase, a machine for living in, then the room, in crime fiction, is a box for murder.

Setting, mostly a backdrop in literary novels, claims the foreground in crime fiction. Just as the detail, in a crime novel, is always trembling on the verge of becoming a clue, of blooming into significance, so the setting is often enhanced into a locus, the scene of the crime. And this is why ‘reading a room’, in Bachelard’s sense of decoding its mysteries, is such an important skill for a detective.[1] Indeed, there is often an architectural flavour to the metaphors by which we describe the detective’s job. The detective takes the scattered data of an incident and ‘reconstructs’ what happened, ‘builds’ a case. We might also observe that the characteristic narrative style of crime fiction, and especially of hardboiled fiction, with its focus on the physical, the tangible, the ‘concrete’, lends itself nicely to the description of buildings. We see this in the fantastically noir Glasgow of Denise Mina’s *The Long Drop* (2017), with its evocation of the Royal Infirmary, ‘black as the devil and ten storeys high’, or the ‘black glowering valleys of Gorbals tenements’, in a climate where ‘[r]ain drags smut down over

the city like a mourning mantilla'.[2]

Moreover, I know from my own practice, and from speaking to fellow crime writers, that buildings can often generate plot ideas. Alan Parks, from whom my title, 'More Books About Buildings and Crime', is borrowed, has been known to wander round Glasgow, looking for buildings that can inspire the next plot point in his novel. A whole monograph could be written on the function of the tenement – and particularly the derelict tenement – in Scottish crime fiction, including my own. And one need only tackle the 115 steps of Robert Stevenson's Mull of Galloway lighthouse, as I did recently, to get a sense of where Stevenson's grandson got the idea for the staircase scene in *Kidnapped*.

In other words, there is no shortage of material for a study of architecture in relation to Scottish crime fiction. We won't have time to explore the many mansions of the topic in this essay; like Gatsby, we can only wander round, flicking on lights and glancing into some of the rooms. But we will, I hope, undertake a kind of gazetteer of Tartan Noir, looking at some of the significant buildings in the Scottish crime fiction canon. Before we do that, however, we need to establish some parameters, not least around chronology: when does Scottish crime fiction begin?

My University of Otago colleague, Professor Val McDermid, in a pamphlet recently published by our Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, argues that Scottish crime fiction effectively begins in 1977 with the publication of William McIlvanney's *Laidlaw*, a book written in the front room of the house where I grew up.[3] While there is a certain attraction to being in on the ground floor, quite literally, of Tartan Noir, I prefer to push the origins of Scottish crime fiction a little further back. The birth of crime fiction as a genre is usually dated to 1841 and the publication of Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', a locked-room mystery whose solution hinges – the word is used advisedly – on architectural features, but the antecedents of Scottish crime fiction lie even further back. Walter Scott's 'The Two Drovers' (1827), with its deep insight into the psychology and cultural context of murder and its deliberately bathetic denouement, in which the summation of the well-meaning judge sadly flattens the complexity of the crime, is one of the great crime stories in Scottish literature. James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) provides a window into the mind of a serial killer. And many of the Scottish ballads can be viewed as proto-

crime novels: ‘The Twa Corbies’, with its unclaimed, murdered corpse; ‘Bonnie George Campbell’, with its murder-mystery scenario (the horse returning riderless, its saddle smeared in blood); and, above all, ‘Edward’, a ballad told entirely in dialogue, taking the form of an interrogation (‘Why does your brand sae drap wi bluid?’) in which Edward’s successive alibis are broken down before, as a final twist, the interrogator is revealed to be complicit in the crime. In essence, ‘Edward’ is the Original Gangster high-concept thriller.

But if we have to land on a single point of origin, then, for me, the place where all the ladders of Scottish crime fiction start is Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Notwithstanding Nabokov’s injunction to ‘consign to oblivion any notion you may have had that “Jekyll and Hyde” is some kind of a mystery story, a detective story’, we will be treating it as precisely that.[4] We will be considering the role of architecture in five Scottish crime novels, broadly conceived: Stevenson’s *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886); Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902); Michael Innes’s *Death at the President’s Lodging* (1936); Muriel Spark’s *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1960) [yes, I’m claiming this as a crime novel]; and Abir Mukherjee’s *A Rising Man*(2016). There are plenty of other candidates we *could* have looked at – Val McDermid’s almost Audenesque meditation on limestone in *A Place of Execution* (1999), or Ian Rankin’s treatment of the Scottish Parliament building in *Set in Darkness* (2000) – but, for now, these are our five case studies.

‘Story of the Door’: Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)

Artwork by Charles Raymond Macauley for the 1904 edition of *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* [Wikimedia Commons]

Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* is not prefaced by a map or floor-plan – architecture is so important to the novel that a map would give too much away – but every reader will mentally construct their own, and indeed Nabokov (or at least one of his students) drew one for his lecture notes. With chapter titles like 'Story of the Door' and 'Incident at the Window', and its circumstantial description of the layout of Jekyll's house ('Black Mail House', as Enfield calls it), the novel places architecture at its heart. Indeed, architecture provides many of our clues to the nature of this 'strange case'. Structurally, *Jekyll and Hyde* is an unusual detective story in that the central quest is foreordained to fail. Gabriel Utterson, our detective figure, spends the novel trying to understand the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde, and to this end he interviews witnesses and suspects, carries out acts of surveillance, makes 'nightly patrols', broods constantly on the facts of the case. But he can't solve the mystery, since, as a 'lover of the sane and customary sides of life', he can't begin to envisage the solution: Jekyll and Hyde *are the same person*.[5]

This unthinkable solution is adumbrated instead by the architecture of Henry Jekyll's house. On the threshold, as it were, of the Scottish crime fiction tradition, we encounter a threshold: 'Story of the Door', the opening chapter of *Jekyll and Hyde*, in which Richard Enfield and Gabriel Utterson contemplate the shabby door in the slum backstreet and Enfield tells the 'very odd story' (6) – Edward Hyde's savage trampling of a young girl – connected with that portal. Despite having 'studied' (9) the building, Enfield fails to recognise what his companion knows and what the reader will shortly discover – namely, that the shabby back door in a dubious neighbourhood and the prestigious street address of Dr Henry Jekyll *belong to the same building*. Architecture facilitates Henry Jekyll's crimes. Even when, as Edward Hyde, he is caught in the act – when he tramples like a 'damned Juggernaut' (7) over the young girl – and brings the forces of vengeance to his very door, he remains safe. The 'place with the door' (as both Enfield and Utterson call it) is not connected in people's minds with the gracious Jekyll mansion, its cosy, firelit, hall 'the pleasantest room in London' (15).

The back entrance of Jekyll's house, in a part of the city where buildings are jumbled together, making it 'hard to say where one ends and another begins' (9), and his front door in an elegant square, while it mirrors the distinction between Edinburgh's Old Town and the New, symbolises the divided personality of

Jekyll/Hyde. And the architecture demands to be 'read' in this way throughout the novel. The neighbouring houses to Jekyll's, broken up into flats and let to 'all sorts and conditions of men' (15) seem the physical embodiment of Jekyll's perception of the individual as a 'mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens' (46). Jekyll's gradual retreat to the cabinet ('The doctor…more than ever confined himself to the cabinet over the laboratory', 28), while Edward Hyde more and more enjoys the run of the house, symbolises the tilting balance in their relationship. And Jekyll's downfall can be charted via his orientation to the house: what was at first his refuge becomes his prison and lastly his tomb.

A close attention to architecture seems to me to be justified, even enforced, by the anthropomorphic approach to buildings that pervades the novel: the place with the door 'thrust[s]' its gable forward, displays a 'blind forehead of discoloured wall'. The shopfronts in the brightly-coloured bystreet stand 'like rows of smiling saleswomen', whose 'coquetry', 'air of invitation', 'florid charms' and 'freshly-painted shutters' give a clue as to the nature of their 'thriving trade' (6). And if buildings are like people, then people are like buildings. Gabriel Utterson's social affections are compared to 'ivy' on a building, while Utterson himself, the long, lean, 'rugged' figure with the 'beacon' (5) in his eyes, warning a friend who fears the 'shipwreck of [his] reason' (40), is like one of the Stevenson lighthouses.

What, then, of the crimes in this pioneering crime novel? The 'place with the door' (8) – the theatre which contains Jekyll's cabinet – is not the 'scene of the crime' in any straightforward sense. The murder at the centre of *Jekyll and Hyde* is the savage killing of Sir Danvers Carew, and this takes place in the public street. The place with the door is, however, where the Faustian overreach takes place; it contains the laboratory where Jeykll conducts his chemical research and the cabinet where he drinks the potion. If Jekyll's original sin is a kind of puritanical pride – 'my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public' (45) – then the place with the door is where that sin issues in the splitting of himself into the 'polar twins' (46) of Jekyll and Hyde. The theatre is not simply the refuge to which Edward Hyde returns after a night on the rampage, or from which he emerges with a cheque from Henry Jekyll to smooth over the consequences of his actions; it is the place where Edward Hyde was born. As Jekyll puts it, in yet another image of thresholds, it is where the drug 'shook the doors of the prison-house of my

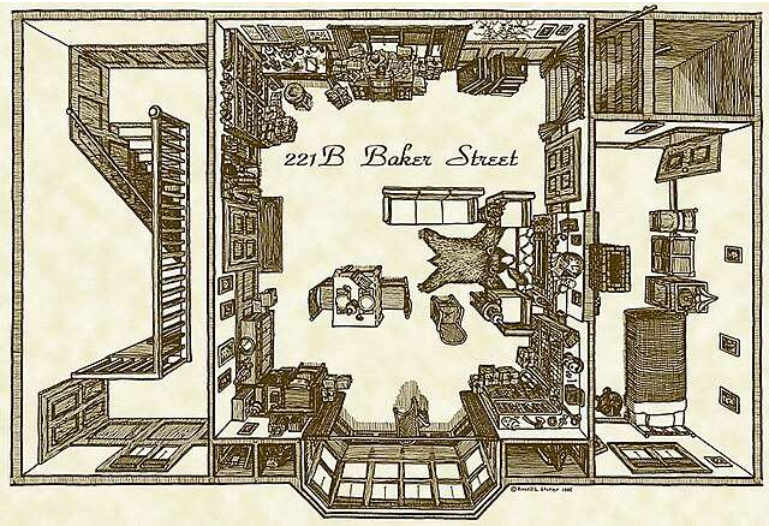
disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth' (49). And so, the murder of Sir Danvers Carew, the crime at the heart of the novel, can, just as clearly as the mauling of the little girl, be traced back to the door in the by-street. The place with the door – 'Black Mail House', that 'likely place' (8), the place that 'seems scarcely a house' (9) – is indeed the scene of the crime.

Holmes's Homes: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902)

If the first novel in the Scottish crime fiction pantheon features a detective who fails and a crime that cannot be solved, things pick up a little in our next novel. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) is where Arthur Conan Doyle, finally bowing to public demand, 'resurrects' Sherlock Holmes following the incident at the Reichenbach Falls. He pitches Holmes into a rollicking Gothic tale, in which 'The Curse of the Baskervilles', an ancient family legend featuring a supernatural hound, has apparently ended the life of one Baskerville incumbent and threatens the life of his heir. Much of the novel's appeal centres on what W. W. Robson, following Eliseo Vivas, calls its 'constitutive symbols' – namely, the hound itself and the moor, particularly the treacherous Grimpen Mire.[6] But architecture looms large and Baskerville Hall, the ancestral home of the Dartmoor Baskervilles, embodies what is at stake in this narrative. Having a Baskerville in residence at the Hall is seen as crucial to the prosperity and even the viability of the local community. And it is to stake his claim to Baskerville Hall and its accompanying riches that Stapleton (himself a Baskerville) effects the death of Sir Charles and plots the death of Sir Henry. The estate being worth almost a million pounds, 'It is', as Holmes remarks, 'a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game' (45).

When the game gets properly afoot, the action moves from London to Dartmoor, but there are, its seems to me, three homes (without an 'l') that play a role in what we might call the 'architectural economy' of the novel, and I propose to look at each of these in turn. The first is the suite of rooms engaged by Holmes and Watson in the 'respectable but unostentatious' milieu of 221B Baker Street, 'the most famous address in detective fiction'.[7] Described by one critic as a 'recuperative haven', the bachelor establishment in Baker Street is an idyll of comfort and civilised domesticity.[8] As depicted in *The Hound*, 221B Baker Street

is a place where one might enjoy a 'blazing fire' (157) in the spacious sitting-room, savouring the contents of a 'well-polished, silver-plated coffee pot' (3), with the *Times* at your elbow on the breakfast table; a place where one might 'coil' (26) up in the armchair by the hearth-rug, and send down to Bradley's of Oxford Street for a pound of shag tobacco or to Stanford's of Charing Cross for the Ordnance map of Devonshire; a place from which one might summon a cab, or sally forth to study the 'modern Belgian masters' in 'one of the Bond Street picture-galleries' (41) or hear the De Reszkes from a box at the opera, dining a Marcini's on the way. As Christina Hardyment puts it in *Novel Houses: Twenty Famous Fictional Dwellings* (2020), Holmes's and Watson's establishment embodies 'something of the escapism of a Victorian male club' and positively 'lives and breathes bachelor heaven'.[9]



Plan of 221B Baker Street [Wikimedia Commons]

If Baker Street is bachelor heaven, then the novel's most seemingly hellish habitation – in a landscape designed to suggest that 'the devil did desire to have a hand in the affairs of men' (27) – is the Neolithic hut on the stoniest part of Dartmoor in which Holmes occasionally shelters to maintain his incognito. This is one of 'hundreds' (115) of circular stone huts, mostly now roofless, which dot the barren moor and which send Watson, in the epiphany which is all but obligatory in historical fiction, traveling back to the past:

> *As you look at their grey stone huts against the scarred hillsides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad hairy man crawl out from the low door, fitting a flint-tipped arrow onto the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. (75)*

If Watson feels displaced among the 'wigwams' (69) of Neolithic man, Holmes, by contrast, seems right at home. When Watson stumbles into the stone hut of the still unidentified 'Man on the Tor', the scene is like a parody of 221B Baker Street: 'Some blankets rolled in a waterproof lay upon that very stone slab upon which neolithic man had once slumbered. The ashes of a fire were heaped in a rude grate… In the middle of the hut a flat stone served the purpose of a table' (120), a table on which Holmes has been dining on bread, tinned tongue and peaches. When Holmes appears, and he and Watson settle down in the hut to review the progress of the case, the identification with 221B Baker Street is complete.

From Watson's perspective, the stone hut signifies the hardships and privations that Holmes was willing to endure in order to crack the case. But as Holmes declares, 'My hardships were not so great as you imagine' (165). Rather, the stone hut also signals Holmes's unlikely kinship with another of the novel's characters. Selden, the Notting Hill murderer, whose crimes, like Edward Hyde's, are 'atrocious' (56) and unspeakable, has escaped from Princetown prison and is in hiding on the moor. When Watson and Sir Henry fleetingly encounter 'this fiendish man' (56), Watson's description plumbs the full lurid lexicon of Social Darwinism and stadial history:

> *Over the rocks, in the crevice of which the candle burned, there was thrust out an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hill-sides. (97)*

But of course, the other figure who haunts the moor, the brooding, solitary watcher who 'might have been the very spirit of that terrible place' (98), is Holmes himself, the 'tenant' (a term used both by Holmes and Watson) of one of the Neolithic huts.

Somewhere between Baker Street and the Neolithic hut, and partaking of both, stands our third home, Baskerville Hall. Like Otranto, Castle Dracula and Wuthering Heights, Baskerville Hall is the classic Gothic mansion, whose situation – rising grandly from a bleak and barren moor – dramatises the clash between domesticity and wildness, civilisation and barbarism, the modern and the

primitive. The Hall is both in ruins and under construction: the lodge is a mess of bared and blackened rafters, but facing it is a ‘new building, half constructed’ (57). The Hall itself is a stirring mix of ancient and modern. The central block, towered, turreted, crenellated, coat-of-armed and clad in ivy, is pure Walpole and Radcliffe. But flanking the original building are two ‘modern wings of black granite’ (57).

Baskerville Hall, formally Clyro Court, may have inspired *The Hound of the Baskervilles* [Wikimedia Commons]

Inside, the house is similarly divided against itself. The hall into which Sir Henry and Watson are shown (the heavy door clanging theatrically behind them) is venerable and stately: ‘It was a fine apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavily raftered with huge balks of age-blackened oak. In the great old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log fire crackled and snapped’ (58). The full panoply of stained glass, stags’ heads, oak panelling and coats-of-arms completes the scene. ‘Is it not the very picture of an old family home?’ (58) asks an enraptured Sir Henry. But the bright bedrooms to which they are shown in the new wing of the house are ‘much more modern’ (59), and Sir Henry aims to extend these improvements, consulting architects and contractors, and vowing to ‘have a row of electric lamps up here inside of six months’ (57).

But even Sir Henry’s projected lamps – ‘thousand-candle-power Swan and Edison’s’ (57) – lack the dramatic wattage of that other source of light in Baskerville Hall: the single candle carried to a second-floor window by the servant Barrymore and answered – as Watson and Sir Henry discover – by a light on the moor. The escaped convict, it turns out, is Mrs Barrymore’s brother and the candle shows the Barrymores where to leave food for the starving fugitive. The

Hall is in communication with the hut, and Watson's anxious question, 'Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?' (93) must be answered with a 'Yes'.

Watson's assumption that the 'criminal' and 'respectable' classes are separated not only by their habitations but by their respective positions on an evolutionary scale, is shown to be false. Just as Holmes can use a seventeenth-century portrait to identify the villain Stapleton as a Baskerville, a throwback to his wild, lawless, aristocratic ancestor, so Mrs Barrymore can see through Selden's villainous image to the vulnerable wee brother beneath: 'To all the world he was the man of violence, half animal and half demon; but to her he always remained the little wilful boy of her girlhood, the child who had clung to her hand' (136). Like Stevenson – and indeed like Scott, Hogg, Galt and Smollett – Doyle is concerned to show that different stages of development (the primitive and civilised) can coexist not merely in the same era but in the same person. The Hall, the hut and the 'haven' at 221B Baker Street, which appear to keep the classes of people apart, actually bring them together.

'Submarine within submarine': Michael Innes's *Death at the President's Lodging* (1936)

Michael Innes was the nom-de-plume of J. I. M. Stewart, the Edinburgh-born Oxford academic, one of a school of donnish detective writers (including G. D. H. Cole, Cecil Day-Lewis, and Cyril Alington) who emerged in crime fiction's interwar Golden Age. Sir Vincent O'Sullivan, the New Zealand poet, who was tutored by Stewart at Oxford, remembers a wry, deliberately old-fashioned character in tweed suits, who spoke deprecatingly about the detective stories he wrote in the early mornings before the real work of the day began.[10] That 'real' work included monographs on Kipling, Joyce and Conrad, and the volume *Eight Modern Writers* (1963) in the Oxford History of English Literature. Predictably, however, the monographs moulder unread while the work of the left hand – in the form of the Inspector Appleby novels – remains in print. One of these novels – *Lament for a Maker* (1938) – has the distinction of being the first, and possibly, only detective novel written in Scots, but it is Innes's debut, written on the boat to Australia as he voyaged to take up the Jury Chair of English at the University of Adelaide, that concerns us most directly today.

Death at the President's Lodging (1936) is a locked-room mystery in which

architecture plays a starring role. Indeed, what Inspector Dodd calls 'the topography of the business' – the sequestered, genteel setting of a fictional Oxbridge college, whose President, Dr Umbleby, is found murdered – seems to overshadow the characters (or the 'livestock' as the same inspector dubs them).[11] Like Christie's *Death at the Vicarage*, the title of Innes's novel points to the shocking incongruity ('crime in St Anthony's!', 35) between violent death and the ordered, insulated milieu. How could it happen here? But of course, in crime fiction, it always happens here. Indeed, Innes's future Christ Church colleague, W. H. Auden, might have had *Death at the President's Lodging* in mind when discussing detective story milieux in 'The Guilty Vicarage'. According to Auden, the detective story requires:

> *A closed society so that the possibility of an outside murderer (and hence of the society being totally innocent) is excluded; and a closely related society so that all its members are potentially suspect… It must appear to be an innocent society in a state of grace, i.e., a society where there is no need of the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and the ethical universal, and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis (for it reveals that some member has fallen and is no longer in a state of grace).*[12]

St Anthony's College fits this exacting bill. Though it fronts onto the 'hubbub' (3) of Schools Street, St Anthony's is buffered by a twelve-foot high wall and the hushed, Edenic expanse of Orchard Ground. The actual locus of the murder – the President's lodging – is doubly sealed off from the outside world by gates that are locked nightly. Here is Inspector Dodd explaining the lay of the land to Appleby: 'In this college there's submarine *within* submarine. At half-past nine they shut off the college as a whole from the world. And then later, at ten-fifteen, they shut off one bit of the college from the rest. That is almost a pure story-book situation now, isn't it?' (7)

The Dean is keen to impress on Inspector Appleby that the murderer *must* come from outside St Anthony's, since it is evidently unthinkable that the irrational act of murder could have been committed by a college don. But what the architecture of St Anthony's achieves, apart from creating a fiendish locked-room mystery for Appleby to crack, is to establish Auden's 'closed society'. Like those other Golden Age locations, the country house and the vicarage, St Anthony's College can't

keep the chaos on the far side of its walls, because the chaos lives within. The 'submarine' is freighted with torpedoes. The murderer lurks behind the college walls. The call is coming from inside the house.

The Golden Age clue-puzzle, as practised by Michael Innes, did not enjoy an extensive vogue north of the border, although the wonderful novels of Josephine Tey form, as Val McDermid has suggested, a kind of bridge between the Golden Age and the modern psychological thriller.[13] There is, however, one important Scottish novelist who seems to me to be an heir of the Golden Age and whose novels, if not strictly crime fiction, might nevertheless be described as 'crime fiction adjacent'. This writer, of course, is Muriel Spark.

'A misty region of crime and desperation': Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)

Spark is the author of at least one bona fide crime novel – indeed, one of the most disturbing and unsettling crime novels ever written. Or perhaps *The Driver's Seat* (1970) should be described as an 'anti-crime novel', inverting as it does the key conventions of the genre. The protagonist, Lise, travels to an unnamed southern city with the express purpose of seeking out the man who will murder her. The novel ends where most crime novels begin, with the discovery of the body, and *shockingly* blurs the roles of victim and perpetrator. But Spark's other twenty-one novels, if not explicitly crime fiction, share the procedures and general ambience of the crime novel. These short economical fictions have the chilly detachment, the crisply unsentimental treatment of violence, that we associate with crime writing – hardly surprising in a novelist reared on the border ballads ('The steel and bite of the ballads…entered my literary bloodstream'). She writes about thieves, liars, murderers, blackmailers, frauds, and her tone, deceptively light and even arch, is really the hardest of hardboiled. Effects of suspense – often achieved via flashbacks and prolepses – are fundamental to her method. And she habitually deals with variations on Auden's 'closed society': a boarding house in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963); a country mansion in *Not to Disturb* (1971), a nunnery in *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), and, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), the Marcia Blaine School for Girls.

Crime, as conventionally treated in the crime novel, does not make much of a showing in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. An act of indecent exposure startles Jenny Gray near the Water of Leith, and the girls witness a common assault on

Edinburgh's High Street. But what Spark, it seems to me, undertakes in the novel is to bring the apparatus of crime fiction to bear, in a kind of mock-heroic fashion, on the novel's central action: the betrayal of Jean Brodie by one of her set, and her subsequent forced resignation from Marcia Blaine School. Putting a stop to Miss Brodie is the burden of the novel's action, and the 'murder' is the killing of Jean Brodie's prime.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is a parody crime novel, in which most of the key roles – detective, witness, killer, victim – are played by the same character: Sandy Stranger. It is Sandy, not Brodie, who is the novel's real protagonist, and it is Sandy's 'pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct' that drives the narrative.[14] Sandy, first of all, plays the role of detective, with a focus on 'sex-crime', where that phrase is understood as tautological. 'Mr Lloyd had a baby last week,' Sandy tells Jenny; 'He must have committed sex with his wife' (17). Sandy and Jenny's 'research' on sex involves them 'piecing together clues from remembered conversations illicitly overheard' (17). Later, Sandy's fantasy life involves her acting as right-hand woman to Sergeant Anne Grey, the pair of them 'dedicated to eliminate sex from Edinburgh and environs' (68). Their chief suspect is clear: 'we've got to find out more about the case of Brodie and whether she is yet in a certain condition as a consequence of her liaison with Gordon Lowther, described as a singing master, Marcia Blaine School for Girls' (69).

All of this is good knockabout fun, but the serious point is that, in the adult world of Calvinist Edinburgh, sex *is* treated like crime; Brodie's 'liaison' with Gordon Lowther is not enough to get her dismissed, but it *does* force Lowther to withdraw from his roles as kirk elder and choirmaster. And sex *does* get more sinister when Brodie starts to groom Rose Stanley to act as her proxy in Teddy Lloyd's bed (though it is Sandy who finally plays that role). It's in response to this development that Sandy acts as witness against Miss Brodie, informing the headmistress that she can 'get' Brodie, not on sex but politics, for teaching Fascism and sending Joyce Emily off to be killed in Spain, fighting for Franco. Sandy is the 'killer' of Jean Brodie's prime. Brodie would never resign – 'she would have to be assassinated' (9); Sandy Stranger, with her tiny eyes and her tendency to 'go too far' (23), is the assassin. The repeated image of Sandy, in later life at the nunnery, clutching the bars of the grille like a prisoner in her cell, confirms Sandy's role as, so to speak, the convicted killer, but also, in a sense, as the victim, her life turned to ashes by its greatest single influence, 'a Miss Jean

Brodie in her prime' (128).

What, then, of the architecture? Marcia Blaine School for Girls, oddly, is nowhere described in detail, though Gordon Lowther's Cramond mansion, where the incriminating crêpe de Chine nightdress is discovered under a pillow, is lavishly limned. But the key architectural moment in the novel comes, of course, when Brodie leads the set on a walking tour of the Old Town of Edinburgh – 'Architecturally speaking, there is no finer sight in Europe' (34) – in Chapter Two:

> *They approached the Old Town which none of the girls had properly seen before, because none of their parents was so historically minded as to be moved to conduct their young into the reeking network of slums which the Old Town constituted in those years. The Canongate, The Grassmarket, The Lawnmarket, were names which betokened a misty region of crime and desperation. (32)*

Among the 'blackened monuments' (109) of the Old Town, Sandy feels she's in a 'foreign country' (32). As indeed she is: this is Edinburgh's Irish ghetto. The language – 'the unbelievable curses of drunken men and women' (109) – is foreign. The 'amazingly terrible' (33) smell is foreign. So are the customs: a man sits insensate on the icy pavement; a man beats a woman in the public street. The girls view the castle from the Grassmarket; they visit St Giles, black as Castle Rock, with its 'blood-stained banners of the past' (35).

For Sandy, the Old Town stands not just for poverty and 'squalor' (34), but Calvinism. St Giles and the Tolbooth are 'emblems of a dark and terrible salvation' (108) – salvation, mark you, not damnation; even the elect are miserable as sin. It is this 'birthright' (108) of Calvinism that Sandy absorbs on her walks round the Old Town. It is this God of 'nasty surprise[s]' (108) that Sandy channels when she – the only member of the set exempt from all suspicion – betrays Jean Brodie. In a sense, then, what we see in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, as in *Jekyll and Hyde*, and *Death at the President's Lodging*, is that the 'crime and desperation' cannot be kept out of the 'closed society', the ordered world of Marcia Blaine school, where the angle of a Panama hat and the proper margin for a window to be opened have their designated measure. Indeed, it is through that opened window that the 'whiff of sulphur' detected by Sandy on her walks around the 'forbidden quarters of Edinburgh' (109) will come.

‘The Architecture of Domination’: Abir Mukherjee’s *A Rising Man* (2016)

One striking feature of Scottish crime fiction written before the great recent efflorescence of Tartan Noir is how much of it is set furth of Scotland. This tradition is continued into the present in the work of the writer to whom I now wish to turn. Abir Mukherjee, who describes himself interchangeably as a British Asian or Scottish Bengali writer, is the author of a compelling series of historical detective novels set in colonial India and featuring the double-act of Captain Sam Wyndham and Sergeant Surendranath ‘Surrender-not’ Banerjee. *A Rising Man* (2016), Mukherjee’s debut, is a police procedural in which the standard challenges of policework are compounded by the political tensions in the British Raj. Captain Wyndham’s desire to stay out of politics and simply enforce the law is frustrated not merely by the case to which he is assigned (the murder of a high-ranking colonial official) but by the very essence of his situation: the police force of which he is part operates as an arm of the occupying power; its officers are tasked with the explicitly political objective of maintaining the status quo.

Throughout the novel, Mukherjee deploys the architecture of Calcutta to reveal the power dynamics at play in this society. We learn, for instance, that the Imperial Police Force (Bengali Division) is headquartered in a mansion house erected by an employee of the East India Company. At the start of Chapter Four, we have a leisurely description of Dalhousie Square, the physical centre of British administration in Calcutta, lined with the Post Office, the telephone exchange, and the Writers’ Building which houses the colonial government. The key feature of the architecture in Dalhousie Square is its classicism:

> *That was the thing about Calcutta. Everything we’d built here was in the classical style. And everything was larger than necessary. Our offices, mansions and monuments all shouted, Look at our works! Truly we are the inheritors of Rome.*
>
> *It was the architecture of domination and it all seemed faintly absurd. The Palladian buildings with their columns and pediments, the toga-clad statues of Englishmen long deceased, and the Latin inscriptions on everything from palaces to public lavatories. Looking at it all, a stranger could be forgiven for thinking that Calcutta had been colonized by Italians rather than Englishmen.*[15]

Classical architecture, of course, is intended to connote civilisation, order,

harmony, the long history of sophisticated political institutions in Europe, stretching back to the Roman republic and the city-states of classical Greece – in short, the kind of heritage that supposedly validates the right of the British to rule over the fractious natives of the Indian sub-continent.

But the classical heritage is not simply a heritage of republican civic virtue; it's equally a heritage of imperial overreach and tyranny. This is hinted at in the passage: '*Look at our works! Truly we are the inheritors of Rome*.' The phrase '*Look at our works!*' recalls Shelley's 'Ozymandias', and the ruined statue in the middle of a desert: *Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!* The implication here is that the great monuments of British rule in India will someday stand as ruined and forlorn as the statue of the arrogant Ozymandias: 'Nothing beside remains'. Like a modern Ozymandias or Roman Emperor, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal wields what Banerjee diplomatically calls 'certain broad, discretionary powers', or, as Wyndham bluntly puts it, 'You mean he can do whatever the hell he likes?' (38). The buildings of Dalhousie Square, designed to signify the long tradition of rational governance associated with the Roman republic, must also call up the tyranny, corruption and decadence of the Empire. In effect, architecture, in *A Rising Man*, stands for a crime that has been committed before the action of the novel starts, a crime of exploitation, expropriation, occupation, that shapes every event in the narrative. The stones of Dalhousie Square bear silent witness to the fact that, even before the murder of Alexander MacAuley, Calcutta is a crime scene.

In this meandering tour 'round the houses' (as it were) of Scottish crime fiction, we have seen how the architectural setting provides so much more than a backdrop. Whether shadowing forth the unthinkable twist in *Jekyll and Hyde*, confounding the comforting binaries in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, defining the 'closed society' and posing the central conundrum in *Death at the President's Lodging*, emblematising the dark attractions of Calvinism in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, or impugning imperial hubris in *A Rising Man*, the buildings bear eloquent witness. The stones speak. In crime fiction, architecture has agency. The buildings in crime fiction may not possess the active malevolence of the house in the horror genre ('Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within'), but they carry theme, they illuminate character, they shape and constrain the action.[16] Nearly a century and a half after Stevenson crossed the threshold of a new tradition in his 'Story of the Door', Scottish crime fiction

continues to flourish by framing ‘More Books About Buildings and Crime’.

Shortly after moving into our current house in Dunedin – a house named ‘Dunnottar’ by a possibly homesick previous occupant – I found the architectural blueprints in a drawer. As I studied the floorplans, with their doorways and windows and hallways and stairs, what popped into my mind was Agatha Christie, closely followed by the board game, Cluedo. *Murder in the Library. Colonel Mustard in the dining room with the length of rope.* My main previous experience of floorplans, I realised, had been in the opening pages of Golden Age crime novels. In very few fictional genres is it quite so important to know the number of steps between the master bedroom and the broom cupboard, or how many doors communicate with the rose garden. I began to sense the intimate connection between architecture and crime fiction. If the house is, in Le Corbusier’s famous phrase, a machine for living in, then the room, in crime fiction, is a box for murder.

Setting, mostly a backdrop in literary novels, claims the foreground in crime fiction. Just as the detail, in a crime novel, is always trembling on the verge of becoming a clue, of blooming into significance, so the setting is often enhanced into a locus, the scene of the crime. And this is why ‘reading a room’, in Bachelard’s sense of decoding its mysteries, is such an important skill for a detective.[17] Indeed, there is often an architectural flavour to the metaphors by which we describe the detective’s job. The detective takes the scattered data of an incident and ‘reconstructs’ what happened, ‘builds’ a case. We might also observe that the characteristic narrative style of crime fiction, and especially of hardboiled fiction, with its focus on the physical, the tangible, the ‘concrete’, lends itself nicely to the description of buildings. We see this in the fantastically noir Glasgow of Denise Mina’s *The Long Drop* (2017), with its evocation of the Royal Infirmary, ‘black as the devil and ten storeys high’, or the ‘black glowering valleys of Gorbals tenements’, in a climate where ‘[r]ain drags smut down over the city like a mourning mantilla’.[18]

Moreover, I know from my own practice, and from speaking to fellow crime writers, that buildings can often generate plot ideas. Alan Parks, from whom my title, ‘More Books About Buildings and Crime’, is borrowed, has been known to wander round Glasgow, looking for buildings that can inspire the next plot point in his novel. A whole monograph could be written on the function of the tenement

– and particularly the derelict tenement – in Scottish crime fiction, including my own. And one need only tackle the 115 steps of Robert Stevenson's Mull of Galloway lighthouse, as I did recently, to get a sense of where Stevenson's grandson got the idea for the staircase scene in *Kidnapped*.

In other words, there is no shortage of material for a study of architecture in relation to Scottish crime fiction. We won't have time to explore the many mansions of the topic in this essay; like Gatsby, we can only wander round, flicking on lights and glancing into some of the rooms. But we will, I hope, undertake a kind of gazetteer of Tartan Noir, looking at some of the significant buildings in the Scottish crime fiction canon. Before we do that, however, we need to establish some parameters, not least around chronology: when does Scottish crime fiction begin?

My University of Otago colleague, Professor Val McDermid, in a pamphlet recently published by our Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, argues that Scottish crime fiction effectively begins in 1977 with the publication of William McIlvanney's *Laidlaw*, a book written in the front room of the house where I grew up.[19] While there is a certain attraction to being in on the ground floor, quite literally, of Tartan Noir, I prefer to push the origins of Scottish crime fiction a little further back. The birth of crime fiction as a genre is usually dated to 1841 and the publication of Poe's 'Murders in the Rue Morgue', a locked-room mystery whose solution hinges – the word is used advisedly – on architectural features, but the antecedents of Scottish crime fiction lie even further back. Walter Scott's 'The Two Drovers' (1827), with its deep insight into the psychology and cultural context of murder and its deliberately bathetic denouement, in which the summation of the well-meaning judge sadly flattens the complexity of the crime, is one of the great crime stories in Scottish literature. James Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) provides a window into the mind of a serial killer. And many of the Scottish ballads can be viewed as proto-crime novels: 'The Twa Corbies', with its unclaimed, murdered corpse; 'Bonnie George Campbell', with its murder-mystery scenario (the horse returning riderless, its saddle smeared in blood); and, above all, 'Edward', a ballad told entirely in dialogue, taking the form of an interrogation ('Why does your brand sae drap wi bluid?') in which Edward's successive alibis are broken down before, as a final twist, the interrogator is revealed to be complicit in the crime. In essence, 'Edward' is the Original Gangster high-concept thriller.

But if we have to land on a single point of origin, then, for me, the place where all the ladders of Scottish crime fiction start is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Notwithstanding Nabokov's injunction to 'consign to oblivion any notion you may have had that "Jekyll and Hyde" is some kind of a mystery story, a detective story', we will be treating it as precisely that.[20] We will be considering the role of architecture in five Scottish crime novels, broadly conceived: Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* (1886); Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902); Michael Innes's *Death at the President's Lodging* (1936); Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1960) [yes, I'm claiming this as a crime novel]; and Abir Mukherjee's *A Rising Man*(2016). There are plenty of other candidates we *could* have looked at – Val McDermid's almost Audenesque meditation on limestone in *A Place of Execution* (1999), or Ian Rankin's treatment of the Scottish Parliament building in *Set in Darkness* (2000) – but, for now, these are our five case studies.

'Story of the Door': Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886)

Artwork by Charles Raymond Macauley for the 1904 edition of *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* [Wikimedia Commons]

Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde* is not prefaced by a map or floor-plan – architecture is so important to the novel that a map would give too much away – but every reader will mentally construct their own, and indeed Nabokov (or at least one of his students) drew one for his lecture notes. With chapter titles like 'Story of the Door' and 'Incident at the Window', and its circumstantial description of the layout of Jekyll's house ('Black Mail House', as Enfield calls it), the novel places

architecture at its heart. Indeed, architecture provides many of our clues to the nature of this 'strange case'. Structurally, *Jekyll and Hyde* is an unusual detective story in that the central quest is foreordained to fail. Gabriel Utterson, our detective figure, spends the novel trying to understand the relationship between Jekyll and Hyde, and to this end he interviews witnesses and suspects, carries out acts of surveillance, makes 'nightly patrols', broods constantly on the facts of the case. But he can't solve the mystery, since, as a 'lover of the sane and customary sides of life', he can't begin to envisage the solution: Jekyll and Hyde *are the same person*.[21]

This unthinkable solution is adumbrated instead by the architecture of Henry Jekyll's house. On the threshold, as it were, of the Scottish crime fiction tradition, we encounter a threshold: 'Story of the Door', the opening chapter of *Jekyll and Hyde*, in which Richard Enfield and Gabriel Utterson contemplate the shabby door in the slum backstreet and Enfield tells the 'very odd story' (6) – Edward Hyde's savage trampling of a young girl – connected with that portal. Despite having 'studied' (9) the building, Enfield fails to recognise what his companion knows and what the reader will shortly discover – namely, that the shabby back door in a dubious neighbourhood and the prestigious street address of Dr Henry Jekyll *belong to the same building*. Architecture facilitates Henry Jekyll's crimes. Even when, as Edward Hyde, he is caught in the act – when he tramples like a 'damned Juggernaut' (7) over the young girl – and brings the forces of vengeance to his very door, he remains safe. The 'place with the door' (as both Enfield and Utterson call it) is not connected in people's minds with the gracious Jekyll mansion, its cosy, firelit, hall 'the pleasantest room in London' (15).

The back entrance of Jekyll's house, in a part of the city where buildings are jumbled together, making it 'hard to say where one ends and another begins' (9), and his front door in an elegant square, while it mirrors the distinction between Edinburgh's Old Town and the New, symbolises the divided personality of Jekyll/Hyde. And the architecture demands to be 'read' in this way throughout the novel. The neighbouring houses to Jekyll's, broken up into flats and let to 'all sorts and conditions of men' (15) seem the physical embodiment of Jekyll's perception of the individual as a 'mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens' (46). Jekyll's gradual retreat to the cabinet ('The doctor…more than ever confined himself to the cabinet over the laboratory', 28), while Edward Hyde more and more enjoys the run of the house, symbolises the tilting balance in their

relationship. And Jekyll's downfall can be charted via his orientation to the house: what was at first his refuge becomes his prison and lastly his tomb.

A close attention to architecture seems to me to be justified, even enforced, by the anthropomorphic approach to buildings that pervades the novel: the place with the door 'thrust[s]' its gable forward, displays a 'blind forehead of discoloured wall'. The shopfronts in the brightly-coloured bystreet stand 'like rows of smiling saleswomen', whose 'coquetry', 'air of invitation', 'florid charms' and 'freshly-painted shutters' give a clue as to the nature of their 'thriving trade' (6). And if buildings are like people, then people are like buildings. Gabriel Utterson's social affections are compared to 'ivy' on a building, while Utterson himself, the long, lean, 'rugged' figure with the 'beacon' (5) in his eyes, warning a friend who fears the 'shipwreck of [his] reason' (40), is like one of the Stevenson lighthouses.

What, then, of the crimes in this pioneering crime novel? The 'place with the door' (8) – the theatre which contains Jekyll's cabinet – is not the 'scene of the crime' in any straightforward sense. The murder at the centre of *Jekyll and Hyde* is the savage killing of Sir Danvers Carew, and this takes place in the public street. The place with the door is, however, where the Faustian overreach takes place; it contains the laboratory where Jeykll conducts his chemical research and the cabinet where he drinks the potion. If Jekyll's original sin is a kind of puritanical pride – 'my imperious desire to carry my head high, and wear a more than commonly grave countenance before the public' (45) – then the place with the door is where that sin issues in the splitting of himself into the 'polar twins' (46) of Jekyll and Hyde. The theatre is not simply the refuge to which Edward Hyde returns after a night on the rampage, or from which he emerges with a cheque from Henry Jekyll to smooth over the consequences of his actions; it is the place where Edward Hyde was born. As Jekyll puts it, in yet another image of thresholds, it is where the drug 'shook the doors of the prison-house of my disposition; and like the captives of Philippi, that which stood within ran forth' (49). And so, the murder of Sir Danvers Carew, the crime at the heart of the novel, can, just as clearly as the mauling of the little girl, be traced back to the door in the by-street. The place with the door – 'Black Mail House', that 'likely place' (8), the place that 'seems scarcely a house' (9) – is indeed the scene of the crime.

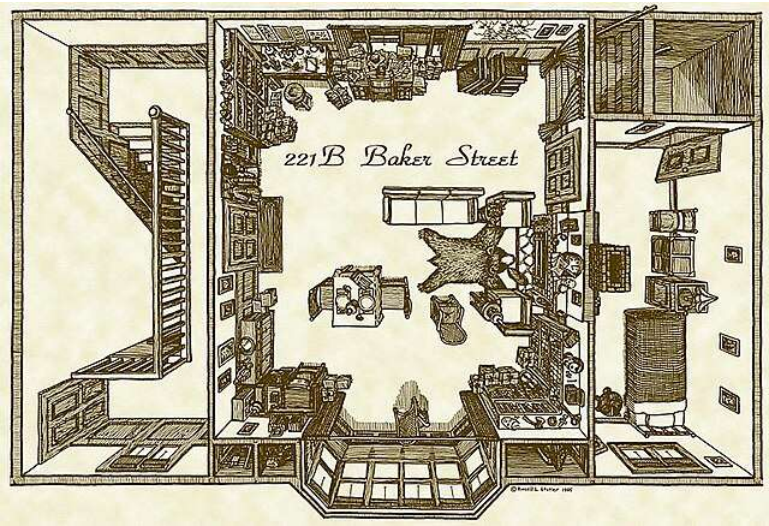
Holmes's Homes: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the*

Baskervilles (1902)

If the first novel in the Scottish crime fiction pantheon features a detective who fails and a crime that cannot be solved, things pick up a little in our next novel. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902) is where Arthur Conan Doyle, finally bowing to public demand, 'resurrects' Sherlock Holmes following the incident at the Reichenbach Falls. He pitches Holmes into a rollicking Gothic tale, in which 'The Curse of the Baskervilles', an ancient family legend featuring a supernatural hound, has apparently ended the life of one Baskerville incumbent and threatens the life of his heir. Much of the novel's appeal centres on what W. W. Robson, following Eliseo Vivas, calls its 'constitutive symbols' – namely, the hound itself and the moor, particularly the treacherous Grimpen Mire.[22] But architecture looms large and Baskerville Hall, the ancestral home of the Dartmoor Baskervilles, embodies what is at stake in this narrative. Having a Baskerville in residence at the Hall is seen as crucial to the prosperity and even the viability of the local community. And it is to stake his claim to Baskerville Hall and its accompanying riches that Stapleton (himself a Baskerville) effects the death of Sir Charles and plots the death of Sir Henry. The estate being worth almost a million pounds, 'It is', as Holmes remarks, 'a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game' (45).

When the game gets properly afoot, the action moves from London to Dartmoor, but there are, its seems to me, three homes (without an 'l') that play a role in what we might call the 'architectural economy' of the novel, and I propose to look at each of these in turn. The first is the suite of rooms engaged by Holmes and Watson in the 'respectable but unostentatious' milieu of 221B Baker Street, 'the most famous address in detective fiction'.[23] Described by one critic as a 'recuperative haven', the bachelor establishment in Baker Street is an idyll of comfort and civilised domesticity.[24] As depicted in *The Hound*, 221B Baker Street is a place where one might enjoy a 'blazing fire' (157) in the spacious sitting-room, savouring the contents of a 'well-polished, silver-plated coffee pot' (3), with the *Times* at your elbow on the breakfast table; a place where one might 'coil' (26) up in the armchair by the hearth-rug, and send down to Bradley's of Oxford Street for a pound of shag tobacco or to Stanford's of Charing Cross for the Ordnance map of Devonshire; a place from which one might summon a cab, or sally forth to study the 'modern Belgian masters' in 'one of the Bond Street

picture-galleries' (41) or hear the De Reszkes from a box at the opera, dining a Marcini's on the way. As Christina Hardyment puts it in *Novel Houses: Twenty Famous Fictional Dwellings* (2020), Holmes's and Watson's establishment embodies 'something of the escapism of a Victorian male club' and positively 'lives and breathes bachelor heaven'.[25]



Plan of 221B Baker Street [Wikimedia Commons]

If Baker Street is bachelor heaven, then the novel's most seemingly hellish habitation – in a landscape designed to suggest that 'the devil did desire to have a hand in the affairs of men' (27) – is the Neolithic hut on the stoniest part of Dartmoor in which Holmes occasionally shelters to maintain his incognito. This is one of 'hundreds' (115) of circular stone huts, mostly now roofless, which dot the barren moor and which send Watson, in the epiphany which is all but obligatory in historical fiction, traveling back to the past:

> *As you look at their grey stone huts against the scarred hillsides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad hairy man crawl out from the low door, fitting a flint-tipped arrow onto the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. (75)*

If Watson feels displaced among the 'wigwams' (69) of Neolithic man, Holmes, by contrast, seems right at home. When Watson stumbles into the stone hut of the still unidentified 'Man on the Tor', the scene is like a parody of 221B Baker Street: 'Some blankets rolled in a waterproof lay upon that very stone slab upon which neolithic man had once slumbered. The ashes of a fire were heaped in a rude grate… In the middle of the hut a flat stone served the purpose of a table' (120), a table on which Holmes has been dining on bread, tinned tongue and

peaches. When Holmes appears, and he and Watson settle down in the hut to review the progress of the case, the identification with 221B Baker Street is complete.

From Watson's perspective, the stone hut signifies the hardships and privations that Holmes was willing to endure in order to crack the case. But as Holmes declares, 'My hardships were not so great as you imagine' (165). Rather, the stone hut also signals Holmes's unlikely kinship with another of the novel's characters. Selden, the Notting Hill murderer, whose crimes, like Edward Hyde's, are 'atrocious' (56) and unspeakable, has escaped from Princetown prison and is in hiding on the moor. When Watson and Sir Henry fleetingly encounter 'this fiendish man' (56), Watson's description plumbs the full lurid lexicon of Social Darwinism and stadial history:

> *Over the rocks, in the crevice of which the candle burned, there was thrust out an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwelt in the burrows on the hill-sides. (97)*

But of course, the other figure who haunts the moor, the brooding, solitary watcher who 'might have been the very spirit of that terrible place' (98), is Holmes himself, the 'tenant' (a term used both by Holmes and Watson) of one of the Neolithic huts.

Somewhere between Baker Street and the Neolithic hut, and partaking of both, stands our third home, Baskerville Hall. Like Otranto, Castle Dracula and Wuthering Heights, Baskerville Hall is the classic Gothic mansion, whose situation – rising grandly from a bleak and barren moor – dramatises the clash between domesticity and wildness, civilisation and barbarism, the modern and the primitive. The Hall is both in ruins and under construction: the lodge is a mess of bared and blackened rafters, but facing it is a 'new building, half constructed' (57). The Hall itself is a stirring mix of ancient and modern. The central block, towered, turreted, crenellated, coat-of-armed and clad in ivy, is pure Walpole and Radcliffe. But flanking the original building are two 'modern wings of black granite' (57).

Baskerville Hall, formally Clyro Court, may have inspired *The Hound of the Baskervilles* [Wikimedia Commons]

Inside, the house is similarly divided against itself. The hall into which Sir Henry and Watson are shown (the heavy door clanging theatrically behind them) is venerable and stately: 'It was a fine apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavily raftered with huge balks of age-blackened oak. In the great old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log fire crackled and snapped' (58). The full panoply of stained glass, stags' heads, oak panelling and coats-of-arms completes the scene. 'Is it not the very picture of an old family home?' (58) asks an enraptured Sir Henry. But the bright bedrooms to which they are shown in the new wing of the house are 'much more modern' (59), and Sir Henry aims to extend these improvements, consulting architects and contractors, and vowing to 'have a row of electric lamps up here inside of six months' (57).

But even Sir Henry's projected lamps – 'thousand-candle-power Swan and Edison's' (57) – lack the dramatic wattage of that other source of light in Baskerville Hall: the single candle carried to a second-floor window by the servant Barrymore and answered – as Watson and Sir Henry discover – by a light on the moor. The escaped convict, it turns out, is Mrs Barrymore's brother and the candle shows the Barrymores where to leave food for the starving fugitive. The Hall is in communication with the hut, and Watson's anxious question, 'Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?' (93) must be answered with a 'Yes'.

Watson's assumption that the 'criminal' and 'respectable' classes are separated not only by their habitations but by their respective positions on an evolutionary scale, is shown to be false. Just as Holmes can use a seventeenth-century portrait

to identify the villain Stapleton as a Baskerville, a throwback to his wild, lawless, aristocratic ancestor, so Mrs Barrymore can see through Selden's villainous image to the vulnerable wee brother beneath: 'To all the world he was the man of violence, half animal and half demon; but to her he always remained the little wilful boy of her girlhood, the child who had clung to her hand' (136). Like Stevenson – and indeed like Scott, Hogg, Galt and Smollett – Doyle is concerned to show that different stages of development (the primitive and civilised) can coexist not merely in the same era but in the same person. The Hall, the hut and the 'haven' at 221B Baker Street, which appear to keep the classes of people apart, actually bring them together.

'Submarine within submarine': Michael Innes's *Death at the President's Lodging* (1936)

Michael Innes was the nom-de-plume of J. I. M. Stewart, the Edinburgh-born Oxford academic, one of a school of donnish detective writers (including G. D. H. Cole, Cecil Day-Lewis, and Cyril Alington) who emerged in crime fiction's interwar Golden Age. Sir Vincent O'Sullivan, the New Zealand poet, who was tutored by Stewart at Oxford, remembers a wry, deliberately old-fashioned character in tweed suits, who spoke deprecatingly about the detective stories he wrote in the early mornings before the real work of the day began.[26] That 'real' work included monographs on Kipling, Joyce and Conrad, and the volume *Eight Modern Writers* (1963) in the Oxford History of English Literature. Predictably, however, the monographs moulder unread while the work of the left hand – in the form of the Inspector Appleby novels – remains in print. One of these novels – *Lament for a Maker* (1938) – has the distinction of being the first, and possibly, only detective novel written in Scots, but it is Innes's debut, written on the boat to Australia as he voyaged to take up the Jury Chair of English at the University of Adelaide, that concerns us most directly today.

Death at the President's Lodging (1936) is a locked-room mystery in which architecture plays a starring role. Indeed, what Inspector Dodd calls 'the topography of the business' – the sequestered, genteel setting of a fictional Oxbridge college, whose President, Dr Umbleby, is found murdered – seems to overshadow the characters (or the 'livestock' as the same inspector dubs them).[27] Like Christie's *Death at the Vicarage*, the title of Innes's novel points to the shocking incongruity ('crime in St Anthony's!', 35) between violent death and

the ordered, insulated milieu. How could it happen here? But of course, in crime fiction, it always happens here. Indeed, Innes's future Christ Church colleague, W. H. Auden, might have had *Death at the President's Lodging* in mind when discussing detective story milieux in 'The Guilty Vicarage'. According to Auden, the detective story requires:

> *A closed society so that the possibility of an outside murderer (and hence of the society being totally innocent) is excluded; and a closely related society so that all its members are potentially suspect… It must appear to be an innocent society in a state of grace, i.e., a society where there is no need of the law, no contradiction between the aesthetic individual and the ethical universal, and where murder, therefore, is the unheard-of act which precipitates a crisis (for it reveals that some member has fallen and is no longer in a state of grace).*[28]

St Anthony's College fits this exacting bill. Though it fronts onto the 'hubbub' (3) of Schools Street, St Anthony's is buffered by a twelve-foot high wall and the hushed, Edenic expanse of Orchard Ground. The actual locus of the murder – the President's lodging – is doubly sealed off from the outside world by gates that are locked nightly. Here is Inspector Dodd explaining the lay of the land to Appleby: 'In this college there's submarine *within* submarine. At half-past nine they shut off the college as a whole from the world. And then later, at ten-fifteen, they shut off one bit of the college from the rest. That is almost a pure story-book situation now, isn't it?' (7)

The Dean is keen to impress on Inspector Appleby that the murderer *must* come from outside St Anthony's, since it is evidently unthinkable that the irrational act of murder could have been committed by a college don. But what the architecture of St Anthony's achieves, apart from creating a fiendish locked-room mystery for Appleby to crack, is to establish Auden's 'closed society'. Like those other Golden Age locations, the country house and the vicarage, St Anthony's College can't keep the chaos on the far side of its walls, because the chaos lives within. The 'submarine' is freighted with torpedoes. The murderer lurks behind the college walls. The call is coming from inside the house.

The Golden Age clue-puzzle, as practised by Michael Innes, did not enjoy an extensive vogue north of the border, although the wonderful novels of Josephine Tey form, as Val McDermid has suggested, a kind of bridge between the Golden

Age and the modern psychological thriller.[29] There is, however, one important Scottish novelist who seems to me to be an heir of the Golden Age and whose novels, if not strictly crime fiction, might nevertheless be described as 'crime fiction adjacent'. This writer, of course, is Muriel Spark.

'A misty region of crime and desperation': Muriel Spark's *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961)

Spark is the author of at least one bona fide crime novel – indeed, one of the most disturbing and unsettling crime novels ever written. Or perhaps *The Driver's Seat* (1970) should be described as an 'anti-crime novel', inverting as it does the key conventions of the genre. The protagonist, Lise, travels to an unnamed southern city with the express purpose of seeking out the man who will murder her. The novel ends where most crime novels begin, with the discovery of the body, and *shockingly* blurs the roles of victim and perpetrator. But Spark's other twenty-one novels, if not explicitly crime fiction, share the procedures and general ambience of the crime novel. These short economical fictions have the chilly detachment, the crisply unsentimental treatment of violence, that we associate with crime writing – hardly surprising in a novelist reared on the border ballads ('The steel and bite of the ballads…entered my literary bloodstream'). She writes about thieves, liars, murderers, blackmailers, frauds, and her tone, deceptively light and even arch, is really the hardest of hardboiled. Effects of suspense – often achieved via flashbacks and prolepses – are fundamental to her method. And she habitually deals with variations on Auden's 'closed society': a boarding house in *The Girls of Slender Means* (1963); a country mansion in *Not to Disturb* (1971), a nunnery in *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974), and, in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961), the Marcia Blaine School for Girls.

Crime, as conventionally treated in the crime novel, does not make much of a showing in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*. An act of indecent exposure startles Jenny Gray near the Water of Leith, and the girls witness a common assault on Edinburgh's High Street. But what Spark, it seems to me, undertakes in the novel is to bring the apparatus of crime fiction to bear, in a kind of mock-heroic fashion, on the novel's central action: the betrayal of Jean Brodie by one of her set, and her subsequent forced resignation from Marcia Blaine School. Putting a stop to Miss Brodie is the burden of the novel's action, and the 'murder' is the killing of Jean Brodie's prime.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie is a parody crime novel, in which most of the key roles – detective, witness, killer, victim – are played by the same character: Sandy Stranger. It is Sandy, not Brodie, who is the novel's real protagonist, and it is Sandy's 'pressing need to prove Miss Brodie guilty of misconduct' that drives the narrative.[30] Sandy, first of all, plays the role of detective, with a focus on 'sex-crime', where that phrase is understood as tautological. 'Mr Lloyd had a baby last week,' Sandy tells Jenny; 'He must have committed sex with his wife' (17). Sandy and Jenny's 'research' on sex involves them 'piecing together clues from remembered conversations illicitly overheard' (17). Later, Sandy's fantasy life involves her acting as right-hand woman to Sergeant Anne Grey, the pair of them 'dedicated to eliminate sex from Edinburgh and environs' (68). Their chief suspect is clear: 'we've got to find out more about the case of Brodie and whether she is yet in a certain condition as a consequence of her liaison with Gordon Lowther, described as a singing master, Marcia Blaine School for Girls' (69).

All of this is good knockabout fun, but the serious point is that, in the adult world of Calvinist Edinburgh, sex *is* treated like crime; Brodie's 'liaison' with Gordon Lowther is not enough to get her dismissed, but it *does* force Lowther to withdraw from his roles as kirk elder and choirmaster. And sex *does* get more sinister when Brodie starts to groom Rose Stanley to act as her proxy in Teddy Lloyd's bed (though it is Sandy who finally plays that role). It's in response to this development that Sandy acts as witness against Miss Brodie, informing the headmistress that she can 'get' Brodie, not on sex but politics, for teaching Fascism and sending Joyce Emily off to be killed in Spain, fighting for Franco. Sandy is the 'killer' of Jean Brodie's prime. Brodie would never resign – 'she would have to be assassinated' (9); Sandy Stranger, with her tiny eyes and her tendency to 'go too far' (23), is the assassin. The repeated image of Sandy, in later life at the nunnery, clutching the bars of the grille like a prisoner in her cell, confirms Sandy's role as, so to speak, the convicted killer, but also, in a sense, as the victim, her life turned to ashes by its greatest single influence, 'a Miss Jean Brodie in her prime' (128).

What, then, of the architecture? Marcia Blaine School for Girls, oddly, is nowhere described in detail, though Gordon Lowther's Cramond mansion, where the incriminating crêpe de Chine nightdress is discovered under a pillow, is lavishly limned. But the key architectural moment in the novel comes, of course, when Brodie leads the set on a walking tour of the Old Town of Edinburgh –

‘Architecturally speaking, there is no finer sight in Europe’ (34) – in Chapter Two:

> *They approached the Old Town which none of the girls had properly seen before, because none of their parents was so historically minded as to be moved to conduct their young into the reeking network of slums which the Old Town constituted in those years. The Canongate, The Grassmarket, The Lawnmarket, were names which betokened a misty region of crime and desperation. (32)*

Among the ‘blackened monuments’ (109) of the Old Town, Sandy feels she’s in a ‘foreign country’ (32). As indeed she is: this is Edinburgh’s Irish ghetto. The language – ‘the unbelievable curses of drunken men and women’ (109) – is foreign. The ‘amazingly terrible’ (33) smell is foreign. So are the customs: a man sits insensate on the icy pavement; a man beats a woman in the public street. The girls view the castle from the Grassmarket; they visit St Giles, black as Castle Rock, with its ‘blood-stained banners of the past’ (35).

For Sandy, the Old Town stands not just for poverty and ‘squalor’ (34), but Calvinism. St Giles and the Tolbooth are ‘emblems of a dark and terrible salvation’ (108) – salvation, mark you, not damnation; even the elect are miserable as sin. It is this ‘birthright’ (108) of Calvinism that Sandy absorbs on her walks round the Old Town. It is this God of ‘nasty surprise[s]’ (108) that Sandy channels when she – the only member of the set exempt from all suspicion – betrays Jean Brodie. In a sense, then, what we see in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, as in *Jekyll and Hyde*, and *Death at the President’s Lodging*, is that the ‘crime and desperation’ cannot be kept out of the ‘closed society’, the ordered world of Marcia Blaine school, where the angle of a Panama hat and the proper margin for a window to be opened have their designated measure. Indeed, it is through that opened window that the ‘whiff of sulphur’ detected by Sandy on her walks around the ‘forbidden quarters of Edinburgh’ (109) will come.

‘The Architecture of Domination’: Abir Mukherjee’s *A Rising Man* (2016)

One striking feature of Scottish crime fiction written before the great recent efflorescence of Tartan Noir is how much of it is set furth of Scotland. This tradition is continued into the present in the work of the writer to whom I now wish to turn. Abir Mukherjee, who describes himself interchangeably as a British Asian or Scottish Bengali writer, is the author of a compelling series of historical

detective novels set in colonial India and featuring the double-act of Captain Sam Wyndham and Sergeant Surendranath 'Surrender-not' Banerjee. *A Rising Man* (2016), Mukherjee's debut, is a police procedural in which the standard challenges of policework are compounded by the political tensions in the British Raj. Captain Wyndham's desire to stay out of politics and simply enforce the law is frustrated not merely by the case to which he is assigned (the murder of a high-ranking colonial official) but by the very essence of his situation: the police force of which he is part operates as an arm of the occupying power; its officers are tasked with the explicitly political objective of maintaining the status quo.

Throughout the novel, Mukherjee deploys the architecture of Calcutta to reveal the power dynamics at play in this society. We learn, for instance, that the Imperial Police Force (Bengali Division) is headquartered in a mansion house erected by an employee of the East India Company. At the start of Chapter Four, we have a leisurely description of Dalhousie Square, the physical centre of British administration in Calcutta, lined with the Post Office, the telephone exchange, and the Writers' Building which houses the colonial government. The key feature of the architecture in Dalhousie Square is its classicism:

> *That was the thing about Calcutta. Everything we'd built here was in the classical style. And everything was larger than necessary. Our offices, mansions and monuments all shouted, Look at our works! Truly we are the inheritors of Rome.*
>
> *It was the architecture of domination and it all seemed faintly absurd. The Palladian buildings with their columns and pediments, the toga-clad statues of Englishmen long deceased, and the Latin inscriptions on everything from palaces to public lavatories. Looking at it all, a stranger could be forgiven for thinking that Calcutta had been colonized by Italians rather than Englishmen.*[31]

Classical architecture, of course, is intended to connote civilisation, order, harmony, the long history of sophisticated political institutions in Europe, stretching back to the Roman republic and the city-states of classical Greece – in short, the kind of heritage that supposedly validates the right of the British to rule over the fractious natives of the Indian sub-continent.

But the classical heritage is not simply a heritage of republican civic virtue; it's equally a heritage of imperial overreach and tyranny. This is hinted at in the

passage: '*Look at our works! Truly we are the inheritors of Rome*.' The phrase '*Look at our works!*' recalls Shelley's 'Ozymandias', and the ruined statue in the middle of a desert: *Look on my Works, ye Mighty, and despair!* The implication here is that the great monuments of British rule in India will someday stand as ruined and forlorn as the statue of the arrogant Ozymandias: 'Nothing beside remains'. Like a modern Ozymandias or Roman Emperor, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal wields what Banerjee diplomatically calls 'certain broad, discretionary powers', or, as Wyndham bluntly puts it, 'You mean he can do whatever the hell he likes?' (38). The buildings of Dalhousie Square, designed to signify the long tradition of rational governance associated with the Roman republic, must also call up the tyranny, corruption and decadence of the Empire. In effect, architecture, in *A Rising Man*, stands for a crime that has been committed before the action of the novel starts, a crime of exploitation, expropriation, occupation, that shapes every event in the narrative. The stones of Dalhousie Square bear silent witness to the fact that, even before the murder of Alexander MacAuley, Calcutta is a crime scene.

In this meandering tour 'round the houses' (as it were) of Scottish crime fiction, we have seen how the architectural setting provides so much more than a backdrop. Whether shadowing forth the unthinkable twist in *Jekyll and Hyde*, confounding the comforting binaries in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, defining the 'closed society' and posing the central conundrum in *Death at the President's Lodging*, emblematising the dark attractions of Calvinism in *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*, or impugning imperial hubris in *A Rising Man*, the buildings bear eloquent witness. The stones speak. In crime fiction, architecture has agency. The buildings in crime fiction may not possess the active malevolence of the house in the horror genre ('Hill House, not sane, stood by itself against its hills, holding darkness within'), but they carry theme, they illuminate character, they shape and constrain the action.[32] Nearly a century and a half after Stevenson crossed the threshold of a new tradition in his 'Story of the Door', Scottish crime fiction continues to flourish by framing 'More Books About Buildings and Crime'.

(c) The Bottle Imp