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In:

Kerstin-Anja Münderlein (Ed.), Crime Fiction, Femininities and Masculinities : Proceedings of the Eighth Captivating Criminality Conference, Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, 12p.. 2024. DOI: 10.20378/irb-92502

Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-94617

Date of Publication: 15.04.2024

"You'll go out there as boys and come back as men:" Masculinities and Rites of Passage in Peter May's *The Blackhouse*[1]

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Abstract

This chapter traces the rites of passage depicted in Peter May's 2009 novel *The Blackhouse* and analyzes how these rites, involuntarily undergone by the male characters, often fail, resulting in the construction of various adult/masculine identities. For the descriptions and theories of rites of passage, the chapter relies on the work of anthropologist Arnold van Gennep and Ronald L. Grimes, founder of the interdisciplinary field of ritual studies. The aim of this chapter is to observe the negative impacts of poorly organized rites of passage in the novel and relate them to Carole Jones's observations on the changes in the depiction of masculinities in Scottish fiction during the last forty years as outlined in her *Disappearing Men* (2009) and later works.

Keywords

Peter May, *The Blackhouse*, rite of passage, Lewis trilogy, Scottish crime fiction

Introduction

The Blackhouse (2009) is the first installment of Peter May's Lewis Trilogy which continued with *The Lewis Man* (2012) and concluded with *The Chessmen* (2013). The trilogy is primarily set on the largest island of the Outer Hebrides, Lewis and Harris, with occasional ventures to other isles of that archipelago. For these novels' plots, the Outer Hebridean setting is essential, and Alison Jack even referred to May's Hebrides as "a character in their own right" (30). I prefer viewing the role of the islands as setting rather than "character," namely as thematized space. As per Mieke Bal's definition, thematized space is space which "becomes an acting place rather than the place of action" (127). The plot "becomes subordinate to the presentation of space" (127) in the sense that the setting determines the types of plot which it can accommodate (Lane 26).

Islands in themselves are convenient environments for the observation of literary masculinities as they have been portrayed, since Homer's *Odyssey*, as feminized spaces, free to be appropriated and subjugated by the many male castaways, explorers, and colonizers (Billig 20). Scottish islands, such as May's Outer Hebrides, are doubly convenient because the setting, especially when thematized, magnifies Scotland's already "masculinized national identity" (Jones, *Disappearing Men* 17). As discussed by Carole Jones, Scottish literature has recently seen a significant shift in its

[1] The funding for the present publication was provided by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports for specific research (IGA_FF_2022_031).

portrayals of male characters. The notion of dominant masculinity became contested in Scottish fiction roughly after the failed 1979 devolution referendum as a result of the twentieth-century challenges to the patriarchy which exposed masculinity as merely another gender category (12) with no justified reason to position itself as superior. According to Jones, the "masculinised Enlightenment liberal humanist self" was "disappearing" in post-referendum fiction – it was either not present at all or was depicted as dying or dead ("Coming in From the Cold" 1). Jones has since supplemented her statement to note that in post-millennial Scottish fiction, "dominant masculinity . . . returns from the borders of its banishment" (2). Dominant masculinity, she concludes, is at home in contemporary Scottish fiction yet again as a symptom of the "neoconservative nostalgia for traditional values" (4), and it currently coexists with the still popular post-referendum trend of disappearing men (16).

An interesting aspect of *The Blackhouse*, and arguably the entire Lewis Trilogy, is its strong emphasis on the portrayals of several male characters' developments from boyhood to manhood. May depicts these characters facing dangerous situations in their teenage years, and these situations, usually unintentionally, function as rites of passage into adulthood and shape these boys' futures by setting them on a path to their unique brand of masculinity. I am going to focus on these formative events in the lives of the series' protagonist Fin Macleod and his childhood friend Artair Macinnes and relate them to Carole Jones's theory of the two post-millennial trends in Scottish portrayals of masculinity.

Rites of Passage

Rites of passage enable individuals to transition between two vastly different states or stages of life. According to anthropologist Arnold van Gennep, in crossing from one such state to another, a three-step process is involved. I will illustrate these phases using the rite of passage this chapter is most concerned with, namely the transition from boyhood (childhood) to manhood (adulthood).

The first step involves rites of separation (also referred to as preliminal rites by Van Gennep) which serve to separate the boy from "the world of women and children" (74). Van Gennep observes that this phase often involves secluding the boy, usually in a place dedicated to the purpose, where he is supposed to behave or, sometimes more importantly, not to behave, in certain ways according to established rules (75). Obeying these rules may lead to physical and mental exhaustion and a symbolic death of the child (75). The second step are rites of transition, also known as the liminal stage. In this phase, the boy is instructed in the ways of adult men with methods specific to his culture. The last step, or the postliminal stage, involves an act of incorporation. Ritual branding or mutilation are often involved after which "the novice [is] forever identical with the adult members" of his community (75).

Observing the rising interest in the rites of passage in the Western world on the cusp of the millennium, leading ritual studies scholar Ronald L. Grimes's 2000 study *Deeply into the Bone* revisits the concepts introduced by Van Gennep in 1909. As Western society is largely secularized, ritualized rites of passage have either completely disappeared or become voluntary and opting out of them no longer "amount[s] to self-exile" since an individual is frequently able to exit a community where they are not comfortable and find a home elsewhere (Grimes 90). "Because personal autonomy is so highly and unquestioningly valued," Grimes adds, "ritual structures are questionable and ritual authorities suspect" (90). Compounded by the West's cult of youth and lack of respect for the older generations, the act of transmission of knowledge from the old to the young is viewed as unattractive or downright undesirable (94). The role of initiators therefore sometimes passes to the peers (e.g., in cases such as college fraternity initiations), and undergoing the rite becomes a matter of proving oneself as a worthy member of a peer in-group. Such rituals are typically traumatizing and violent, and often only exist for the sake of being degrading (94).

Grimes also draws attention to the spatial aspects of the rites of passage and notes that several of the examples which Van Gennep cites in his seminal work directly involve movement away in space during the preliminal stage (104). Initiands are taken to the wilderness, where they are left to their own devices, or to inaccessible or sacred places. Grimes also offers a long list of some frequent component elements of rites of passage, four of which are of special interest for the purposes of this chapter, namely: "gaining access to previously off-the-limits areas," "having to keep secrets from those who are younger or uninitiated," "partaking in celebratory meals," and "mastering difficult tasks" (106-07). Curiously, Grimes leaves out any mention of bleeding or the shedding of blood in his discussion of boys' rites of passage while first menstruation is in many cultures seen as a naturally occurring signal of a girl's (sexual) maturation. Interestingly for the purposes of the present chapter, he also mentions that in many societies, the result of the rite is not only the emergence of an adult man or woman but that of a potential father or mother (34).

While the rites are designed to cause a permanent change in the individual, Grimes warns, the process does not always prove successful – the actual effect should not be conflated with the desired effect (98). In other words, not even tried and tested rites are guaranteed to always work, let alone the impromptu ones or the ones presided over by the initiand's inexperienced peers. When a rite fails or backfires, the consequences for the initiand might be far more serious than his appearing as an individual unfit to progress in his society's hierarchy. It seems important to add that the ritual might be successful on the surface, but deeper down the individual emerges from the postliminal stage traumatized and fully aware that he is unable to fulfil the role into which he seemingly graduated. All of these trappings of transitioning from

boyhood to manhood can be observed in *The Blackhouse* in which this potentially problematic cultural act meets with the condition of islandness and the confines of crime fiction on the unique backdrop of Scottish cultural traditions.

The Blackhouse

The Blackhouse begins with the protagonist Fin Macleod losing interest in the relationship with his wife Mona after the tragic death of their son in a hit-and-run. Fin is forced to return to work as an Edinburgh police detective and is immediately sent to the Isle of Lewis, his birthplace, to investigate a brutal murder which resembles an unsolved case Fin worked on in the past. This enables Fin to escape from his wife, whom he blames for failing to protect their son, but only at the cost of returning to his childhood home in the small village of Crobost from which he escaped twenty years previously. On Lewis, Fin is forced by the investigation and by his own memories to face former friends and negotiate deeply rooted traumas. The murder victim is Angel Macritchie, the local bully with whom Fin had numerous unpleasant encounters during his childhood and teenage years, but what is most difficult for Fin is meeting his childhood best friend Artair Macinnes, his wife and Fin's former girlfriend Marsaili, and their son Fionnlagh who bears Fin's first name. The novel alternates between chapters narrated from the third person point of view treating the investigation, and chapters narrated in the first person by Fin which treat his past starting in early childhood, progressing to his early adulthood.

Fin and Artair were neighbors growing up. Fin lost his parents in a car accident at the age of eight and moved in with his eccentric aunt. Mr. Macinnes, Artair's father, took on the role of the father figure in Fin's life and devoted his free time to improving both boys' academic prowess, later giving up on his own son and continuing only with Fin, who is eventually accepted to a university and thus gets the chance to leave the Isle of Lewis forever. A crucial piece of information Fin suppresses in his mind, however, is that Mr. Macinnes was, most likely sexually, abusing him and Artair behind closed doors. During the summer before Fin's departure to Glasgow and Artair's entry into the local workforce, Mr. Macinnes arranges for the boys to come with him and a team of nine other local men to the traditional gannet hunt which takes place on an isolated rock in the middle of the ocean. During the hunt, Fin slips on wet stone and falls off a cliff, injuring his head. In an apparent attempt to help Fin, Mr. Macinnes falls to his death into the sea and his body is never recovered. While Fin is able to leave Lewis for Glasgow, forgetting all about the abuse due to his concussion, Artair enters a dead-end job, is obliged to take care of his invalid mother and, even though he marries Marsaili, the woman he has always loved, he ends up raising a son whom he (rightfully) suspects not to be his. This all is, in Artair's mind, Fin's fault. He cannot forgive him for getting the chance to leave the island and for forgetting about being abused. Artair lives a bitter and unhappy life

and eventually hatches a monstrous plan to get revenge. He kills the local bully in a gruesome way to make it resemble a murder Fin unsuccessfully investigated in the past and so ensure that it would be Fin the police send to Lewis. Then Artair plans to tell Fin that Fionnlagh is his son, only to kill the boy and deprive Fin of another child.

The Guga Hunt: Fin's and Artair's Rites of Passage

In this section, I am going to look in more detail at the first rite of passage depicted in the novel – Fin and Artair's first gannet hunt. Mr. Macinnes, acting behind their backs, has negotiated two spots for them on the hunt which takes place during the summer after both boys, aged seventeen, have finished secondary school. Known on the island as "gugas," gannets are a local delicacy in the new millennium while in the previous centuries, they were hunted out of necessity to prevent starvation. The gugas nest on An Sgeir, a remote rock in the ocean where men from the northern Lewis Ness area are allowed to kill two thousand birds yearly thanks to an exemption from European law. The hunt is spoken about as a rite of passage several times in the novel. Fin and Artair's participation is referred to as an "initiat[ion] into the ancient rite" (May 224), and Mr. Macinnes presents the trip to the boys as an "honour . . . a time of great comradeship and togetherness," emphasizing that they will "go out there as boys and come back as men" (238). Fin and Artair fail to see the hunt in this way and are reluctant to join it. Later in life, and in spite of his own horrific experience during the first time at the hunt, Artair identifies with his father's view, employing the very words "rite of passage" to describe the hunt and saying that it will turn his "soft" son Fionnlagh into a man (222-23).

Curiously, when the boys dare protest against Mr. Macinnes's plan, he ends the discussion by saying that the "village elders" have agreed to their participation. This is a very odd way of referring to the guga hunters which does not appear anywhere else in the novel. It seems somewhat out of place since the team comprises men of all ages and they are not described as having any other leading roles in the Ness community; on the contrary, they are said to be an "unlikely assembly of weavers and crofters, electricians, joiners and builders" (230). The title of "village elders" clearly sets these men apart as wiser and much more experienced simply on the basis of them participating in the centuries-old tradition of the gannet hunt which in turn endows the hunt with a near-sacred meaning. While the guga hunters are not defined as "village elders" by any other character, they are indeed viewed as an "exclusive club" (224) whose members do something extraordinary for their community. They have proven themselves against the elements, and even though the hunt is no longer a necessity undergone for the sake of preventing starvation, the task is no less perilous, which makes it prestigious. In her analysis of the novel, Alison Jack notes

that the notion of the guga hunters as "chosen people" is also corroborated by their total number being twelve, like the twelve apostles (33).[2]

According to the unwritten rules of the hunt, no-one is invited or forced to participate; whoever feels ready negotiates his (never her!) participation with the other hunters. An Sgeir, the wind-swept rock on which the hunt takes place, is inscribed with several characteristics which make it a fitting site of sacred ritual. It is repeatedly spoken of as a hostile environment and a wilderness, a "most primeval of places" (May 257). No information about what goes on there must ever be shared with outsiders as "[w]hatever happens on the rock stays on the rock" (232). The rock itself and especially the hunt is viewed as a chance to reconnect with the ancestors – the men who took part in the hunt in the previous centuries. It is no wonder, then, that for most boys and men, it is an honor to become a member of the team and Fin and Artair's peers fail to understand their unwillingness to participate. A schoolmate expresses his regret that his father was not able to get him on the team, calling Fin a "lucky bastard" (243) and Marsaili, then Fin's girlfriend, chastises him for not wanting to win the respect of everyone in Ness.

Gigs MacAulay is the man most qualified for the role of the main initiator. In fact, Alison Jack even views him as "Moses-like" (32). At the time of the two friends' initiation, Gigs has already been to the rock over a dozen times and while he is not formally dubbed one, everyone considers him the leader of the hunt. To Gigs, all the trips to An Sgeir stand out as unique in his memory. Not all involve taking a new member on board or initiating a seventeen-year-old, but Gigs compares them to "songs in a hymn book, they're all different" (May 231). Gigs's own motivation for continuing the guga hunt, even though it is no longer necessary for his community's survival, is its uniqueness as a tradition no-one else has. Gigs is also the one to whom Fin decides to confide about Mr. Macinnes's abuse after he gets drunk days before the hunt. Originally wishing to involve the police, Gigs is persuaded by the humiliated Fin not to tell anyone and instead decides to take justice into his (and the other guga hunters') own hands, an unorthodox decision which is however aligned with his perception of the rock as a sacred site and validates Mr. Macinnes's view of the hunters as the village elders. Gigs decides to use the environment of An Sgeir to try, condemn, and punish Macinnes by having him live alone on the rock for fourteen days. He is also to be forbidden from ever returning to the sacred site because he has proven unworthy of spending time in the presence of his ancestors, whose memory still lives on An Sgeir in the form of commemorative stone piles.

[2] It is important to point out here that the gannet hunt is a real tradition which exists on Lewis and May is following its descriptions closely. The usual number of hunters, however, has been ten, not twelve, since 1975 (Murray 239). The number being a conscious change made by May might be a nod to the twelve-member crews of the early 1970s and late 1960s but, at the same time, it can still corroborate Jack's view that the number serves as a Biblical reference.

Angel Macritchie also participates in the hunt with Fin and Artair, but he is much more knowledgeable of what awaits him. He takes on the role of the cook which was previously held by his recently deceased father. Even though he is generally unpopular, Angel does his job well and thus far he is respected as a member of the team. Therefore, having morals or a good reputation outside of the guga hunt are not necessary prerequisites to qualify for this exclusive group, which obviously raises doubts about the authority and worthiness of Gigs's impromptu tribunal. Moreover, the fact that Angel knows everything about the sins of Macinnes senior grants him new incredibly cruel ways of torturing Artair for the rest of his life.

Before it even takes place, there is a clear indication that the rite of passage might (and will) fail. The most important rule of the guga hunt is broken: Mr. Macinnes arranges for the boys' participation without their knowledge and they would clearly never decide to participate themselves. It is difficult to imagine that a rite of passage might be effective when the participant is clearly not in the proper state of mind to undergo it. After being tried and condemned by the other hunters, Macinnes is absent and cannot perform the role of initiator he originally plays which, at least in Fin's case, falls to the much more suitable Gigs.

Participation in the rite of passage on An Sgeir involves a significant movement in space. The crossing to the rock is heavily dependent on the weather, which is mostly unpleasant or downright dangerous, and it takes about eight hours. During Fin and Artair's crossing, the journey is undertaken at night and, when out of sight of any lighthouse, Fin acutely experiences the separation from civilization manifesting as "abject terror" (May 250). He does manage to fall asleep, however, and is as if miraculously transported to the sacred site. A normal day on the rock is filled with hard physical work and communal breakfasts and dinners are non-negotiable. All men wash their hands before meals in water which seems too dirty for this act to be anything but symbolical and they listen to Gigs reading from the Gaelic Bible while eating. In the morning, the hunters rise early to listen to more Bible reading – "soft Gaelic incantations" – at dawn (263). One dinner on the rock consists of guga. This meal is especially ritualized as the men who had so far only eaten preserved food they brought with them are looking forward to the meat and they are not allowed to use cutlery eating the guga, just their hands. These men keep in close contact with their food until the very act of consumption, having killed, plucked, gutted, and cooked the birds by themselves.

Fin starts learning how to hunt guga on the second day. He is assigned the gruesome task of cutting off the heads of freshly killed gannet chicks and he is quickly covered in their blood. Blood-related rituals are curiously absent from Grimes's enumeration but being supposed to kill living creatures to obtain food can fall under his other points such as "overcoming pain and fear," "assuming new responsibilities," or "mastering difficult tasks" (Grimes 106). At first, Fin is disgusted by the slaughter

but then is forced to pick up speed not to slow down his team; he soon becomes desensitized to the blood splatter and the killing becomes "mechanical and mindless" (May 266). He even forgets to pay attention to his surroundings and only later realizes the dangerousness of the wet cliffs and ledges he moves on. He is similarly desensitized to all the other monotonous and painful tasks like plucking and cleaning up the birds' entrails. So, even though he is actively being instructed in the sacred ways of the guga hunters, desensitized and bathed in blood, the hunt does not have the desired effect of rite of passage on Fin. He does not feel any connection with the older men and avoids their company because they always fall silent when he approaches them, which is probably the consequence of their knowing what Mr. Macinnes has done to him. Instead of experiencing the advertised togetherness, Fin "cannot ever remember feeling so alone" (259). Having experienced eight other men learning about his sexual abuse, Fin is further traumatized by their silence. In other words, he is not entering Van Gennep's postliminal stage and becoming incorporated into the group since he has not completed the previous stages. Not ready for the rite to begin with, he is now even less ready and the instruction in killing and communal living serve to further alienate him from the society rather than helping him become part of it.

On the very last day of hunting in the most dangerous location, Fin is attacked by a large bird and falls off a cliff, suffering concussion and several broken bones. He survives this near-death experience and is saved only by Mr. Macinnes, who, perhaps in an attempt to redeem himself, helps to get Fin to safety and then jumps or falls to his death in front of Artair's eyes. Rites of passage often involve an experience resembling death at the end of the preliminal stage, seen as a symbolic death of the child. However, Fin's fall and serious injury fulfill the role of this symbolic death only partially because they do not lead to Fin's shedding his childhood identity. Not only is Fin immediately removed from the island, whereby the rite of passage is interrupted, but also, since the concussion he suffers allows him to forget about Mr. Macinnes's abuse, he is never able to come to terms with that part of his childhood and consciously decide to leave it behind and move on. And, as the proper adult identity emerges only at the end of the postliminal phase after all the instruction and transition rites have taken place in the liminal phase, it can be said that Fin somewhat imperfectly dies as a child in the rite but is not reborn as an adult man.

The adult Marsaili, who was never told anything about what happened on the rock eighteen years earlier, feels that the guga hunt had changed both Fin and Artair in mysterious ways. "There was more than Artair's dad died," she tells Fin. "You and I died. And you and Artair died. It was like everything we'd all been before, died that summer" (361). She captures the situation well because both Fin and Artair died as boys but were not reborn as men. In Carole Jones's terms it could be said that Fin, stuck at the end of the pre-liminal stage, is a disappearing man. All his traumatizing

experiences are pushed out of his consciousness, and he is forever aware of some void inside of him which prevents him from becoming a committed, responsible adult and father. It makes him spend his life constantly running away from responsibility, never quite finding himself.

Artair's rite of passage seems on the surface to be finished and dramatically cemented by the death of his father. Instead of embracing the role of the main breadwinner of his family, however, Artair refuses that identity which he perceives was unfairly bestowed on him by Fin's breaking the unwritten pact of silence about Mr. Macinnes's abuse. As a result, Artair performs the adult role only shallowly. Unlike Fin, Artair has no means of escaping his past. He does not move away from the island because he needs to take care of his mother, and the education he has received only allows him to do menial jobs. Moreover, Angel Macritchie takes care to constantly remind him of the circumstances of his father's death and, in Artair's mind, Fin is to blame for the turn his life has taken and deserves to be punished. With Fin no longer living on the island, Artair displaces his anger and tyrannizes and beats Fionnlagh whom he believes to be Fin's son. Interestingly, Artair seems to bridge both of Carole Jones's categories. The victim of bullies during his childhood due to his physical weakness and asthma, Artair adopts the guise of a violent dominant male. What he hides behind this façade is his true identity of a disappearing man who blames others (Fin, his wife, his mother, his deceased father,...) for the situation he is in and foregoes his own agency and any attempts to better his lot in life (Jones 33).

Fin's Second Chance

Fin manages to finalize his rite of passage eighteen years after the failed attempt when he visits the rock during a guga hunt again, this time voluntarily. After discovering that Artair murdered Angel Macritchie in order to bring him back to Lewis to witness the death of Fionnlagh, the son he did not know he had, Fin rushes to save the boy who has left for An Sgeir only a few hours before. The circumstances of Fin's second journey to the rock are somewhat similar to the previous one when, beyond distraught, he is still able to sleep through the passage during a night so stormy that he has to persuade the skipper to sail against his better judgment. In this way, Fin is able to gather strength to take on the turbulent sea in a small inflatable boat to cross from the trawler to the rock. He is as frightened as never before, thoroughly humiliated by the forces of nature, and he experiences his own insignificance in comparison with the elements. All these emotions can be said to be desirable during the initiation process. When Fin finally reaches the shelter of the titular blackhouse, Artair and Fionnlagh are conspicuously absent. Gigs dissuades Fin from looking for them before sunrise, and, in front of the nine other men, he re-

freshes Fin's incomplete memory of his first guga hunt. Fin's fragmented recollections of his experience eighteen years ago start making sense after he is reminded that Mr. Macinnes was an abuser rather than the helpful tutor Fin remembers him to be. Upon hearing about the events, Fin rushes outside to vomit, symbolically purging this long-lost part of his childhood.

Coming to terms with what he had forgotten allows Fin to progress into the liminal stage of his re-started rite of passage. He confronts Artair who is balancing the tied-up Fionnlagh over a cliff, and, without knowing the truth himself, manages to persuade everyone present that Artair is Fionnlagh's father, implying that Artair spent his life torturing his own child, which makes him no better than his own abusive father. This is Fin's transitional task in the liminal stage, which he voluntarily undertakes and successfully accomplishes. Artair releases Fionnlagh but, riddled with guilt, commits suicide by jumping off the cliff.

On his way back to Lewis with Fionnlagh, Fin feels "hollowed out. A husk. Emptied of everything that might once have defined him" (May 472). He has entered the postliminal stage and is now ready to start developing a functioning adult identity and, notably, a functioning father identity. The ending of the novel reveals that Fionnlagh is indeed Fin's genetic son, and it is implied that Fin feels confident enough to immediately take on the father role as, in the last sentence, he offers to take Fionnlagh to a football game, arguably a stereotypical male bonding experience.

Conclusion

Due to both their rites of passage being unfinished, Fin and Artair originally develop dysfunctional adult identities. Both fail as husbands and fathers, and neither is in full control of his life. Fin is a disappearing man *par excellence*, struggling against his own unconscious mind to complete his identity. He manages to finalize his interrupted rite of passage after eighteen years by voluntarily revisiting the same distant sacred location in the same context of the gannet hunt. The presence of the same initiator, Gigs, allows him to finally complete the preliminal stage and progress into the liminal stage in which he manages to save his son Fionnlagh's life – something which he thinks he failed at in the case of his second son Robbie. Ready to develop into a functioning and responsible adult, Fin seizes the new chance at fatherhood allowed to him by the DNA test and spends the two following novels of the trilogy negotiating this role, becoming a new post-millennial variation of the disappearing man which Carole Jones describes as "positively drawn" – not defined by negative features and looking into the future (16).

Artair, on the other hand, after his failed rite, positions himself as a victim of the circumstances which were brought about by one person: his former best friend Fin who betrayed Mr. Macinnes's crimes to others which may or may not have led the

man to suicide. Either way, if Fin had never spoken up, Artair's father would probably have survived the guga hunt and Artair might have had a chance to live his life at least somewhat differently. In order not to show weakness, Artair hides his inability to positively influence his life behind the construction of a monstrous dominant masculine identity which he uses to negatively influence the lives of others, most notably that of the child he is supposed to raise. In killing Angel Macritchie in a way that imitates the *modus operandi* of a killer Fin has not managed to catch, Artair begins to punish and remove those who, as he perceives it, are the originators of his suffering. Angel is killed as this is the only way for Artair to get rid of his nagging reminders of the past. Fionnlagh is supposed to die too, not only because he is the living reminder of Fin's alleged victory in life but also because killing him is the best way of punishing Fin who needs to suffer (as opposed to, for example, being merely killed). It appears that Artair is not planning to return from the final guga hunt where he intends to kill Fionnlagh, which is corroborated by the fact that he leaves his life-saving asthma medication at home. His intention to kill himself on the sacred rock points to his inability to continue living after taking his revenge, presumably because the desire for this revenge is what keeps him alive. Once those he blames are punished, the only available next step is to die, literally giving in to Jonson's "disappearing."

It remains to be seen what new trends of depicting Scottish masculinities will emerge in the post-Brexit environment and in what ways they will be reflected in crime fiction as the depictions of dominant, extreme, and violent masculinities (and other gender identities) are staples of the genre. In view of the recent boom of true crime serial killer narratives, it seems likely that criminal masculinities are about to reach new extremes in the 2020s and beyond and that Scottish crime fiction will definitely not merely watch that development from the sidelines.

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