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**“Never Show You Are Hurt”: Social Isolation and Self-
Estrangement in Val McDermid’s *The Mermaids*
*Singing***

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CONTENTS

0. Introduction:	1
0.1 Women Crime Writers	5
0.2 Val McDermid	9
0.3 Methodology	10
2. Alienation	11
2.1 Alienation in Crime Fiction	13
3. Seeman's theory	15
3.1 Powerlessness	16
3.2 Meaninglessness	16
3.3 Normlessness	17
3.4 Social isolation	18
3.5 Self-estrangement	19
4. Alienation in Tony Hill	20
4.1 Behind the mask	20
4.2 The Workplace as a Sanctuary	23
4.3 Angelica and Tony: Two Sides of the Same Coin	25
4.4 Avoiding Personal Relationships	26
4.5 Succumbing to the Mermaid's Voice	29
5. Conclusions and Further Research	34
Works Cited	37

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Abstract

Val McDermid is an extraordinarily acknowledged contemporary crime writer. Her writing style, feminist outlook and her involvement in giving voice to LGTBI+ characters made her be considered a sensitive and respected author. *The Mermaids Singing* is the first novel of the Tony Hill and Carol Jordan series and it is very well-known. However, little research has been done on the main character Tony Hill and his representation as an alienated person, who consequently embodies the conception of the modern individual in literature within the contemporary period.

This paper attempts to give a close analysis of Tony Hill through Melvin Seeman's theory about alienation and the classification he gave to understand the term better. Tony will be therefore examined through the terms of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness and, above all, through social isolation and self-estrangement. The study of the character, however, will be divided into his self-estrangement, his alienation from others, his ambition to hunt the killer and his willingness to escape from reality respectively.

Keywords: *The Mermaids Singing*, Val McDermid, Social Isolation, Self- Estrangement, Melvin Seeman, Crime Fiction, Women's Crime Fiction

“I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.

I do not think that they will sing to me.”

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”, T.S. Elliot (1915)

0. Introduction:

The world of crime fiction is remarkably extensive and fascinating. Crime fiction was not considered a sub-genre until the beginning of the 20th century with what is known as the Golden Age -or the period between wars- and its detective fiction. The increasing popularity of that sort of narrative at that time provoked the emergence of a new genre in which crime and its consequent investigation and solution became the central aim. Indubitably, murdering, kidnapping and revenge have always been present in literature. In the Elizabethan period they were practically used as a means for a greater purpose- for instance, to explore the human condition, identity and other concerns which apparently are not related as it is proposed in *Hamlet*- and not as the whodunnit narrative of the Golden Age. However, Post- modern and contemporary crime fiction has returned to focus the attention on the exploration of human relationships and police procedural rather than on the crime itself.

Explaining the reasons why crime fiction is so appealing might be complicated. However, the idea that justice has been done and that society recovers its stability may be the key to answer other queries. According to John Scaggs, “the emphasis on right conduct, reinforced by the harsh punishments, [...] is characteristic of most narratives of crime up until the mid-nineteenth century, including the stories of Edgar Allan Poe” (2005, 9). As occurs in most fairy tales, readers may expect an ending where the evil – in this case the murderer(s)- ends up behind bars or dead, showing that good always beats evil. To some degree, that sort of endings gives readers the optimism that crime can be

under control, society will always get over any obstacle and any possible dystopian future will be extinguished.

Apart from the pursuit of justice, there is also another attribute which is intrinsically related to it: the exposure of the truth. Throughout history, the epistemological exploration of truth has raised countless discussions without any final and unanimous resolution. We could define it as the evident clarification that something is reliable. For crime fiction, truth functions as the core and driving force of those narratives. Moreover, it has a double purpose: the exposure of the truth in the novel and the questioning of moral truths in real life.

On the one hand, by revealing the truth, the characters can finally move on and recover, at least, a tiny part of their inner peace. In other words, chaos and confusion can only disappear if we acquire a total comprehension of what has happened and the consequent punishment of it. On the other hand, this genre shows the horrors of human nature primarily for amusement and fascination for our dark side, but it can serve as warnings to emphasize the right conduct as well. As Tony Hilfer (1990: 53) points out, the crime novel can only be effective if it presents controversial issues as, for instance, violence, death, incest, rape or revenge. Readers may consider those situations as fictional, but at the same time, they are aware that fiction is not so far from reality.

Looking back, some of the main distinctive features of crime fiction can be identified in stories as ancient as *Oedipus the King* or the Book of Daniel. In the case of the Book of Daniel, there are several biblical tales where the first vestiges of the detective figure are shown. In his adventures, Daniel, like an early detective character, tries to uncover any mystery or injustice that he comes across and reveal the truth. However, in those biblical stories, what matters the most is not the revelation of the truth, but the punishment that dishonest people receive, to demonstrate the importance of right conduct.

As for *Oedipus the King*, Scaggs comments (9) that it practically shows all the features of crime stories as, for example, the whodunnit mystery and the introduction of a group of suspects. Moreover, Oedipus is presented as an outsider who came to Thebes, which is interesting because criminals have often been presented as outcasts that, whether they meant to or not, appear to break up the peace of the community. The murderer does not necessarily have to come from another place, he can perfectly be part of the society he disrupts as occurs with Oedipus or Cain.

Towards the final decades of the 18th century, many writers published some biographies of criminals who were in Newgate waiting for their execution. At first, it was a monthly bulletin of executions called *The Newgate Calendar*. It was mainly used as a tool to reinforce the law by describing the horrendous punishments that any offender could receive for breaking the law. As in the Book of Daniel, the objective of it was to emphasize the sentence of the crime rather than to restore society's peace, it "served to validate the death sentence and demonstrate the efficiency of the penal system, reassuring the reader that crime could and would be contained and deterring the potential criminal with the apparent certainty of punishment" (Worthington, 2010: 14).

Curiously, even though punishments were quite explanatory and unpleasing, it generated the opposite reaction, above all in the popular classes. Numerous writers discovered a whole new world of sensationalism through the biographies of the prisoners and a market of narratives and collections inspired by their lives appeared. Londoners read with eagerness and fascination, appealed by their rebellious conduct. Hence, what at the beginning was just an informative bulletin, ushered in an innovative approach to crime inside literature. That phenomenon together with the arrival of the Gothic novel established the basis of a new coming character: the private detective.

In a post-enlightenment period where the traces of rationalism were still palpable, Edgar Allan Poe created the first modern detective, Monsieur Dupin, whose mind worked in a logical- analytical way and who would later be the key reference to the invention of the most famous detectives like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes or Agatha Christie's Monsieur Hercules Poirot. With Dupin, Poe was able to "fusion [...] two distinct genres and created what we may call the story of mystery, as distinct from pure detection on the one hand and pure horror on the other" (Sayers, 1928-29: 73).

In the modern society of the 19th century, the heroes of medieval stories were left in oblivion – or at least not considered a righteous model- and it was felt necessary to introduce a completely new hero who would be considered appropriate to the western thinking of that period. Ferreras suggests:

The detective emerges as the post-modern mythical hero of a one-dimensional, post-enlightened world, where traditional, metaphysically oriented mythical heroes have gone bankrupt, and detective fiction allows the myth of the absolute Truth to subsist and even prevail -if we are to judge by the apparently universal appeal of this particular narrative genre- against all of our post-modern ascertained uncertainties (2012: 25).

With the establishment of a new hero, mystery fiction began to increase its popularity reasonably quickly. Worthington (21) remarks on the magnitude of detective narratives in the progress of crime fiction because they focused the attention on the detective character and founded the case format that later authors would copy.

While in Britain the whodunnit narrative was by far the most popular mystery novel of the Golden Age, in the United States it was the hard-boiled narrative, one of the most famous detectives being Philip Marlowe. Although there was a private detective as well, the main difference relies on the aggressive and gangster-like narrative of the latter. Compared to the private eye novels, the hard-boiled ones survived to the post-war literature owing to the "tensions and anxiety of postwar society [which] were much more

directly represented in the American investigative fiction published from the 1920s on, in which tough private eyes negotiate a violent and corrupt urban terrain” (Horsley, 2010: 32).

Moving forward, from the middle of the 20th century on, detective fiction gave way to the police procedural, which emphasized the collaborative teamwork within the police force as well as the internal operations of the public institutions in the search for a more realistic novel. It does not mean that there were no more detective novels, but that the new trend was police procedural writing. What was more refreshing about police novels was the methodology used in their investigations and the apparition of new characters like the forensic or the psychological profiler. Besides, to achieve realism the urban setting, which was clearly inspired by hard-boiled novels, was the main landscape for most of that sort of narratives.

Finally, contemporary crime fiction is primarily characterized by the enormous quantity of police narratives. In our time the scientific-technological field is the predominant method to uncover the crime through the utilization of electronic devices for DNA or ballistic evidence among others. Literary crime fiction trespassed its barriers in the 20th century to be also projected on the screen and nowadays police TV series are one of the most demanded categories – examples of it are *C.S.I.* and *Law and Order*. However, there is also a current literary tendency to set the story in past epochs, especially in the Victorian era, which is known as historical crime fiction. Those novels try to be as realistic as possible to the period they are set, which could be a “renegotiation with the early patterns of crime fiction that went on to define a genre” (Scaggs: 32).

0.1 Women Crime Writers

In literature, there is the common division of the accepted canon where the greater part of authors included - if not all- are male, and a parallel literature development where

the majority of female writers are placed. In the case of crime fiction, the difference is not as enormous as may happen in other genres because both men and women crime writers have created male and female main characters. However, the patriarchal constraints were -and still are- present, so it is imperative to dedicate at least a sub-category to women crime writers and their contribution to shaping this wide-ranging category.

In the nineteenth century, the apparition of female sleuths “challenged general expectations about both women’s writing and female characters” (Gavin: 2010: 258) due to their transgression of male rules in crime fiction. In the Gothic novel, Ann Radcliffe’s character Emily in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* is one of the first female sleuths presented. It was typical to describe them as victims that had to be forced to act as a sort of detective to succeed in the end. Regrettably, Gothic novels were not considered appropriate for female readers, but this created the opposite effect on both women authors and readers by drawing their attention to them.

Female detectives had more presence in the late Victorian era with notable authors such as Catherine L. Pirkis and her famous character Loveday Brooke. Interestingly, Brooke was a professional single detective who had to overcome many obstacles in the novel owing to her gender. Among male authors, it was frequent to end a female detective’s career once she got married or re-established the honour of a male character, which illustrated and reinforced the patriarchal conception of the limited options a woman could have to be independent in that period. Furthermore, at that time women sleuths were also overshadowed by the famous figure of Sherlock Holmes, which “may be interpreted as a testimony to the dominance of bourgeois, patriarchal ideology” (Reddy, 2003: 193). Thus, Pirkis’s Loveday Brooke is significant because “gender role

expectations are broken down” (Gavin: 261) and she is one of the several precursors of the feminist detective fiction that would increase throughout the twentieth century.

According to Maureen T. Reddy (193), during the Golden Age most female characters habitually appeared as the companions of male characters or as overly inquisitive single women. However, for some authors such as Agatha Christie, those characteristics did not suppose an obstacle. For instance, her character Miss Marple used her unmarried status and the stereotypes it entailed as an advantage for solving crimes. In Britain, it was common amongst women authors to publish crime stories revealed by old women. The underestimation towards those ladies was their most appreciated ability because “being largely invisible is an invaluable attribute for a detective but clearly reflects sexist and ageist cultural values” (Gavin: 263). However, the formality presented in British crime fiction had a ‘negative effect’- if we could consider it as such. It was eventually left as a feminine reading “as little old ladies [...] could not tolerate a dose of the truth” (Reddy: 193) that American hard-boiled fiction illustrated.

Hard-boiled narratives are extremely misogynistic and “the most defensively masculine branch of the genre” (Scaggs: 30). As a result, female detectives were “relegated to the rank of amateurs” (Reddy: 193) and marginalized, but that view would change from the 1940s onwards – particularly between the sixties and the eighties- with the American female hard-boiled detective fiction. As a response to hard-boiled male detectives, hard-boiled female detectives were also exceptionally active in the dangerous and threatening streets of the city, being at the same level as male characters. Sara Paretsky’s V. I. Warshawski is an example of it. She is a private investigator from Chicago who is presented as a loner, tough hero who constantly faces violence.

Back in Britain, in 1972 P.D. James published *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, the “first modern novel to feature a female private detective” (Reddy: 195) and “combines

a mystery plot with the structure of (female) bildungsroman” (196). The title undoubtedly indicates that the genre was mainly considered masculine, but James purposely wrote it as a protest to that belief. Her private detective Cordelia is similarly characterized like hard-boiled male detectives, “solitary and alienated from her surroundings” (196). However, the main difference relies on the continuous impediments she encounters in her job for being a woman. In the end, Cordelia has reached a more mature attitude towards life and is confident of her own decisions.

That individuality can be seen as well in the 1980s, when several authors like Marcia Muller or Sue Grafton created solitary, independent, strong and intelligent women detectives as the main characters of their novels and how they persisted in life despite the patriarchal system they lived in, giving a new outlook to main female characters. Reddy (199) states that the major difference between hard-boiled and the feminist approach to this genre is that female characters did not only fight back against direct violence but also against the whole patriarchal system they were subdued to. In the 1990s until our current days, new variations of crime fiction spread as, for instance, lesbian, forensic and historical crime fiction. Patricia Cornwell is one of the most acknowledged contemporary writers, helping to introduce female characters within scientific fields thanks to her character the forensic pathologist Dr Kay Scarpetta. What is more, the boom of female protagonists in the last decades “proved that there was a readership hungry for strong women detectives and at the same time pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable in crime fiction” (200).

Overall, thanks to the immense variety of female sleuths and private detectives written by women crime writers, most of the authors reacted against the patriarchal norms imposed in crime fiction. They contributed to widen the range of personalities and backgrounds of female protagonists; and above all, they have severely criticized the

violence against women by constantly showing the worst ways of torture, killing and rape. Sally R. Munt observes that “traditional crime fiction exonerates society by appointing blame on to an individual. Feminist crime fiction makes guilt collective and social, and the need for change structural” (Munt, 1994: 198). Munt acknowledges women crime writers for the vision they provide about the condition of being a woman. They give readers a deeper insight into their characters, the social and political troubles they have to bear and most of them do not use romance as the end for a woman’s career.

0.2 Val McDermid

Val McDermid was born in Scotland in 1955 and she is considered one of the greatest contemporary British women crime writers. She was introduced to the world of books at a very young age. The first crime novel she read was Agatha Christie’s *Murder at the Vicarage*, which is still her favourite Christie book, and it opened a whole new world for her. Before making a living from writing, she was a journalist for sixteen years. Nowadays she has written more than thirty novels, including four series and a children’s book, and has won several awards. In addition, she has also published three non-fiction books, one of them entitled *A Suitable Job for a Woman: Inside the World of Women Private Eyes* (1995), which is a nod to P.D. James’s novel *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*.

She considers her work inside the ‘Tartan Noir’, the Scottish crime fiction genre. ‘Tartan Noir’ has its roots in Scotland and it is only specific for Scottish writers. It is characterized by the mix-up of elements taken from other traditions of crime fiction, especially the American hard-boiled fiction. In the case of Val McDermid, she usually sets the stories in Scotland, the characters are usually people who suffer personal crises and some of the main characters may be presented as antiheroes like Tony Hill.

Additionally, it is common to see in her style a continual alternation of narrators, giving voice to most of the characters appearing in her novel including the killer.

McDermid is totally concerned with feminism and the need to make visible LGBTBI+ characters. For instance, one of her series is featured by Lindsay Gordon, a lesbian reporter and an amateur detective who became the first openly lesbian detective in the United Kingdom. Gordon's series "reflect contemporary lesbian issues, so in these respects, [...] the books highlight broader cultural discussions surrounding gender, identity, and sexuality" (Humann, 2017: 86). As for her first Tony Hill /Carol Jordan novel *The Mermaids Singing*, which is inspired by T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock", was partly written "as a reaction against a slew of novels coming out of the US in which hideous violence was meted out to female victims whose only role in the books was to be raped, mutilated, dismembered and strewn across the landscape" (McDermid, 2009). Therefore, although she writes with passion, she is aware of the power a writer has and she uses it to raise cultural and social issues, modifying little by little the path of crime fiction and literature in general.

0.3 Methodology

Scholarly research and critical reviews have mainly focused on the high violent scenes Val McDermid projects in her novels and the feminist perspective of her female characters, which of course are not less worthy of analyzing. However, little study has been conducted about one of the main characters, the misunderstood psychologist Tony Hill. Thus, this paper attempts to give a closer approach to the figure of Tony Hill, the main character of the Tony Hill and Carol Jordan series, from the viewpoint of existentialism and alienation in the first novel of the saga *The Mermaids Singing*. In order to accomplish that, the paper is divided into three parts.

Firstly, I will introduce the term alienation and its development in the modern period. It will also be necessary to comment on existentialism and its effect on modern and post-modern writers to understand the concept of alienation. Then, I will comment on the ‘alienation’ term within the crime fiction genre, presenting the private detective as an alienated figure and his replacement of other similar characters with the same alienated condition in the police procedural novels. Secondly, the analysis of Tony Hill is based on Melvin Seeman’s theory of alienation, so it is indispensable to comment on his theory and the five types of alienation that he provided. Finally, I will examine Dr Hill’s personality and his subsequent alienation from both his inner self and the rest of society.

2. Alienation

The term “alienation” comes directly from the Latin word *alienationem*, whose nominative form is *alienatio*, and primarily means “a transfer, surrender” or “separation”; but, at the same time, that noun derives from the combination of the adjective *alius*, meaning “another, other, different” and the suffix *-nus*, that indicates “belonging” or “relationship”. Nowadays, Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the expression as “the state of feeling estranged or separated from one’s milieu, work, products of work, or self”. That term has been thoroughly present in literature- the most famous personification of it is Hamlet-, but it did not become a popular expression as well as “the subject of many psychological, sociological, literary and philosophical studies” (Mittal, 2018: 3) until the arrival of the contemporary era.

There are three principal reasons for this sudden interest in the concept. Firstly, the two world wars left an immense sense of desperation and loss – not only the loss of loved ones, but also the loss of all the values that society had built and its progress, which

provoked the consequent “withdrawal of the more sensitive people, especially among intellectuals, into isolation” (Nwaegbe, 2013: 16). Secondly, the publication of Karl Marx’s *Philosophical and Economic Manuscripts* in 1932 reinforced the idea of the individual being separated from the rest of the world. In a summarized way, Marx claimed that within a capitalist and industrial state the employee was not able to find his existence and, therefore, it was easy to encounter different kinds of alienation. Finally, Sigmund Freud’s theory about mental disorder and human behaviour together with his research on psycho-analysis drew attention from various fields of learning including politics, medicine, psychology and literature.

In addition, alienation would be hard to understand without mentioning a philosophical movement, which achieved its peak in the middle of the 20th century, known as existentialism. It appeared as a consequence of the cultural, political, economic and social situation after the two world wars and the great violence and destruction that they left behind. As shown above, the state of the continent was shocking and horrific after all that excessive destruction and it gave rise to a crisis of conscience and values. “The chaos, disorder, annihilation and fears and frustration on the one hand and the crumbling traditional values and old world views, including loss of faith and God and trust in man along with anguish and anxiety, estrangement and loneliness rendered (the) life absolutely absurd, meaningless, directionless and futile” (Saleem, 2014: 68)

Moreover, there was a huge increase of totalitarian nations and the existential viewpoint became a firm response to the whole situation that was threatening the individual’s existence as well as “a sharp reaction of all forms of rationalism” (68). All the bases on what the notion of the human being was built were at risk to completely disappear and existentialism came as a sort of ray of light amid that darkness, reinforcing

the individuality and subjectivity. Earnshaw comments on the change of perception from objective to subjective:

Existentialism is a philosophy that takes as its starting point the individual's existence. Everything that it has to say, and everything that it believes can be said of significance- about the world we inhabit, our feelings, thought, knowledge, ethics- stems from this central, founding idea. Hence what sets it apart from most other philosophies is that it begins with the 'individual' rather than the 'universal' and so does not aim to arrive at general truths: its insistence on personal insights as the only means to real understanding entails that it makes no claims to objective knowledge (2011: 1).

That new perception of the world where the human being is placed in the centre of all existence called the attention of numerous intellectuals and artists. In literature several writers as, for example, T.S. Elliot, Ernest Hemingway, Kate Chopin or James Joyce dealt with the subject of alienation from this philosophical point of view inspired by the existentialist formulas that Sartre, Heidegger or Jaspers manifested. Thus, they explored the role of a character inside the society they lived in and the lack of freedom they experienced. In other words, the main character was incapable of realizing his or her true potential owing to the social constraints; so they compared human behaviour inside a community, following the rules, norms and traditions of it, in contrast with the desires and longings of a particular character that did not go in accordance to what the society dictated.

2.1 Alienation in Crime Fiction

There is a recurrent figure that most of the crime authors in the modern and post-modern detective fiction incorporated in their narratives, which is the eccentric one. He or she is seen as a *rara avis* by other characters as well as by the reader. By eccentric I refer to someone who employs a different approaching method to investigate a crime and from whom the reader knows little about his or her private life. Furthermore, although this particular character may provoke some sort of disconcert and disturbance to other

characters in the novel, he or she is usually meant to play the hero role and, therefore, becoming the main character.

The reason for that incorporation was because it was felt necessary that the protagonist should stand out from the other characters. John G. Cawelti perfectly describes the outcome for the hero in the Victorian era:

He [the detective] is a magical brilliant and rather ambiguous figure who appears to have an almost magical power to expose and lay bare the deepest secrets. But he chooses to use these powers not to threaten but to amuse us and to relieve our tensions by exposing the guilt of a character with whom we have the most minimal ties of interest and sympathy (1976: 94).

The alienated character was the private detective. Their intelligence was not the only thing that made them be seen as an outcast, it was also the way they behaved, their manners, their likes and dislikes and, above all, their relationship with others. Carl Malmgren (2010: 155-156) contemplates this figure as an idiosyncratic, mysterious protagonist that cannot be classified with any label with the objective to become eternal. In other words, the character itself trespasses its sole identity to become the abstract idea of the detective.

American hard-boiled detective fiction had its own private detective whose questionable methods and manner made him be alienated from the rest. They were “homeless, alienated protagonists on [...] rootless wanderings” (Horsley: 40) that could hardly maintain romantic relationships with those who were not part of the violent urban environment. In Post-war British novels, the psychological profiler incarnated the alienated role within police procedurals. Similar to the private detective, he “revives something of the mystique of Sherlock Holmes in his near-uncanny ability to identify serial killers through the pattern of their crimes” (Priestman, 2003: 186).

Although most of the heroes in crime narratives personified the idea of alienation, the ones who are truly seen as outcasts are the transgressors of justice. As has been observed in the first section, lawbreakers appear as disrupters of a quiet community and

they also serve as a moral, social and political critique of both the fictitious and the real world. Criminals vary from tricksters to terrorists and they are all (self-) marginalised from the rest of citizens because society has become a disappointment and a failure for them. Among all those ‘offenders’, contemporary crime fiction has largely dealt with the serial killer, the perfect outcast for police procedural novels and in particular for the psychological profiler character. Val McDermid, for instance, employs the serial killer in several novels, especially in the Tony Hill and Carol Jordan series.

3. Seeman’s theory

In 1959, Melvin Seeman published *On the Meaning of Alienation* in the journal *American Sociological Review* as an attempt to re-discover and re-organize the meaning of the word alienation, which was really appreciated by various fields of investigation and hardly reinterpreted since the publication of Marx’s manuscripts. In his article, “Seeman spoke of the task as being to produce a specific and unique social indicator (rather than global indicators) of the individual’s feelings of happiness or despair, well-being or discontent, futility or optimism.” (Seeman cited in Ludz, 1976 :21).

From a social-psychological field, Seeman identified five distinct versions to study alienation: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social/cultural isolation and self-estrangement; and from that moment on, “his seminal work [would] challenge the longstanding conceptualizations of alienation as a general: unidimensional phenomenon” (TenHouten, 2017: 1). The differentiation he made, however, does not imply that these versions are found separately in each person; it is possible to observe more than one at the same time. However, since the publication of his research, the world has advanced, and it has been reinterpreted or applied into new studies like Neal and

Collas' *Intimacy and Alienation: Forms of Estrangement in Female/Male Relationships* (2000) or Devorah Kalekin-Fishman and her contributions of alienation in the post-modern world.

3.1 Powerlessness

Seeman defined powerlessness as "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements he seeks" (Seeman cited in Senekal, 2008: 20) to what Marx considered in his work "lack of control". Warren D. TenHouten defines the expression as "being subjected to domination by others and unable to live according to the dictates of one's judgement and nature" (139). It answers the question "What can I do?". The individual is subordinated to a higher unit, which is the society, and he must obey or follow a set of rules so as there can be respect and peace among everyone. Nevertheless, living in a peaceful world demands that each person must leave aside certain -often hidden- desires or aspirations that may be contrary to what society stipulates. It is not only what one would like to accomplish, but also the fact that there are some situations or circumstances in a socio-political level that one cannot avoid or control – like having the power to change the economic system-, which originates the feeling of powerlessness in the person.

In literature, Burgert Adriaan Senekal suggests that the character who personifies powerlessness is the antihero. This kind of character usually goes through unwilling situations that lead him to take drastic alternatives to get the revenge he craves for and sometimes "he becomes the murderer as circumstances draw him into the plot" (25).

3.2 Meaninglessness

Meaninglessness is "the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged" (Seeman cited in Senekal: 25) as well as his lack of clarity "as to what he ought

to believe- when the individual's minimal standards for clarity in decision-making are not met" (Seeman cited in Sarfraz, 1997: 30). Whereas powerlessness is aimed to explain alienation from an objective level, where the individual cannot control external factors, meaninglessness refers to the internal lack of understanding of oneself. Thus, it answers the question "How do I understand what I do?". The individual's capacity to come up with a solution for a certain situation is confronted by the lack of understanding of the environment he finds himself surrounded by. As a result, people of that kind undergo a phase of anxiety and personal crisis because they are not sure of the outcome of their actions and, therefore, feel they are not in control of themselves.

3.3 Normlessness

Normlessness is "the situation in which social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules of behaviour" (Seeman cited in Senekal: 37). It was first mentioned by Durkheim with the word 'anomie' and was used to describe when the laws of a country fail to be carried out because the society cannot fulfil those standards- known as 'anomie'.

Regarding alienation, it means when society's established norms of conduct fail to fulfil the objectives of one's own, so laws are no longer meaningful for the individual.

At that moment, the individual feels the need to act by himself, which

involves a moral judgement about one's society in terms of the extent to which its ethical standards must be violated in goal attainment. The social desirability of moral mandates in terms of community standards is rejected, and the normless person will seek to realize goals solely on the principle of efficiency. Here the view is that the end justifies the means; that if something works, it doesn't matter whether it is right or wrong. Circumventing the law is regarded as acceptable if it leads to practical benefits (Neal and Collas, 2000: 21).

It answers to the question "How do I have to behave?". The state has lost all its authoritativeness towards the person, who cannot but withdraw from it because it does

not provide the meanings to achieve his objectives. Moreover, this variety of alienation can also appear when there is a difference between what the society expects from a person – his behaviour- and what society provides him to reach those standards. For instance, it can occur when society obliges people to know a foreign language, but it does not offer the necessary instruments to do it.

3.4 Social isolation

Social isolation refers to the individual's detachment from a community because their rules are no longer meaningful or efficient for the individual. Besides, the person does not feel a sense of belonging to that community either. Although it might seem a similar definition to 'normlessness', social alienation could be defined as the moment in which society as a unit is not sufficient for a human being to be considered part of it and consequently, it can "lead to powerlessness, meaninglessness, and normlessness" (Senekal: 43).

That loss of belonging to a group is the reason for the emergence of alienation and existential crisis. Seeman believed that this behaviour was "most common in descriptions of the intellectual role, where writers refer to the detachment of the intellectual from popular cultural standards" (Seeman cited in Senekal: 45). As a matter of fact, "every individual fulfills his need to belong [...] and to be loved by other by adhering to the group norms as a member of that group" (Sarfraz: 55). However, "if the group norms are too restrictive and in conflict with the individual's personal goals [...], the group loses its normative influence on the individual and, as a consequence, the individual becomes isolated from the group." (55). In other words, the individual considers that his own values are more worthy than the ones that the community follows, so he realizes that he is different from the rest and, in order to be loyal to himself, he must act according to his

judgement without considering whether the decisions can be accepted by society or not. Hence, it can answer the question “What is right?”.

Senekal (46) observes that in literature the perfect personification of that term is the antihero as well, which include the fool, the criminal, the eccentric, the outsider and the rebel without a cause among others. They personally decide to separate themselves from the rest so as to maintain intact their true self.

3.5 Self-estrangement

Finally, the last variant of alienation is the most personal aspect of it due to the fact it has to do with oneself. It occurs when the individual is incapable of recognizing himself, like an alien, and can lead to “an emotional experience that is highly negative, painful, and refractory to cognitive-level management or control” (TenHouten: 93).

It usually occurs in the working place, where the employee does not find the work satisfying or rewarding anymore; so, it can answer the question “What do I want?”. This lack of motivation and denial of one’s own desires provokes the individual to look for external satisfying occupations rather than internal ones because he is not prepared to face and feel the pain and anxiety that come with them.

Furthermore, self-estrangement can also be caused by the impossibility to identify with others. In order to be part of a community, apart from complying with the rules, people should also share customs and traditions. The individual may consider that nothing of what the community provides is shared by him as well; so he enters into a sensation of self-questioning as to whether he does not behave as others because he knows he is not like them or because he cannot manage to comprehend himself.

4. Alienation in Tony Hill

4.1 Behind the mask

Tony Hill is the main character of the novel together with Carol Jordan, a Detective Chief Inspector (DCI) of Bradfield Police. His whole character can be summarized in this extract from the novel:

Ever since the bullies had started to pick on him, the smallest boy in the street and his class, he'd learned the harsh lessons of self-control. [...] 'Never show they've hit the mark it only reveals your weak points. Learn to be one of the lads. Learn the vocabulary, learn the body language, acquire the attitude. Mix it all together and what do you get? You get a man who hasn't the remotest idea of who he is. You have a consummate actor, a human impostor who can take on local colour like a chameleon' The miracle was that it fooled so many people. Brandon clearly thought he was a good bloke. Carol Jordan obviously fancied him. Claire, his secretary, thought he was the best boss she'd ever had. He was passing for human, all right. The only one who he couldn't fool was his mother, who still treated him with the thinly disguised contempt which was all he'd ever known from her. His fault his father had left them, and no wonder, according to her. [...] He'd done his best to be good, as Granny had instructed him, but it wasn't always easy. She wasn't a bad woman, just constrained by her own upbringing into the belief that children should be seen and not heard. [...] Tony swiftly learned self-control the hard way. Was that what had happened to Andy, too? (McDermid, 2015: 219)

In this paragraph we can comprehend the reasons that brought the protagonist to act as he does and the later alienation of his persona. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to give a thorough analysis of him.

Tony Hill has a PhD in Psychology and is considered one of the best psychological profilers of his country. Like a main character, the reader might expect he will be the successful, intelligent and brilliant hero that the city needs to catch any serial killer and, although he does a good job profiling the killer, the reality we face about his personality is not completely that one though. In the 80s and 90s the psychological profiler was usually depicted as a man fascinated by the murders, but he ended up "towards a culminating attack from which he only just escapes" (Priestman: 186), which is what Val McDermid presents in Tony Hill. From his colleagues' perspective, he seems to be a considerate, responsible and amiable person. He is always polite and has a good head on

his shoulders. However, as the novel develops Carol, for example, realizes he is not as perfect as he appears to be. When some of her police colleagues ask her what Dr Hill is like, she expresses that “considering he spends his working life getting inside the minds of psychopaths, he seems pretty normal. There’s something quite... closed about him. He keeps his distance. Doesn’t give much away. But he treats me like an equal, not like some thick plod.” (114). His professional partner is aware that Tony Hill is incredibly discreet with his lifestyle and reticent to share aspects of his past.

Carol is not the only character that believes he hides something behind his perfect-partner-to-work-with mask though. John Brandon, the Assistant Chief Constable (ACC) of Bradfield Police, is the person who proposes Dr Hill to cooperate with the police. As soon as they meet for the first time and share some words, John is surprised to discover that “there was something about Tony Hill’s calm assurance that unsettled him” (17). Although the ACC might not give much importance to his reaction, it is actually essential for us because it demonstrates that Tony may be something else. If John suspects Tony might not be that trustworthy it is because the psychologist is not comfortable with socializing and interacting with others. He feels better working alone and worming into criminal minds. Nevertheless, as a human being and living inside a community, he must show some kind of proximity to others and to do so, he tries to be another persona by hiding behind a self-constructed mask.

The first hints we can perceive from his self-estrangement, meaninglessness and social isolation perspective are at the beginning of the novel. Tony has to make a speech in front of a great number of police officers about the great advantages that the Bradfield police force would have if they incorporated a Profiling Task Force, which means his exposure in front of several people that most probably will judge him. What for others would simply be another anecdote, for him “it required all his sources to maintain the

façade he'd need to get through the day" (7) because "public speaking had always been firmly outside the boundaries of his comfort zone, so much so that he'd turned his back on an academic career after achieving his doctorate because he couldn't face the constant spectre of the lecture theatre" (15). The fear of his behaviour towards others gives rise to a construction of another self that not even he can fully understand; it is just a masquerade for passing among the society he is bound to live in and this is why "he understood how much it took out of method actors to produce the fraught, driven performances that captivated their audiences" (7). Therefore, "the prickle of sweat along the back of his neck" that he sensed during the lecture "was becoming a trickle, sliding down between his skin and his shirt collar. It was an uncomfortable sensation that reminded him of who he really was behind the mask he'd assumed for his public appearance" (13).

Paradoxically, he is a psychologist, which means he should be emotionally stable, knowing himself better and perfectly able to meet people. In fact, because he is a great psychologist and he completely recognizes his true self, he occupies an alienating position since he is not ready to resolve his own traumas and move forward:

The worst of it was, he recognized his own behaviour. How many times had he sat across the table from a multiple rapist, arsonist or killer and watched them reach the point in their reliving of events where they could no longer face themselves. Just like him, they closed down. They couldn't disconnect a phone, but they closed down just the same. Eventually, of course, with the right therapy, they breached the walls and managed to confront what had brought them there. That was the first step towards recovery (121).

In other words, by recognizing his broken personality, he opts for seeing the world from a cautious distance- and consequently alienating himself from the rest- rather than taking a step forward and showing his weaknesses so as to feel liberated. His fears are stronger than his common sense and they do not allow him to portray a normal life. A possible explanation for his decision to become a psychologist can be that he tries to find whether the other citizens are like him or not. For him "[...] it was tempting to imagine that

everybody was like him, getting up each morning and selecting a persona for the day” (8) so he could feel that he is not alone; that to some extent he is like the rest of the others and the alienated behaviour triggered by past problems can occur to anyone. From his self-estrangement position, our main character looks for external personalities that might match with his. As a matter of fact, he searches for a sense of belongingness in his patients, but “sometimes it felt like the chicken and the egg. Did he empathize with his patients because he too knew the frustrations and anger of impotence, or had his sexual problems increased precisely so that he could do his job better?” (272). However, he realized that “he wasn’t one of them” (8) because no one feels the same way as he does.

4.2 The Workplace as a Sanctuary

As we have observed, social isolation, meaninglessness and self-estrangement are very present in Tony Hill’s personality. His workplace is another factor. It has become his sanctuary. Tony works alone in his own office and only interacts with his patients, who only seek help and treatment. Thus, he works in an isolated place, in his own comfort zone without the necessity to establish personal relationships with other work colleagues. He did not only construct a psychological fortress, he has also built a more physical fortress for himself, where he can feel safe and have everything under control. Hence, he does not feel powerless. His seclusion is so enormous that Carol reflects on this issue by saying that “[...] he’s one of those workaholics who’s more interested in getting the job done than anything else” (114). The only direct contact he has is with his secretary, to whom he just has to give orders, and with his patients, to whom he only has to listen and give advice; so actually, he is the master of all the conversations that come up in his workplace, “somehow, spending his days poking around in the distorted recesses of the minds of the criminally insane was far less threatening.” (15). His search for people like

him leads him to think that perhaps he has a similar personality to criminals rather than non-criminal citizens because of their twisted minds:

He wondered again if his involvement in the twisted logic of killers was a surrogacy, the only thing that prevented him from joining their number. God knows, there were times when the inevitable drive that surged through their heads seemed attractive. And there were times enough when he'd felt murderous rage, though it was usually turned against himself rather than the person he was in bed with (220).

Working in a secluded space alienated from the rest of the world, the only people he can have a close bond with are his patients. For instance, when he has to analyze the serial killer's nature, he gives him a name, "Handy Andy", because "I always give them a name. It makes it personal" (81). He is so focused on his work that even he starts "to get a feel for him" (248) owing to the fact Tony understands the killer very well.

Furthermore, Dr Hill, in his way to understand others, finds those perverse psyches extremely attractive. As a result, his major aspiration is to have his own team in a National Criminal Profiling Task Force and collaborate side by side with the police force. The ambition to work with the police comes from two reasons. Firstly, because he believes that he considers himself special, he is what the police need because profiling "developed different approaches that can often be more productive than familiar techniques" (15) and "can help investigating officers to narrow the focus of their investigation" (13). Tony is confident that his new method will revolutionize the police procedural in Bradfield and he will receive the recognition he deserves. After the first two killings are committed, Tony is convinced that it is a serial killer's work, but as he cannot impose his own theory, he feels powerless, "he couldn't afford to be the one to say it first". He had to wait for the police to ask for him and, therefore, "his stomach clenched on emptiness and he winced" (7). His awaited dream finally arrives when John invites him to cooperate with them, "this was what he had craved for weeks now" (20).

Secondly, collaborating with the police brings him the opportunity to see the crime scene personally and understand the fascinating *modus operandi* of the killer. At the moment he sees the crime scene for the first time, he is surprised and amazed by what is in front of him:

I thought I was the expert in keeping things battened down, but you're something else; aren't you? [...] You are going to be one of the ones they write books about. Welcome to the big time. Recognizing that he was dangerously close to admiration for a mind so disturbingly complex (38).

4.3 Angelica and Tony: Two Sides of the Same Coin

In this novel we encounter the criminal as the rival and *alter ego* of Tony Hill. Like in many other crime narratives, the main character is faced one time or another with a “villain” that forces him or her to rack their brains, to question themselves whether they are good enough and if they are chosen to bring peace to society; an equally-balanced battle of good and evil. In *The Mermaids Singing*, the evil clone of Tony is Angelica, the murderer. The psychologist, in his search for an equal, has treated countless patients but did not feel accomplished noticing there was something missing. With the apparition of a serial killer in Bradfield and his involvement in the investigation, Tony finally “got what he wanted” (49), some excitement in his life and his opportunity to demonstrate what he is capable of. From that moment on, it would be “a battle of wits now, his insight against the killer’s stockade” (49).

Furthermore, it is not only the clash of minds that constitute them as *alter egos*; it is also the fact that they are alike. His problems with himself and the traumas he experienced in his childhood cause Tony to empathize with the criminal he is profiling and feels that they are both sides of the same coin:

But you can't hide from me, Andy. [...] I'm just like you, you see. I'm your mirror image. I'm the poacher turned gamekeeper. It's only hunting you that keeps me from being you. I'm here, waiting for you. Journey's end' He stood for a moment longer, savouring the admission he'd made to himself (212).

It seems like both have endured similar situations in their early years but have taken different paths in their adulthood and now they are face to face, struggling to catch each other first without the knowledge of the other. The past is what mostly defines one's behaviour. In this case, the murderer's past is what will help Tony to have a chance to escape alive from her. As he thought once, "the past won't matter. But it does matter, Andy. The past is what matters most of all" (162) - thinking about both his own past and Angelica's.

4.4 Avoiding Personal Relationships

It is also worth noting and examining the relationship Tony maintains with his professional colleague Carol Jordan. Both Carol and Tony have their own problems, but in this paper I will solely focus on Tony's perspective and alienation from her. According to Neal and Collas:

The primary human concerns reflected in the alienation themes derive from the problems of identity and conflict in social relationships. These concerns involve blending mastery and control in some situations with feelings of helplessness in others; blending a sense of coherence and understanding with perceptions of complexity and chaos; and blending feelings of membership and belonging with feelings of personal loneliness and social isolation. Having a sense of purpose and prediction, having a sense of personal mastery and control, and having a sense of belonging and membership are among the primary ingredients of an individual's sense of well-being (2000: 24).

Due to Tony's difficult childhood and lack of parental loving, he has developed difficulties when it comes to sexual encounters. As a result, he keeps his distance and creates a barrier with everyone – especially with Carol- because he is afraid of showing his weakness. Albeit he admires the inspector physically and intellectually, he still wonders "why was that, faced with a woman any normal man would regard as attractive, something in him closed down? Was it because he refused to allow himself to feel the first stirrings that might lead him to a place where he was no longer in control, where

humiliation lurked?” (96). The impotence of not fully understanding how to behave with a lover makes him feel powerless and meaningless.

In couple relationships the sense of isolation and loneliness appears because the individual deals “with both their own sexuality and with the sexuality of their partners”. (Neal and Collas: 98). Moreover, powerlessness is very present. Dr Hill needs to believe he has everything under control and relationships are quite the opposite. That is the reason for his constant analysis on others, because he does not want to come across with any surprise; and this is why, before stepping forward in a romantic relationship, Tony feels a strong necessity to know in detail the person with whom he is-“the more he could find about [Carol], the better” (87). It is not that he has to have confidence with her because he is insecure of his involvement in a relationship; it is that he needs to control everything so as to never feel pain and humiliation, to have the power and control of every single situation, which is impossible in intimate relationships. He is not satisfied with that decision though. He knows that distancing from a person does not make one happy, and “sometimes Tony wished he could just switch off the part of his head that had to analyze every statement, every gesture, every intricate piece of body language and just revel in the pleasure of eating dinner with someone who seemed to enjoy his company” (226).

The fear of involvement is even present in flirtations. For example, when Carol and Tony are having dinner, they talk a little about their professions and there is a moment when they are joking and Carol asks him a teasing and sensual question, to which Tony replies with a neutral answer that prevents the conversation from going to a sexually suggestive moment. “He knew this was the point where he could have moved the relationship forward, but he had spent too long constructing his defences against precisely these moments of weakness to let them down that easily” (228). Carol, of course, realizes that Tony may be tough to persuade and “the swift switch away from the personal back

to the case confirmed to Carol the need to play it cool with Tony. She'd never seen anyone back off so fast at gentle flirtation. It was puzzling, all the more since she sensed he liked her" (229).

The climax of that tension arrives when Carol becomes aware that there might be another woman. Desperately, Tony replies that it is not what she thinks, and it is none of her business either, but it sounds more like an excuse and she leaves his house disappointed. Here we observe from a meaninglessness viewpoint Tony's reaction towards what had happened. He unconsciously told her that so as to explain himself, but he did not think about the consequences of his response. He is afraid of their relationship, but he is also afraid of losing her from his side. Hence, he starts to worry about what had occurred and even considers what others would say: "An outsider would say we hardly know each other, everything that happened tonight was an overreaction. But outsiders don't understand the bonding, the intimacy that springs out of nowhere when you're working closely together on a manhunt, when the clock's ticking the next victim's life away" (261). The last sentence is a forced self-affirmation that his urgency to clarify the situation with Carol was because spending days working together generated a special bond and not because he liked her.

Nonetheless, looking on the positive side, Carol, like Angelica, makes him think about himself and the way he behaves. Carol is not aware of her power over him though. For instance, Tony tells her that perhaps he feels some kind of sympathy for the killer, to which Carol replies that it can be an unpleasant sensation although " [...] they say the best thief-takers are the ones who get inside the heads of the villains. So if I'm going to be the best at what I do, I have to think like a villain. That doesn't mean I want to do what they do, though" (248). The psychologist is "strangely comforted by her words" (248)

and ponders on the possibility that perhaps he is not as twisted as he believes. Therefore, she acts as a therapist for him.

4.5 Succumbing to the Mermaid's Voice

The alienation of a character usually causes him to escape from his reality even if it only occurs inside his imagination. We have already discussed that Angelica, the murderer, is the *alter ego* of Tony. However, Angelica plays another important role in the novel. She incarnates the fantasy that Dr Hill desires: to be sexually active and resolve his erection problem. If Carol Jordan is the reality he has to face, Angelica Thorpe is the dream world where everything is perfect.

The myth of the mermaids says that their “voice, which sweetly called sailors to their doom, was a feature of sirens. [...] In many tales, mermaids lured sailors to impending doom with the beauty of their voices” (Sherman, 2008: 308) and they were usually “capricious and inconstant” (304). Angelica is exactly that kind of character in the novel. In order to kill Tony Hill, she seduces him with her voice to finally kidnap him when he is most vulnerable. Tony does not know at any moment the true nature of Angelica and he has not seen her either. He only talks to her on the phone, which is a significant fact because it shows that their relationship is just fictional, at least for him, and there is no physical contact.

His fascination for others' intellect and his search of belongingness are the reasons for his acceptance to keep talking, “[...] the scientist in him wanted to hear what she had to say. And the damaged man inside had enough self-awareness to know he needed to be cured, and that this might just be the way” (117). With perseverance, Angelica succeeded in taking Tony to her ground, little by little “she'd wormed her way through his barricades.” (60), making him more confident with her. By entering into her world, the

mermaid's one, he has avoided reality. This is a fantasy where he can escape from his existential crisis:

She was in his head again. The mystery woman. At the start, he'd felt vulnerable, unwilling to take part in her games. [...] But she had persisted, patiently continuing to administer her soothing persuasions till he had started to relax, even to join in. [...] She had seemed from the first to have an instinct for his Achilles heel, yet she never attacked it. She was everything anyone could desire in a fantasy lover, from gentle to raunchy. [...] But he could not escape the fear that, if not yet dependent on the phone calls, he was at risk of succumbing to that danger. Already incapable of sustaining a normal sexual relationship. [...] But he was still too wary of fresh humiliation for that. [...] the mysterious stranger who managed to make him feel like a man for long enough to drive the demons underground (59).

As Dr Hill decided to maintain a considerable distance from others, the fact that Angelica is not present helps him to relax and enjoy their erotic phone calls. If at any moment he is not capable of achieving erection, he does not have to feel humiliated or upset and he just has to disconnect from that imaginary world, "that's why Angelica was safe. When she drove him to distraction, he could slam the phone down, rather than slap her face. Or worse. Best stay out of risk, he thought" (217). Hence, "he reminded himself of his earlier resolve not to let her get under his skin, so that when the time came, he could walk away without pain" (117). For Tony, that is idyllic because he does not have to go out of his comfort zone and believes he has everything under control. Angelica opened a new world for him, and he found out it is a place where he felt comfortable; so from that moment on, every time she called he would be "back in his own world, anchored within his own head at the sound of her voice" (116).

As the novel develops, Tony's assurance and self-confidence grows, but actually they are false emotions. As he escapes from reality, what he encounters in Angelica's calls is also false. Angelica only tells him what he wants to hear, and this is what confuses Tony, making him think that what they have is real instead of the opposite, but his alienated figure can hardly distinguish one world from another. He has created a false high-esteem and a false self-confidence inside him. With her, "for the first time in his life,

Tony had felt a protective care that succoured without smothering. [...] Thanks to Angelica, he dared hope the pattern had been broken. It had caused him enough pain over the years” (352-53). Furthermore, although he might consider their situation is not completely real, he seems not give much importance to it because

he felt as if he'd been suddenly detached from a burden he had been carrying for so long he had ceased to notice its weight. Was this what being cured felt like, this sense of light and colour, this sensation of having dumped the past like sacks of coal in a bunker? Was this how his patients felt when they'd unloaded their mess on him? (351)

Although it is not real life, it is better. He can feel liberated and that is more important for him rather than considering if it is the right path. He had never been in that situation and it is magnificent, “he felt a new confidence [...]; that he had finally wrestled his demon into submission thanks to her strange erotic therapy” (375). What is more, the spell she cast over him makes him reflect on the prospect that maybe he is no longer alienated from the world he lives in and gives him great expectations:

His experiences on the phone with Angelica, coupled with his conviction that he'd done a good job on the profile, had given him fresh hope. Maybe he didn't have to be dysfunctional. Maybe he could join the rest of the world, the ones who handled things, who assimilated the past and shaped their world according to what they wanted to see. ‘I can change my life,’ he announced (322).

The murderer is continually challenging Tony's alienating position. He is relaxed and comfortable with her, but he knows that they only talk on the phone and still he is not completely sure of their relationship. For example, in one of their conversations, Angelica assures him that her only desire is to make him happy. Tony, on hearing that response thinks “If only [that was true]...” (117) owing to his great longing for achieving that feeling one day. In other words, he experiences an internal confrontation where he begins to expect an integration with society, but simultaneously, he fears walking over a difficult pathway:

Part of Tony prayed that Angelica knew enough about the theory and practice of psychology to stick with him till he too could break down the barriers and stare into the face of whatever it was that had bred this sexual and emotional cripple. But the other part of him hoped she'd never call again. Never mind 'no pain, no gain'. He just wanted no pain (121).

Considering that he was escaping to a false realism, we should expect its end. That culmination occurs when Angelica kidnaps him. Tony receives a shock of reality when he awakens in Angelica's chamber of torture and is tied in a Judas chair. The psychologist has fallen into her trap. In an instant he realizes that everything was a lie and her words "had given him hope for his future, only to leave him finally stranded in this place" (443). Therefore, the disappointment he feels is immense. Not only has he thought about being cured, but also about becoming someone else, a more self-assured person who does not have to wear a mask anymore.

Angelica is not the only one who played the mermaid role though. Tony did it too when he was her captive. It is important to highlight that, in the same way that the murderer reached Tony's vulnerability and made him fall into her trap while he thought he was not in danger - in his house where he controls everything-, Tony did exactly the same in Angelica's own place, where she is supposed to be the master of all conversation and torture. Once Tony knows that what they had during their phone calls was not true, he attempts to play the same game so as to escape from her and her imaginary world, knowing that if he did not do it, he would die. He told her all the words that she wanted to hear, and they even kissed, with the hope she would lower her guard. In the end, he managed to escape by killing her. As they were intellectually and emotionally similar, there was only room for one in the world and, consequently, they had to betray each other as Judas did.

Finally, Tony Hill's pain and fear materialize when he reads the diary of Angelica. He realized after reading a few paragraphs that the way she wrote made him feel strange,

a “chilling relish [...] that was unusual” (441). He understood that “whatever it was, it was making him more reluctant to continue the more he read, the opposite to his normal response” (441). For the first time, he had the chance to get into Angelica’s mind through her diary, but what he found was that he had been part of her reality and now it was disgusting for him. He realized that “these words were touching him in ways he’d never experienced before because the life outlined on these pages had touched him with a directness he’d known before. They were the footsteps of his own personal nemesis that he was tracing, and it was an uncomfortable journey” (442) owing to his reluctance to accept that he could have suffered the same tragical fate as the previous victims.

Back in reality again, Tony cannot stop thinking about what he had gone through in the chamber of torture and what could have happened. Additionally, their kiss in that chamber is what most obsesses him because it is his epiphany. The kiss represents the moment of betrayal and the materialization of his awareness that his ideal world would never come true:

Then that kiss. The whore’s kiss, the killer’s kiss, the lover’s kiss, the saviour’s kiss, all rolled into one. [...] He had spent his working life worming his way into the heads of those who kill, only to end up one of them, thanks to a Judas kiss. ‘You’ve won, haven’t you, Angelica?’ he said softly. ‘You wanted me, and now you’ve got me’ (443).

Tony believes that he has become a criminal. Angelica took him to the depths of the world to come back as one of them. He is a killer now and he will have to endure it in a place where he still feels alienated. From that moment on, he is convinced that he will be like Angelica, a killer and an outcast.

5. Conclusions and Further Research

The genre of crime fiction is extremely miscellaneous and covers a huge variety of sub-genres. Although it is possible to appreciate the first traces of mystery fiction in ancient books such as the Bible, it did not start to gain force until the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. In addition, women crime writers have largely contributed to the diversification of this genre by conferring new perspectives. Val McDermid is a contemporary crime writer who is quite famous for the extreme violence present in her books, but above all for her feminist approach and her narrative style, which is categorized inside the 'Tartan Noir' genre.

The purpose of this paper has been to analyze Tony Hill's personality from the viewpoint of alienation and his reasons for making certain decisions in a personal and a social level. In order to accomplish that, the analysis has been based on Melvin Seeman's approach *On the Meaning of Alienation* published in 1959. With the aim to clarify the meaning of alienation and facilitate the study of this term, Seeman proposes five dimensions: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, social isolation and self-estrangement. Those distinctions do not necessarily have to be independent and it is frequent to notice several –if not all- of them in the same person. For instance, social isolation and self-estrangement are more generic and they can lead to the other three.

Tony Hill practically shows all five features, but I have especially emphasized his relationship with the other characters through social isolation and his relationship with himself through self-estrangement. Despite being a psychologist and a psychological profiler, Tony hides behind a self-constructed mask throughout the novel so as not to show his true personality. The main reasons are that his traumas made him built a fortress around himself and the belief that he may not be like the rest of the citizens. As a

consequence of his self-alienation, he feels incapable of fitting into society and even less maintaining any sort of romantic relationship.

Moreover, owing to the distance he keeps with 'normal' citizens, he hopelessly seeks a sense of belongingness in his patients. In the end he discovers someone who is alike but who turns out to be his *nemesis*. Both Tony and Angelica are playing the game of cat-and-mouse, but Tony is not aware of his disadvantage towards her. Angelica plays both as the *alter ego* and the false reality where Tony is comfortable and generates false self-esteem. The psychological profiler believes he can control everything until the moment of his kidnapping, which is the peak of the novel, and realizes that nothing has changed, that he is still alienated from the rest of the society, now more than ever.

My contribution to the analysis of this magnificent novel is just a tiny part of everything that it could be analyzed, interpreted and studied. For instance, Dr Hill can be further analyzed by comparing him to T.S. Eliot's Alfred Prufrock in the poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock". Val McDermid was inspired by this poem to write *The Mermaids Singing*. Hence, it could be interesting to find similarities in them as well as divergences regarding alienation and existentialism, the period they were published and the perspectives both authors give and so on.

The relationship between Chief Inspector Carol Jordan and Dr Tony Hill is also worth to examining. The psychologist is not the only one who must deal with his suffering, Carol Jordan has her own past and problems that clearly affect their mutual understanding and the romantic feelings they share. Another way to approach the novel could be from the perspective of the killer: her *modus operandi* and writing style when she describes the mutilations and tortures may also be a fascinating study and it can be compared to other murderers in literature. All in all, Val McDermid is an exceptionally

conscious writer and her novels touch numerous themes, outlooks and fields. Thus, I am convinced that we will hear about her for many years.

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