



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH

ESSAY

As I enter the third year of my Ph.D., my research has branched into two areas: critical academic research focused on Scottish and Canadian crime fiction, as well as my own original writing where I have produced a crime novel set in both Calgary, Canada and Edinburgh, Scotland.

In my first research paper titled *Writing a Postcolonial Land Without its People: A case study of Louise Penny's A Better Man*, I examined the literary concept of hybridity in Canadian crime writing, defined as a productive and shifting postcolonial force that rejects one form of colonialism in favour of another. Canada is a postcolonial land, settled by both French and English colonizers, whose early ethnographic collection of data on Canada's Indigenous people added to the colonial belief that 'within a few generations Aboriginal peoples would become extinct.' In my research, I focus on the fictional setting of Three Pines, and the creative choices Penny makes to add verisimilitude to the setting which might feel inauthentic if not included. The paper, which I presented this summer at the Great Writing International Creative Writing Conference in London, England, forms a portion of my 20,000-word critical reflexive.

My creative output—a 70,000-word novel—centres on a series of murders perpetrated by a white supremacist. My intention is to put emphasis on the craft of setting in crime writing, as many Canadian crime writers, like Penny, use fictional settings rather than real places. In my novel, I assess the environmental and societal factors that can explain: what is happening in the environment to cause this particular crime, at this time, in this moment? I scrutinize white supremacy sympathizers in policing and place my protagonist—a young female detective—in the crosshairs of a toxic police culture. The setting is linked to the political and social environment in Canada which has experienced an increase in social disorder by white supremacists. My narrative takes readers to major cities including Calgary and Toronto, as well as more isolated settings such as the Canada-US border crossing at Niagara Falls, and a ranch outside of Bragg Creek, Alberta.

For the past three years, the University of Edinburgh has been my home for my creative practice, original writing, and research. I completed my master's degree in Edinburgh in 2018, and began my doctoral studies in 2021. As a result of my tenure, I've had the time to form in-depth relationships with the faculty in the Literature, Languages and Culture's department, but also with faculty and researchers in other departments such as the Edinburgh College of Art, Sciences, and History department. This year, I intend to submit a cross-disciplinary research proposal to the Scottish Arts and Graduate School (SGSAH) for their Spring into Research Methods workshops, which would not be possible without the relationships I've formed over the past few years.

Edinburgh has a world class creative writing program and the city itself is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for Literature. Canadian graduates of the creative writing program have gone on to publish their work with major presses, win awards, and lecture at top universities. A previous Ph.D. student, Dr. Alycia Pirmohamed, is a poet from Edmonton who now teaches at the University of Cambridge following her doctoral studies from the University of Edinburgh.

My supervisory team includes two award-winning authors who I have worked with since 2018. My primary supervisor, Dr. Jane Alexander has written award-winning genre fiction, and her novel *The Last Treasure Hunt* (Saraband, 2015) was selected as a Waterstones debut of the year. My secondary supervisor, Dr. Jane McKie, is a senior lecturer and was awarded the Scottish Arts Council prize for her debut poetry collection. Her academic research *Telling Data Stories: Developing an Online Tool for Participatory Speculative Fiction* was published in SAGE Publications in March 2022.

Each year, I submit an annual review to my supervisory team and provide an outline of my progress. My creative writing and critical reflexive are reviewed by both supervisors, as well as the program director, Dr. Frauke Matthes. Feedback from my second-year review states that my “novel has gained a good deal of depth and thematic cohesion.” Comments also state that reflections on my own work are “effectively woven through her critical examination of how postcolonial Canada is portrayed in crime fiction.” My secondary supervisor remarked that I had produced “a highly impressive review.”

Last year, I was fortunate to be a recipient of the Sir James Lougheed Award of Distinction and since that time, I have had two significant accomplishments as a result of this funding. I received a book contract from Vernon Press, a US-based academic publisher, for my academic research titled *Criminal spaces: Examining postcolonial places and their effect on criminality in contemporary Canadian and Scottish detective novels* which will be forthcoming in 2025. Additionally, I was selected out of over 90 applicants to pitch my novel to agents, publishers, and editors at Bloody Scotland – an international crime writing conference. Following the event, I was approached by Francesca Riccardi, a literary agent from Kate Nash Literary in London who is reviewing my full manuscript. Recently, I was shortlisted for the New Writer’s Award in 2024 from The Scottish Book Trust.

In June 2023, I was invited to the MOTIVE Crime Writing Festival in Toronto, Ontario as part of the Crime Writers of Canada, where I pitched my novel to Orenda Books and performed a live reading of my short story collection, *Thieves*, on their main stage. Additionally, I performed at North/West Passages hosted by The Writer's Union of Canada and recently applied to be the Storyteller-in-Residence at the Calgary Public Library in late 2024. My writing has been published internationally, including in Gutter Magazine, Neon Books, and Loft on Eighth Press. Each of these accomplishments would not have been possible without the support of the Alberta Foundation for the Arts, Calgary Arts Development, and Government of Alberta who have generously funded my writing projects, academic research, and professional development.

As I begin my third year of Ph.D. studies, I will focus on completing my novel and critical thesis. Additionally, I will begin the peer review process with editors at Vernon Press for my academic title. Moreover, I plan to host an academic creative writing conference in collaboration with another Ph.D. student at the University of Bristol to bring researchers and delegates to Banff, Canada in 2024. My creative writing practice will also evolve into new forms, including adapting my work for radio and film formats. Later in the year, I’ve been offered to teach *Across the Genres*, an introductory course on creative writing at the University of Calgary. I am also awaiting the publication of my first journal article in *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*. Near the end of the year, I will be preparing for my VIVA (an external examination) with plans to graduate in 2025.

I appreciate you considering my application for the Sir James Lougheed Award of Distinction.