

TRACING THE SHADOW OF 'NO MEAN CITY' :
ASPECTS OF CLASS AND GENDER IN SELECTED
MODERN SCOTTISH URBAN WORKING-CLASS
FICTION

Sylvia Bryce

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



2005

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Acknowledgements

I thank Robert Crawford for all of his advice and encouragement throughout the preparation of this thesis. I also express my thanks to the following people: Christopher MacLachlan, who supervised me during the preparation of the first draft of Chapter Two; Moira Burgess, who was a constant source of helpful information and kindness; H. Kingsley Long's daughter Gillian Prentice, who granted me an interview and lent me her father's papers; A.L. Kennedy, who corresponded with me; Mrs. Woods, who permitted me to examine Alexander McArthur's papers; and James Kelman, who let me interview him at the University of Glasgow. I would like to acknowledge the support I have received from the Arts and Humanities Research Board.

I give my gratitude to my parents for their understanding and patience.

I dedicate this project to Tyler.

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Ph.D. Dissertation Abstract

Tracing the Shadow of No Mean City: Aspects of Class and Gender in Selected Modern Scottish Urban Working-Class Fiction

This Ph.D. dissertation examines the influence of Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long's novel No Mean City (1935) on the representation of working-class subjectivity in modern Scottish urban fiction. The novel helped to focus literary attention on a predominantly male, working-class, urban and realistic vision of modern Scotland. McArthur and Long explore – in their representations of destructive slum-dwelling characters – the damaging effects of class and gender on working-class identity. The controversy surrounding the book has always been intense, and most critics either deplore or downplay the full significance of No Mean City's literary impact.

My dissertation re-examines one of the most disliked and misrepresented working-class novels in modern Scottish literary history. McArthur and Long's literary legacy, notwithstanding its many detractors, has become something to write against. Through examination of works by James Barke, John McNeillie, Edward Gaitens, Robin Jenkins, Bill McGhee, George Friel, William McIlvanney, Alan Spence, Alasdair Gray, James Kelman, Irvine Welsh, Janice Galloway, Agnes Owens, Meg Henderson and A.L. Kennedy, the thesis outlines how the challenge represented by No Mean City has survived the decades following its publication. It argues that contrary to prevailing critical opinion, the novel's influence has been instrumental, not detrimental, to the evolution of modern Scottish literature.

Ultimately I hope to pave the way toward a fuller, more nuanced understanding of No Mean City's remarkable impact, and to demonstrate how pervasive its legacy has been to Scottish writers from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Introduction

No Mean City: Class, Gender and Influence

Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long's No Mean City (1935) is perhaps Scotland's most infamous and undervalued urban working-class book, and in areas such as character development, narrative voice, style, subject and influence, has, more often than not, been judged as inferior, and excluded from serious consideration. At other times, the book is used as a negative exemplar – at least within some Scottish literary contexts – to demonstrate the relative high (or low) value of other relevant literary forms, and therefore functions as a combined tool and weapon of Scottish canon-building practice. The critical reactions to No Mean City, which will be examined in later chapters, have contributed, simultaneously, to the novel's notoriety and its status as one of the most influential Scottish working-class books in print today.

No Mean City's influence on the representation of working-class subjectivity in modern Scottish urban fiction is as considerable as it is controversial. The text helped to focus literary attention on a predominantly male, working-class, urban and realist vision of modern Scotland. McArthur and Long explore – in their depictions of destructive slum-dwelling characters – the damaging effects of class and gender on identity. Although among modern Scottish novels and short stories No Mean City has been arguably the most important text influencing the presentation of working-class life, my intention is not to argue that all subsequent literary explorations of class and gender ideologies in Scotland are the result of No Mean City's direct influence. My argument is more focused and complex than this. While showing that there is ample evidence for the direct impact of McArthur and Long's novel, I will also explain that No Mean City set an agenda which many later Glasgow writers were compelled to follow or try to displace. This thesis will show that considering No Mean City alongside some very different works can be mutually illuminating. Rather than being a book to discard or discredit, No Mean City should be

seen as a vital part of the equipment for critics of modern Scottish urban writing. Indeed, one of the most striking developments in recent decades has been the rise, rather than the decline, in evidence for No Mean City's influence in contemporary Scottish fiction.

Aspects of No Mean City are anchored to cultural, historical and theoretical contexts in terms of its continuing popularity; references to the novel in the media, literary and social criticism, fiction, historical works and autobiographies abound. The novel's impact is therefore multifaceted. What must be acknowledged, since it is crucial to this examination of the book's influence, is that most critics either deplore or downplay the full significance of No Mean City's literary impact. This thesis will deal with the critical tradition surrounding McArthur and Long's book, both to give as comprehensive a picture as possible of prevailing interpretations of the novel, and to form a springboard for fresh analysis. Since the main thrust of my thesis is that No Mean City exerts influence over modern Scottish urban fiction, and that the cultural sway held by the book is not necessarily always negative, I need to specify what I mean by 'influence,' at least within the bounds of this study. Though this is not the place to engage in a detailed critique of such important theoretical works as Harold Bloom's The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (1973), and even though Bloom taps a theory of poetry, not fiction, it may nonetheless be helpful to draw attention to his idea that authors strain for a sense of independent creativity under the weight of influence from earlier writers. However, as even he suggests in his Preface, writers cannot avoid being influenced by their predecessors.¹ It should be emphasised here that my examination of No Mean City and its inheritors takes as one of its theoretical bases an adaptation of Bloom's conceptualisation of the literary process as a chain of influence. The assumption underpinning my study of No Mean City, and indeed the idea which seems to permeate many analyses of McArthur

¹ Harold Bloom, Preface, The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) xxiii.

and Long's book, is that the novel casts what Moira Burgess, in Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (1998), calls a shadow of influence over Glasgow writers.² Unlike many critics, however, I do not see No Mean City as a detriment to individual creative expression, but rather as a challenge, a Glaswegian literary demon that needs to be faced – and perhaps even exorcised – in order to fully understand the range, quality and extent of its cultural legacy.

Another, related, assumption underlying my thesis is that expressed by Peter Widdowson in Literature (1999). He defines the 'literary' in a way which can be applied to my examination of the literary influence of No Mean City. Literature, Widdowson suggests, is not simply *influential*; it is *influence itself*. He maintains that 'past and present literature *writes us*, inasmuch as its particular formulation, which did not exist hitherto and now does, permanently changes how we perceive things'.³ My argument turns on the notion that McArthur and Long's text affects the way in which Scotland sees itself; at the same time, and because of the international success of such writers as Irvine Welsh – whose depictions of urban Scotland are influenced by those of No Mean City – the hardened and masculinised version of Scottish identity continues to be the main formulation, at home and abroad. This is not to say that No Mean City controls Scotland's image. As Widdowson reminds us, literature as influence is essentially a volatile entity: literature is 'a kind of uncontrolled free space in which unpredictable things can happen and from which unpredictable effects may accrue'.⁴ The impact of McArthur and Long's image of urban Scotland, although potent, does not jeopardise the creative freedom of Scottish urban writers; No Mean City may be a large part of the nation's urban heritage, but it is not a determining factor in what authors write. Rather, it is a conditioning element, and is part of a 'larger culture of Glasgow negativity on which it draws, like its

² Moira Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 170.

³ Peter Widdowson, Literature (London: Routledge, 1999) 205.

⁴ Widdowson, Literature 205.

predecessors and followers, from [Sarah] Tytler's St Mungo's City (1884) to [Archie] Hind's The Dear Green Place [1966].⁵ Literary influence, as Widdowson suggests, can be understood as a function of an 'endlessly unstable dialectics of the author/text/reader nexus in history,' a continual and necessarily problematic process of writing and re-writing which underscores the importance of viewing any given text – even a decidedly non-canonical one like McArthur and Long's No Mean City – as a participant in the interplay.⁶ In one sense, No Mean City is a continual thesis in the ongoing dialectic of the literary history of urban Scotland, providing a pressure point for response. The book helps to drive literary development. It is ironic, however, that No Mean City – one of the most disliked texts in Scottish literary circles – should play such a definitive role. After all, most critics deny the book literary status. In challenging the inferiorisation of McArthur and Long's novel, then, this dissertation has at least one main underlying theoretical motive: to contribute to the destabilisation of canonical notions of what is and is not considered 'literary.' As Widdowson notes, the criteria for the 'canonising process' are 'imprecise, unexplained, tacitly assumed, and thoroughly naturalised'.⁷ Furthermore, and as he points out, the received canon is 'historically constructed on behalf of some very powerful and insistent ideological imperatives and vested interests'.⁸ The inclusionary/exclusionary process involved in canon formation – that same process whereby books such as No Mean City have been denied access to the coveted realm of the 'literary' – is therefore informed by contextual and subjective, rather than intrinsic and objective, considerations. Also, and as Marilyn Butler points out, the exclusivity of the concept of a literary canon can limit our access to texts considered worthy of investigation, and undermine the process of literary criticism in general: 'evaluation itself is threatened:

⁵ Douglas Gifford, 'Report on PhD thesis by Sylvia Bryce' (6 January 2005) 1.

⁶ Widdowson, Literature 10-11.

⁷ Widdowson, Literature 13.

⁸ Widdowson, Literature 11.

how can you operate the techniques for telling who a major writer is, if you don't know what a minor one looks like?'.⁹ A general premise of this study is to question Scottish urban canonical procedures by positing McArthur and Long's book and influence as crucial to their present and future development. Indeed, No Mean City can be seen as a valuable text since it contributes to our understanding of the history of the modern Scottish urban novel.

The debates surrounding No Mean City have always been intense, largely because of the subversiveness of McArthur and Long's depictions of working-class men and women. Many of their characters are violent, immoral and criminal slum-dwellers who destroy themselves and each other in their pursuit of money, status and power. The slum in question – the Gorbals district of Glasgow – is shown to be the urban space where class and gender ideologies intersect to produce the social and economic conditions for a decidedly damaged form of working-class identity. This idea has been explored in many novels and short stories since No Mean City was published, although McArthur and Long's contributions to the development of Scottish literary traditions are rarely valued. Indeed, as a detailed examination of critical responses in the chapters that follow will demonstrate, the consensus view of the book is that it is badly written, sensationalistic, and even dangerous. Tracing the influence of No Mean City is therefore like listening in on an argument between McArthur and Long on the one hand, and subsequent authors and critics on the other. The bone of contention is the issue of not only how working-class Glasgow *is* represented in literature, but how it *should* be portrayed; No Mean City is frequently held up as the wrong way to write working-class fiction.

Attitudes towards McArthur and Long's text over the past sixty years range from denial to amusement, from embarrassment to outrage, making the work a barometer of reigning

⁹ Marilyn Butler, 'Repossessing the Past: The Case for an Open Literary History,' in Dennis Walder (ed.), Literature in the Modern World: Critical Essays and Documents (Oxford: Oxford University Press with the Open University, 1989/90) 15.

perceptions about working-class Glasgow in general, and the status of blue-collar literature in particular. The question of how class relates to literature therefore needs to be addressed. According to Gary Day, there is a connection between class and literature in terms of a link between 'the economic form of capitalism and 'literary' representation'.¹⁰ I agree with this assessment, as well as those of his theoretical sources. Along with Day, I call attention to Georg Lukács's idea that the novel is a vehicle for societal change: 'literature, particularly the novel, is able to penetrate the surface of society, highlighting hidden connections and identifying the underlying trends which may lead to its revolutionary transformation'.¹¹ This idea, although dated in its Marxist rhetoric, is nonetheless in keeping with McArthur and Long's view that their novel is a window that looks into the true state of affairs for working-class Glasgow. As they state in the Appendix to No Mean City:

Though all the characters in *No Mean City* are imaginary and the book itself merely fiction, the authors maintain that they have not drawn an exaggerated picture of conditions in the Glasgow tenements or of life as it is lived amongst the gangster element of the slum population.

(NMC 314)

Then there is Lucien Goldmann's view that literature 'represents the world-view of a particular group,' which again is directly applicable to my study of No Mean City in particular, and working-class literature in Scotland in general.¹² As McArthur wrote in an article for the Daily Record:

I want to see a real investigation of the Glasgow slums...[the] knowledge that unknown men and women had lived lives and died deaths of a sordid kind added to my belief that they did not do so in vain...I hope 'No Mean City' has not been written in vain.¹³

As he goes on to say, 'I am glad I wrote 'No Mean City'...because it gives me gratification to know I am the natural 'implement' which put the poorest of Glasgow's

¹⁰ Gary Day, Class (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) 1.

¹¹ Day, Class 2.

¹² Day, Class 2.

¹³ Alexander McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City',' Daily Record and Mail (1 November 1935) 7.

citizens on the map in a way that is looked upon as unique'.¹⁴ McArthur was a self-aware working-class writer, and saw himself as the spokesperson for the Glaswegian underclasses. No Mean City, and indeed one of its two authors, therefore invites a textual analysis based on theories of class. As this thesis will point out in some detail, however, there is also the question of gender.

McArthur and Long's novel, although it tackles class ideology, does not do so without acknowledging the importance of concepts of masculinity and femininity. Indeed, my argument is that class – as it is explored throughout No Mean City – cannot be fully understood without realising that it intersects with, and is conditioned by gender ideology. The characters in the book are working-class men and women, and as such are shown to develop their identities as male and female based on the potentialities and limitations imposed by their social and financial status within the class-based culture that overarches their lives. The men have the following options: work, unemployment, or crime; the women, on the other hand, can choose work, marriage and motherhood, or prostitution. These are the potential trajectories of identity formation for male and female members of the lower orders, and No Mean City acknowledges and scrutinises all of them through its array of characters. As such, the novel is an early recognition of the complex interaction of gender and class that Paul Lauter, in 'Working-Class Women's Literature' (1979), searches for in vain in most traditional definitions and images of blue-collar people.¹⁵

No Mean City consists of three intertwined story lines. The main plot centres on the degenerative lives and careers of Johnnie and Lizzie Stark. Their personalities dominate both the Gorbals and the narrative. Johnnie is the embodiment of tough Glaswegian masculinity, violent and sexually rapacious, and Lizzie the perfect gangster's moll. As the

¹⁴ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'' 7.

¹⁵ Paul Lauter, 'Working-Class Women's Literature: an introduction to study,' Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism, Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds. (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 837.

ringleaders of a large Gorbals gang, they terrorise the district in pursuit of admiration. A secondary plot focuses on Johnnie's younger brother Peter and his wife Isobel. Desperate for people to look up to them, they try to earn respect by adopting the outward signs of financial success and social superiority. Peter works hard to impress his employers at the warehouse, reads high-brow Marxist literature, and behaves like a 'bourgeois.' Isobel dresses conservatively and encourages her ambitious husband to move to a better area of Glasgow, where she revels in a house with its own bathroom. A tertiary plot recounts the dancing careers of Bobbie Hurley and Lily McKay. This couple pursues celebrity. They become famous in the dance halls, earn good wages, and move to a better tenement house, also with a bath. No Mean City, on this superficial layer of the narrative, is about the shame of poverty and slum, the need to escape the Gorbals and the anonymity of the masses, the yearning for transcendence, and the desire for a sense of self-worth.

All of the characters struggle to rise above what they see as the common ruck: Johnnie and Lizzie through notoriety, Peter and Isobel through respectability, and Bobbie and Lily through fame. They all want to be superior in some way to their fellow slum dwellers. All of the characters fail. Johnnie is eventually dethroned by a younger hard man. Lizzie dies giving birth to another man's child. Peter and Isobel are hurled back into poverty when Peter is first demoted at work, and then dismissed for his involvement in politics and street-fighting. Bobbie and Lily become prostitutes and end up separated, their dancing careers, relationship and reputations destroyed by scandal. The lives of the characters are shaped by a combination of gender and class expectations; one of No Mean City's main concerns is thus to explore, in fictional form, the realities experienced by people whose identities are formed where the norms of masculinity or femininity cross paths with poverty, violence and the desire for betterment in financial and social terms.

Though in writing individual chapters I have avoided constantly citing theoretical works on gender construction, so as to focus on the novels under discussion, I wish to make it clear at this point that the theories of gender which underscore my study are drawn from several sources, which include the following: Berthold Schoene-Harwood's Writing Men: Literary Masculinities From *Frankenstein* to the New Man (2000); David Glover and Cora Kaplan's Genders (2000); Christopher Whyte's Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature (1995); and Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl's Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism (1991). Later in the thesis, I utilise the feminist ideas of Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva as part of my examination of women's Scottish urban writing – in particular the writings of Janice Galloway, Agnes Owens and A.L. Kennedy – but the majority of my dissertation aims for a balanced awareness of gender theory, and its even-handed application to understanding the literary representation of identity in terms of the class and gender nexus. Both masculinity and femininity are held to be of equal status for the purposes of investigation; a too narrowly gynocentric analysis could limit the exploration of how men are depicted in the fiction I have chosen to scrutinise, and might obscure the second part of my thesis, which is to expose the intersections between gender (both male and female) and class. Pamela Fox's Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945 (1994) has been an ongoing source of theoretical inspiration for this thesis. Her attention to the literary representation of gender, combined with the notion that working-class narratives betray a simultaneous consciousness of and shame about class, can be applied to our understanding of No Mean City as a form of literary, social and individual resistance, an articulation of the horrors and humiliations of poverty and low social status. Theory-wise, then, my dissertation is principally underpinned by considerations of class and gender, though it is also alert to literary and cultural history as well as issues of stylistic

analysis. These are the parameters within which my examination of No Mean City's influence operates.

The first chapter of the dissertation, entitled 'The Making of No Mean City,' investigates some aspects of the history of working-class writing, culture and politics in the United Kingdom during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and scrutinises a variety of influences bearing on the writing and publication of No Mean City. The analysis focuses on various dimensions – political, literary, social, historical and biographical – in order to provide as thorough and complex a context as possible within the limitations of this study. Research materials include articles, newspapers, correspondence, archival findings and interviews; much of this data is either seriously underexamined, previously unacknowledged or original, and therefore sheds light on our understanding of the circumstances surrounding the appearance of McArthur and Long's notorious book. The conclusion to this first chapter indicates the directions that will be taken throughout the remainder of the dissertation; textual analysis of No Mean City will be followed by a consideration of its critical reception in order to more fully appreciate the nature and extent of the novel's influence.

Chapter Two investigates and assesses the critical tradition surrounding No Mean City. I demonstrate that many of the charges levelled at McArthur and Long's novel – such as its inferior literary quality, the regressive qualities of its influence, the inaccuracy of its representations of working-class experience – are not only hasty and ill-founded, but also indicative of a need to rethink the terms by which we read this, and other, working-class texts. I therefore lay the groundwork for tracing the novel's influence on Scottish urban literature by formulating and applying to No Mean City a theoretical framework based on class and gender analysis as well as literary and cultural history, which allows for a reconsideration of its role in the evolution of modern Scottish urban fiction.

Chapter Three builds on the previous chapter by tracing the quality and extent of the book's impact between 1935 and 1970. Although Archie Hind's The Dear Green Place (1966) is most often seen as one of the definitive novels of this era, analysis is limited to the following five appropriate novels for reasons of space and thoroughness: James Barke's Major Operation (1936), John McNeillie's Glasgow Keelie (1940), Edward Gaitens's Dance of the Apprentices (1948), Robin Jenkins's The Changeling (1958) and Bill McGhee's Cut and Run (1962). The works of McNeillie and McGhee betray strong evidence of No Mean City's direct influence, and so yield rather easily to the part of my thesis that implicates McArthur and Long's book as a key text in understanding the representation of class and gender in Glaswegian working-class fiction; the novels of Barke, Gaitens and Jenkins, on the other hand, incorporate the shadow of No Mean City in more subtle ways, although Barke's Major Operation and Gaitens's Dance of the Apprentices can be read with an eye to revealing traces of overt inspiration from McArthur and Long's book. Barke, evidence suggests, wrote his novel in an effort to neutralise No Mean City's power, and so exists in tension with the earlier book; Gaitens's work, similarly, is often seen as an antidote to McArthur and Long's poison, and will be analysed – along with Barke's text – as a demonstration of the other part of my thesis, namely, that No Mean City functions as the pressure point against which Glasgow writers attempt to reformulate literary representations of working-class femininity and masculinity.

Chapter Four considers the significance of No Mean City's role throughout the 1970s, during the second wave of the Scottish Literary Renaissance. This was a time of change and growth in working-class fiction writing; increasingly, Glasgow authors were reinvesting the genre with new insights, becoming more experimental in approach, and incorporating stylistic techniques from magic realism, crime fiction and modernism. The

traditionally naturalistic mode of working-class literature was empowered by these advancements. For instance, George Friel's Mr Alfred M.A. (1972) slips from straightforward realistic narration into fantasy, delusion and the supernatural. William McIlvanney's Laidlaw (1977) marks a shift in register for working-class fiction in Glasgow; he weds the genre with popular crime writing and existential philosophy, thereby forging a new literary space in Scottish urban writing that would be further developed by authors within the city and without. Alan Spence's Its Colours They Are Fine, published in the same year as McIlvanney's novel about his deep-thinking hard man detective, injects the harshly realistic working-class mode with Joycean epiphanic visions; there is a modernistic focus on the development of individual consciousness, turning the series of short stories about young boys growing up in a slum environment into a poignant *bildungsroman* for the lower orders of Glaswegian society. No Mean City's influence during this era is less overt; indeed, it was during this time that the novel's role shifted from being something to be either imitated or resisted, to an undercurrent that could be redirected to irrigate new fields of literary opportunity.

Although Alasdair Gray's Lanark: A Life in 4 Books (1981) really deserves a dissertation in itself, I have decided to include this novel in the fifth chapter of my study of the influence of No Mean City, examining it as a stylistic balancing act; realism is juxtaposed with surrealism, thereby bringing the genre of working-class fiction in line with postmodernistic trends, and carrying traces of influence from McArthur and Long's representations of blue-collar masculinity and femininity. James Kelman's The Busconductor Hines (1984) is also analysed in this chapter; his typographical rebellions, although not nearly as experimental and innovative as the bold advances made by Gray, nonetheless invest his own brand of working-class realism with a sense of unmediated narration that makes No Mean City's narrator – with his frequent asides and translations –

look positively pedantic in comparison. I then train my sights on Edinburgh through a close examination of Irvine Welsh's Trainspotting (1993), which I define as a No Mean City for the late twentieth century. The influence of McArthur and Long has been absorbed, re-contextualised and enhanced in Welsh's graphic tale of drug-maddened youth. The 'hardened' image of working-class Glasgow has been given new life in Edinburgh; further, the international success of Trainspotting as book and film has broadcast the image of urban Scotland as 'No Mean City.'

The final chapter examines the contributions of Scottish urban writing by women throughout the twentieth century, and focuses in particular on such recent works as Janice Galloway's The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989), Agnes Owens's A Working Mother (1994), Meg Henderson's Finding Peggy: A Glasgow Childhood (1994) and A.L. Kennedy's So I Am Glad (1995). I have decided to segregate these works not to ghettoise them, but rather to draw explicit attention to the significance of women's contributions to the development of Scottish urban fiction, which are substantial despite their under-representation in quantifiable terms. Women authors, more than men, have invested urban literature in Scotland with a plurality of vision the importance of which to the future of Scottish writing might be missed if juxtaposed with works by Gray, Kelman and Welsh, the acknowledged giants of Scotland's literary vanguard. I will show that the writings of Glasgow women betray less of No Mean City's impact than those of male authors, an important point that needs to be emphasised from the outset of this study. This difference between the writings of men and women in urban Scotland is perhaps based on the general masculinisation of working-class issues, politics and art; certainly, women's working-class texts are outnumbered by middle-class fictions by both men and women, and there is more concentration of gender issues in works by women than there is on class *per se*. Of course, there are notable exceptions – such as Dot Allan – but for the large part women's Glasgow

fiction is gender-focused and middle-class in perspective. Working-class novels by women which focus on both gender and class from a blue-collar perspective – such as those by Meg Henderson – are still rare.

My study of the influence of No Mean City revises the story of one of the most disliked, feared and misrepresented working-class novels in modern Scottish literary history. McArthur and Long's literary legacy, notwithstanding its many detractors, has become something to write against. The challenge represented by No Mean City has survived the decades following its publication. Contrary to prevailing critical opinion, the novel's influence has been instrumental, not detrimental, to the evolution of modern Scottish literature. Ultimately, I will accomplish three aims: first, to pave the way toward a fuller, more nuanced understanding of No Mean City's remarkable impact; second, to counteract the general erasure of blue-collar writings and history; and third, to assist in the democratisation of literary studies by contributing to the serious study of working-class literatures.

Chapter One:

The Making of *No Mean City*

Though *No Mean City* has played a key role in the development of modern Scottish urban fiction, little research has been done on its contexts, background, authors or reception. The academic who has done the most work on the subject so far is sociologist and short story writer Seán Damer. In 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur' (1990), Damer not only concludes that 'a literary evaluation of McArthur's work has still to be made,' but can also be credited with being the only researcher who has attempted to gather information on McArthur, Long and the circumstances surrounding the publication of *No Mean City*.¹ Despite Damer's work, there are still holes in the story leading up to the novel's appearance in 1935. In attempting a more comprehensive and coherent picture of the making of *No Mean City*, I have gone beyond Damer in consulting other sources of information, such as correspondence, newspaper articles and reviews. Long's daughter Gillian Prentice has played an invaluable role by providing interviews, letters, published and unpublished manuscripts of her father's writings, copies of out-of-print novels and notes. This chapter reconsiders salient aspects of the social, cultural and political contexts for *No Mean City*, thereby offering a more thorough understanding of the material circumstances surrounding the publication of this controversial novel.

In a narrow sense, *No Mean City* is part of what Moira Burgess calls the 'gangland school,' a strand of novels which she sees as starting with George Blake's *Mince Collop Close* (1923). As Burgess states, however, '[it] is a common error to suppose that the Glasgow gang novel sprang fully-formed from the Gorbals soil in 1935, in the shape of *No Mean City*'.² It would be a mistake to reduce McArthur and Long's novel to a story about gangs, or even to regard any book about gangsterism as simplistic; *No Mean City* and,

¹ Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' *A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher*, eds. Kevin McCarra and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 42.

² Moira Burgess, *The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition* (Motherwell: Scottish Library Association, 1986) 43.

indeed, Mince Collop Close have roots in a wider tradition of naturalistic realism. In Scotland during the early decades of the twentieth century, several writers used aspects of realist narrative to portray town and city life. To produce a list of their novels may seem mechanical, but is worth doing since it is a reminder of the range as well as the quantity of early twentieth-century realist urban fiction – a kind of fiction often accorded less critical attention than the more deliberately avant-garde urban fiction of James Joyce or Virginia Woolf. A list of Scottish realist fictions might include George Douglas Brown's The House with the Green Shutters (1901), John Blair's Jean (1906), Frederick Niven's Justice of the Peace (1914), Patrick MacGill's Children of the Dead End: the autobiography of a navvy (1914) and The Rat-Pit (1915), George Blake's The Shipbuilders (1935) and James Barke's Major Operation (1936). In England there was Robert Tressell's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1914), as well as Ellen Wilkinson's Clash (1929), Walter Greenwood's Love on the Dole (1933), and George Orwell's autobiographical Down and Out in Paris and London (1933) and The Road to Wigan Pier (1937). The United States produced a plethora of naturalistic works, including Theodore Dreiser's Sister Carrie (1900), Upton Sinclair's The Jungle (1906), Sinclair Lewis's Main Street (1920) and Erskine Caldwell's Tobacco Road (1932) and God's Little Acre (1933).

The 1930s therefore witnessed a surge in the production of working-class writing on an international level. At least three reasons for this shift have been suggested: the decline of modernism, the Wall Street Crash of 1929, and resulting unemployment and poverty. As Gary Day argues, '[The] decline of modernism favoured a revival of realism...unemployment in the early 1930s brought the plight of a section of the working class to the nation's attention'.³ The 'crisis in capitalism' occasioned by the Great Depression 'had a bearing on attitudes to literary representation'.⁴ Modernism, with its

³ Gary Day, Class (New York: Routledge, 2001) 169.

⁴ Day, Class 169.

focus on the 'self,' was overshadowed by immediate, and international, financial anxieties; this was an 'age of unemployment, poverty and conflict' that had to be dealt with, leading to a literary 'concentration on external events not internal processes'.⁵ Significantly, this was the decade during which the documentary film came of age; John Grierson's cinematic representations of the working class in Industrial Britain (1932) and Coalface (1935), for instance, aimed to provide an inside view of the realities of lower-class experience. As Day points out, however, 'this well-intentioned recuperation of the working class also performed an ideological function' by reinforcing, rather than challenging, the *status quo* –

It was an attempt to reduce class tension by showing that each person had their part to play in the national community. These films did not therefore aim to change the class system, merely the way it was perceived. In some respects, indeed, they reinforced it since, by idealising the physical nature of work, they perpetuated the hierarchy of mental and manual labour.⁶

The problem with the Griersonian approach is that the negative aspects of being working class were overlaid with idealised images of industrious workers happily contributing to their nation's wealth. The emphasis on the *physical* rather than the *mental* in working-class life had an even more insidious side-effect: 'It was this assumption that justified the middle class speaking for the working class rather than listening to what they had to say'.⁷

Indeed, as Moira Burgess argues, middle-class control over literary representations of lower-class life was evident in Scotland throughout the 1920s and 30s. Concepts of Glaswegian identity during the first half of the twentieth century, though generally expressed through masculine, working-class imagery, were often the by-products of essays, novels, poetry and articles from a non-working-class Scotland:

Many writers in the 1930s...still observe Glasgow working-class life with a middle-class eye, or (in the case of Muir, Gibbon and Gavin) from the more detached

⁵ Day, Class 170.

⁶ Day, Class 170.

⁷ Day, Class 171.

viewpoint of a rural upbringing. Writers rooted in the urban working class have so far been rare.⁸

When No Mean City was authored by a *bona fide* member of the working class (with the assistance of a middle-class journalist ghostwriter), the prevailing images of Glaswegian experience and people were in the hands of a literary elite, during the Scottish Renaissance of the 1920s and 30s. Douglas Gifford refers to the core of Scottish writers in this period as

A richly varied lot, often quarrelling about whether to use Scots or English, whether the novel was a true art form or not, and most of all about what kind of images and situations to choose to represent the Scotland of their time, which they saw as a kind of Wasteland of 'kailyarderie'.⁹

By the time No Mean City appeared, Hugh MacDiarmid, Edwin Muir, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, George Blake and James Barke were established writers who made Scotland – rural, urban, middle-class, working-class – the focus for their art. As Gifford indicates, they were involved in heated debates about language, art and Scottish identity:

All the writers were deeply political, and almost all socialist or communist, as well as being Nationalist also. Many stood for Parliament; many worked on Government boards, on say, hydro-electricity or on crofting or fishing.¹⁰

Many writers in pre-World War Two Scotland combined their role as artists with self-consciously political, cultural and economic motives. Although several came from working-class backgrounds, they were also middle-class in the sense that they came to occupy empowered and influential positions at home and abroad. They wrote about the Scotland of their time from privileged positions as writers, teachers, journalists, town councillors, editors, publishers, critics, translators, professors, essayists, reporters and civil servants. MacDiarmid, despite his working-class background and his experiences of poverty during the 1930s, seems to have harboured not a few elitist tendencies. He may

⁸ Moira Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 149.

⁹ Douglas Gifford, The Dear Green Place? The Novel in the West of Scotland (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985) 5.

¹⁰ Gifford, The Dear Green Place? 6.

have declared that Scottish literature has a 'far greater democratic character' than that of England, and that Scotland 'is almost entirely lacking in the social stratification' of its southern neighbour, but he also stated that 'the undifferentiated mob...scarcely matters. What is of consequence is what the determined and determining minority do'.¹¹ Manfred Malzahn finds the contradictions in MacDiarmid's class-consciousness 'baffling'.¹² At the same time, MacDiarmid realised, correctly, that urban, working-class Scotland had yet to find its authentic voice:

[Glasgow's] bards have all been backward-looking ruralists, spineless triflers, superior persons insulated from the life of the city in petty suburban snobberies, all utterly incapable of catching the real rhythms of Clydeside at all and all hopelessly at variance politically and in every other way with all that was really significant, really alive, in their area, or, indeed, elsewhere.¹³

Lewis Grassic Gibbon wrote about Glasgow with an outsider's distanced eye, calling the city the 'vomit of a cataleptic commercialism'.¹⁴ His descriptions of the Gorbals are scathing:

It is coming on dark, as they say in the Scotland that is not Glasgow. And out of the Gorbals arises again that foul breath as of a dying beast...It is not even a Scottish slum. Stout men in beards and ringlets and unseemly attire lounge and strut with pointed shoes; Ruth and Naomi go by with downcast Eastern faces...¹⁵

Glasgow is singled out as alien to the rest of Scotland – a monster with the Gorbals as its stinking heart. The slum district is a bestial zone, populated by foreign Jews, 'lovably and abominably and delightfully and hideously un-Scottish'.¹⁶ The Gorbals, he writes, has a better 'stench' than Govan or Camlachie; it is 'haunted' by the ghosts of 'goodness' and

¹¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Contemporary Scottish Literature and the National Question,' Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed. Duncan Glen (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) 208. Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Caledonian Antisyzygy and the Gaelic Idea,' Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid 59.

¹² Manfred Malzahn, Aspects of Identity: The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-Expression (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1984) 19.

¹³ Hugh MacDiarmid, 'The Scottish Renaissance: The Next Step,' Selected Essays of Hugh MacDiarmid, ed. Duncan Glen (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969) 109.

¹⁴ Lewis Grassic Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Glasgow,' Scottish Scene (London: Hutchinson, 1934), quoted in Glasgow Observed, eds. Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987) 208.

¹⁵ Grassic Gibbon, 'Glasgow' 208.

¹⁶ Grassic Gibbon, 'Glasgow' 208.

'grossness'; the area has been 'ripened under alien suns'.¹⁷ Grassic Gibbon's is a decidedly poetic and ambivalent view of the Gorbals, one which approaches the subject of Scottish urban slum culture from the position of the flâneur. The slum and its inhabitants are discursively dispossessed in the process.

The reputation of the Gorbals preceded Grassic Gibbon's descriptions. As Ronald Smith notes, the stigma of the Gorbals stretches back to at least the fourteenth century, when a leper colony dedicated to St. Ninian was established to segregate plague victims from the city across the Clyde.¹⁸ Fears of disease and contamination from the Gorbals are perhaps partially due to its transformation into a repository for untouchables, and tie in well with Grassic Gibbon's view of the area as a source of contagion.

The Gorbals is a symptom of Glasgow's success story as the workshop of the British Empire. By the nineteenth century, the district was an industrial nerve-centre of commercial activity. Its physical landscape changed to accommodate the influx of people seeking employment: '[to] house the workers in local factories and cotton mills, the rest of the area was developed throughout the nineteenth century resulting in a remarkably uniform grid-iron layout of four-storey tenements'.¹⁹ Incomers placed acute pressure on available housing, and overcrowding bred disease: 'the first major typhus epidemic was in 1817, there were two cholera outbreaks in 1831-32 and 1848-49'.²⁰ Indeed, T.C. Smout, in A Century of the Scottish People: 1830-1950 (1986), indicates that the industrial era in Scotland was not an unqualified success story. As he argues, the 'age of great industrial triumphs was an age of appalling deprivation...unspeakable urban squalor, compounded of drink abuse, bad housing, low wages...'.²¹ Alongside the squalor, disease and crime grew

¹⁷ Grassic Gibbon, 'Glasgow' 208.

¹⁸ Ronald Smith, The Gorbals: Historical Guide and Heritage Walk (Glasgow: Glasgow City Council, 1999) 7.

¹⁹ Smith, The Gorbals 9-10.

²⁰ Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte, eds., Introduction, Glasgow Observed (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987) 28.

²¹ T.C. Smout, A Century of the Scottish People: 1830-1950 (London: Collins, 1986) 2.

a recognisably Glaswegian literature of ‘histories, guides, statistical accounts,’ which helped to consolidate Glasgow’s double-sided reputation as the ‘greatest city in Britain, outside London, and the most fearsome’.²²

Writings on Glasgow’s slum areas fed a growing perception of the criminality of the lower classes. Alexander Brown’s 1858 Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs, for instance, portrays slum dwellers as urban savages. The men are pimps, idle workmen, unfaithful husbands, dirty drunkards, violent thieves and hardened blackguards.²³ Two boys are described as having ‘low brows, [and] monkey-looking heads and faces’.²⁴ Women are depicted as hard-featured, dirty, idle, pitiful, smelly, repulsive, offensive, depraved and obscene.²⁵ Brown recoils from ‘the horrid oaths and imprecations of low prostitutes – carrying their loathsome figures about with offensive boldness – flushed with drink, and bloated with disease’.²⁶ Brown’s narratives dehumanise the men and women of the slums, and project the poor as a ‘sub-class alienated from general standards and restraints of the society around them. They produce a separate species’.²⁷ He blames the ‘social evils’ of Glasgow’s slums on the ‘social degradation of a large class of its labouring population’ through intemperance and ignorance.²⁸

The literature on Glasgow’s slums grew throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. William Hunter points out that ‘[low-life] reporting of Glasgow became a fashionable form of journalism’ which nourished the city’s notoriety at home and abroad:

In 1870 the [North British Daily Mail]’s reporters probed what they called The Dark Side, a sin patch of drinking places and brothels around the Cross. This citadel of

²² Berry and Whyte, eds., Introduction, Glasgow Observed 29.

²³ Alexander Brown, Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs: Being Sketches of Life in the Streets, Wynds and Dens of the City, ed. John F. McCaffrey (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1976) 28, 37, 49, 56, 58, 63, 70-1, 105, 108.

²⁴ Brown, Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs 112.

²⁵ Brown, Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs 18, 20-1, 25, 28, 33, 46, 48.

²⁶ Brown, Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs 43.

²⁷ John F. McCaffrey, Introduction, Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs: Being Sketches of Life in the Streets, Wynds and Dens of the City, by Alexander Brown (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1976) 8.

²⁸ Brown, Midnight Scenes and Social Photographs 118, 119, 130, 131, 137.

slaeze was a tenebrous slum of closes and pends from the Trongate south towards the river to Bridgegate and Goosedubs.²⁹

The Gorbals drew 'scandal-seeking scribes' who damaged Glasgow's reputation by encouraging a fascination 'with the sin centre'.³⁰ Nineteenth-century reportage created a 'twilight tourist industry' which attracted voyeuristic customers from the upper classes of Scotland and other nations. This wild and debauched view 'endured in the public prints because it was a handy subject,' becoming a part of Glaswegian urban mythology.³¹

Slum writing continued into the twentieth century, often marketed as travel literature.

A 1907 travelogue states that many Glaswegian men

have a hooligan aspect. They are mostly young, and the majority are either street loafers, or mechanics, mill workers or porters out of work...They loll at street corners, or in front of the public-houses, or stroll listlessly about...as you pass them highly spiced oaths are wafted to you on the muddy atmosphere.³²

Novelists capitalised on this literary trend. George Blake's *The Wild Men* (1925), for instance, describes the slum child as 'sharp and cunning and immoral...useless to himself or to the society to which he belongs, positively dangerous in that his are the impulses of the animal'.³³ Glasgow's notoriety has therefore been a joint effort: '*No Mean City* was not solely responsible for giving Glasgow a bad name'.³⁴ McArthur and Long were not the only novelists who focused on the slums or emphasised working-class crime. Nor was *No Mean City* alone in its application of the 'sociological' perspective to urban poverty and criminality. The book was symptomatic of the literary and political interest in working-class people, settings and themes throughout the 1920s and 30s.

²⁹ William Hunter, 'Drink,' *A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher*, eds. Kevin McCarra and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 68.

³⁰ Hunter, 'Drink' 69.

³¹ Hunter, 'Drink' 68, 69.

³² T.F. Henderson and Francis Watt, *Scotland of Today*, in *Glasgow Observed*, eds. Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 187-88.

³³ George Blake, *The Wild Men* (1925), quoted in *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction*, by Moira Burgess (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 131.

³⁴ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 166.

By the 1930s, and despite the Depression, the Gorbals was still a 'hive of commercial activity,' with a thousand shops and one hundred and thirty pubs serving a population nearing the one hundred thousand mark.³⁵ The area assimilated 'a succession of immigrant groups such as Highlanders, displaced from their homes by sheep, land confiscation and poverty; Irish folk fleeing the famine; Jews displaced by persecution in Europe and Lithuanians displaced by Russians'.³⁶ True to form, the modern Gorbals continued to absorb the unwanted 'others' of society, which may have added to the growing stigma.

Indeed, little was done to ameliorate the living conditions of tenement dwellers. Glasgow neglected the economic causes of deprivation in the Gorbals, with predictable results:

But decay soon set in and, in common with many other inner city areas throughout Britain, this became apparent in the inter-war period. Little was done to address localised problems of building decay, overcrowding or poor sanitation, with the result that the deterioration in conditions became widespread throughout the Gorbals.³⁷

Grassic Gibbon's descriptions of Glaswegian slums, like those of Alexander Brown, transform the people inhabiting the areas into a separate, frightening species:

Nothing endured by the primitives who once roamed those hills – nothing of woe or terror – approximated in degree or kind to that life that festers in the courts and wynds and alleys of Camlachie, Govan, the Gorbals...[the] hundred and fifty thousand eat and sleep and copulate and conceive and crawl into childhood in those waste jungles of stench and disease and hopelessness, sub-humans as definitely as the Morlocks of Wells...³⁸

The appeal to his readers' sense of social justice – 'A hundred and fifty thousand...and all very like you or me' could perhaps justify this degenerative view of slum-dwellers.³⁹ At

³⁵ Smith, *The Gorbals* 10.

³⁶ Smith, *The Gorbals* 10.

³⁷ Smith, *The Gorbals* 15.

³⁸ Lewis Grassie Gibbon and Hugh MacDiarmid, 'Glasgow' (London: Hutchinson, 1934), quoted in *Workers' City: The Real Glasgow Stands Up*, ed. Farquhar McLay (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1988) 57.

³⁹ Grassie Gibbon, 'Glasgow' 57.

the same time, his word choice is dehumanising: '[Glasgow] may be a corpse, but the maggot-swarm upon it is very fiercely alive'.⁴⁰

There is a political dimension to the vilification of working-class Glasgow. Scottish society is deeply divided along class *and* regional lines; this internal stratification has led to resentment, prejudice, suspicion and a lack of cultural cohesion. As James D. Young suggests,

Scotland is an unknown country...In the first place, working-class Scotland is unknown to the indigenous ruling class. Secondly, because of the disparity in the social and cultural geography of Scotland, the separate regions constitute perceptual prisons vitiating any permanent sense of national identity.⁴¹

As Young goes on to say, anti-Glasgow attitudes were prevalent amongst Scots in the 1930s:

Though many of them 'had never stepped foot' in Glasgow, the Glaswegians were...typified by the gangs, the razor-kings, the crooks and the violent Irish. Violence, disorder and social problems were blamed on the pernicious cultural influence of the Irish incomers, not urban society or capitalism. The Glaswegians' heroes and heroines belonged to a different species of humankind – John Maclean, Jimmy Maxton, Benny Lynch, countless football stars...with such heroes and heroines, the Glaswegians were simply incapable of projecting an authentic Scottish identity.⁴²

Scottish people themselves contributed to negative ideas about Glasgow – 'prisoners of small-town parochialism and intolerance, they identified the problems thrown up by capitalism with THE CITY and city behaviour'.⁴³ Part of the motivation might have been self-promotion. Young thinks that the people of Grangemouth, for instance, 'prided themselves on being superior to the awful and half-Irish Glaswegians'.⁴⁴ Further to this, and as S. G. Checkland argues, class divisions within Glasgow itself were reflected in an increasing geographical segregation within the city, and the middle and lower classes

⁴⁰ Grassie Gibbon, 'Glasgow' 56.

⁴¹ James D. Young, Making Trouble: Autobiographical Explorations and Socialism (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1987) 100.

⁴² Young, Making Trouble 13.

⁴³ Young, Making Trouble 13.

⁴⁴ Young, Making Trouble 13.

'interpenetrated only to a minor degree'.⁴⁵ There were therefore 'two Glasgows, sharply distinct'.⁴⁶

Glasgow – the victim of snobbery and suspicion within and outwith Scotland – earned a national and international reputation for extreme forms of socialism and violence during the first half of the twentieth century. In common with many cities across the world, Glasgow had a hard time of it during the inter-war years. By 1930, unemployment was high, the standard of living was low, and radicalism was prevalent.⁴⁷ During the first few years of the Depression, Scots seemed to be losing faith in the efficacy of labour politics to implement change. Labour government was concentrated in Glasgow, and although by 1935 there was a decrease in unemployment, the Scottish economy was suffering from losses in Clydeside's export trade.⁴⁸ Over-crowding in the slums, coupled with an impatience with Labour's cautious approach to Home Rule, fuelled the zeal for national autonomy.⁴⁹ Paranoia about socialist Glasgow beleaguered Stanley Baldwin's Conservative government, and plans were made in 1935 to shift Scottish administration from Glasgow to Edinburgh to 'dampen' Glasgow's 'spirit for nationalism'.⁵⁰

For Baldwin the real danger lay in the Scottish people believing that a revolutionary dictatorship (communist or fascist) could provide housing, a better environment and jobs.⁵¹ The 1919 Glasgow general strike and 1921 riots over cuts in unemployment benefit contributed to a fear of Glaswegian revolution.⁵² William Bolitho Ryall's The Cancer of Empire (1924) helped to exaggerate the threat of Red Clydeside:

⁴⁵ S.G. Checkland, The Upas Tree. Glasgow 1875-1975...and after. 1975-1980 (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1981) 22, 23.

⁴⁶ Checkland, The Upas Tree 22.

⁴⁷ Ian Levitt, 'The State,' Modern Scottish History: 1707 to the Present. Volume 2: The Modernisation of Scotland, 1850 to the Present, eds. Anthony Cooke, Ian Donnachie, Ann MacSween and Christopher A. Whatley (East Lothian: Tuckwell, 1998) 17.

⁴⁸ Levitt, 'The State' 18.

⁴⁹ Levitt, 'The State' 18.

⁵⁰ Levitt, 'The State' 18-20.

⁵¹ Levitt, 'The State' 15.

⁵² Levitt, 'The State' 14.

The Red Clyde, the smouldering danger of revolution in Glasgow, owing to the swift development of political affairs in Britain, has ceased to be a local anxiety, and become an interest and an alarm to the whole civilised world...Revolution has grown virulently infectious, and any threatened outbreak in the very heart of the universal British Empire is as much a concern to citizens in other States as an outbreak of cholera in a central seaport...England, the country immediately affected, knows this; has discarded the instinctive desire to blanket the Red Clyde, explain it away...⁵³

Ryall explains that Glasgow is dangerous for two interconnected reasons – working-class dissatisfaction with housing conditions, and the Scottish character: ‘There is something deeply wrong with the Clyde; the whole middle-class of England knows it’. He continues:

The mainspring of the trouble, the root grievance of the Clyde, is Housing. This is a simple term for a cancerous condition which, starting from the lack of space and light in the homes of the workers, festers and complicates itself, in numberless vicious circles, feeding on their Scottish vigour of character, their education, their stony wills; has developed into a political movement...which threatens to harden into almost as rigorous an extremism as Leninism itself.⁵⁴

According to Ryall, Glasgow breeds hard men whose socialism threatens the English middle class, the British Empire and the entire world. No mean city right enough. The odd thing about all the paranoia about Glasgow, however, is that despite the fact that the city was often portrayed using graphic and threatening imagery, there has never been a major socialistic uprising of the Glaswegian working class; indeed, the city’s problems revolve more around the issue of self-destruction through substance abuse and localised violence.⁵⁵

So, by the time that No Mean City was published, the Gorbals and Glasgow in general had been the victims of prejudice for a long time. Edwin Muir writes that ‘the Glasgow slums always hold a sense of possible menace; they take their revenge on the respectable and the rich’.⁵⁶ Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte note that Muir’s comment encouraged sociologists to see the city’s name ‘as a totem for every kind of modern urban horror’.⁵⁷

⁵³ William Bolitho Ryall, The Cancer of Empire (1924), in Glasgow Observed, eds. Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987) 199.

⁵⁴ Ryall, The Cancer of Empire, in Glasgow Observed 199-200.

⁵⁵ Young, Making Trouble 104.

⁵⁶ Edwin Muir, Scottish Journey, in Glasgow Observed, eds. Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987) 1.

⁵⁷ Berry and Whyte, Introduction, Glasgow Observed 1.

Critics acknowledge the significance of this negativity for reading literature produced in and about Glasgow. Christopher Whyte, for example, argues that Glaswegian literature must be understood in terms of the 'particular, and in many ways terrible, nature of the urban experience Glasgow stands for'.⁵⁸ Recent accounts of Glaswegian culture continue to fuel the fires of the city's infamy. Here is journalist George Forbes declaring in 'Gang Wars!' (1993) that

Glasgow is synonymous with gangs just as it is with slums and the first were created by the second. The tradition of the organised gang or team of teenagers or young men, territorially organised into groups who wage war with weapons such as knives, razors and hatchets purely for the violence and the glory, is a phenomenon unusually characteristic of the city and not found in such abundance or historical length anywhere else in Britain.⁵⁹

Forbes insists on the existence of a gangster tradition in Glasgow's history, which he then ties to the issues of class and race:

The Celtic temperament common to both Scots and Irish has several broad tendencies: a natural aggression (possibly spawned from an inferiority complex), sentimentality, a belief in man as the hunter and woman as the housewife-cum-mother and a propensity for high spirits in the shape of whisky.⁶⁰

This caricature reflects and promotes the myth of Glasgow *qua* British crime capital. Hyperbole is married to stereotype, prejudice and conjecture, demonstrating that the tradition of slum writing started in the nineteenth century is alive and well today, especially in tabloid journalism.

As Forbes snarls his way through the article, he pauses to describe the behaviour of slum girls in some detail: the 'molls were as hard talking, brassy and 'gallus', or sharp, as their counterparts while holding their liquor and opening their legs on order'.⁶¹ He then bewails *No Mean City* as a 'poorly written treatise on squalor and violence'.⁶² So, not only does Forbes reduce Glaswegian working-class history to crime and sex, a tale of

⁵⁸ Christopher Whyte, 'Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel' 317.

⁵⁹ George Forbes, 'Gang Wars!', *Scottish Memories* 2 (April 1993) 6.

⁶⁰ Forbes, 'Gang Wars!' 6.

⁶¹ Forbes, 'Gang Wars!' 7.

⁶² Forbes, 'Gang Wars!' 7.

violent drunkards and sluts, but he also denigrates McArthur and Long's novel; certainly, No Mean City is about hard men and hairies, but Forbes's is a very narrow understanding of the narrative, and one which ignores the fact that the novel was not alone in representing Glasgow in criminalised terms. Indeed, Forbes's article *itself* seems to be cashing in on the shock value of describing the violence and sexual habits of men and women in the slums; calling for a 'work of art' about 'beauty and nobility' whilst simultaneously portraying Glasgow in degrading and ugly words seems to be a bit of a contradiction, to say the least.⁶³

Exaggerated descriptions of Glasgow as a terrible place and Glaswegians as a bad lot have therefore enjoyed a steady reign throughout the twentieth century. George Blake's Heart of Scotland (1934) looks at the city 'largely in terms of the working man; and that is justified by his predominance in the social scheme of the untidy city of the West'.⁶⁴ It is the 'Scotland of hard and ugly fact,' characterised by 'meanness and untidiness, of greyness and unnecessary squalor'.⁶⁵ Working-class Glaswegians, he continues, live in over-crowded conditions, have a 'low average standard of height,' and 'too many bow-legs and other symptoms of vitamin-deficiency'.⁶⁶ The Glasgow man, he argues, 'can be terribly dangerous in revolt and as terribly strong in defence of his own conception on order'.⁶⁷ Glasgow, then, is supposedly a hard, ugly city populated by unattractive and dangerous working-class people. In his analysis of twentieth-century American crime fiction, Ralph Willett links such inferiorised images of working-class culture with a nineteenth-century, middle-class belief that the 'lower depths' of a city were synonymous with both the 'lumpenproletariat' and the stigma of sewers, disease, dirt and excrement –

⁶³ Forbes, 'Gang Wars!' 37.

⁶⁴ George Blake, Heart of Scotland (1934), quoted in Glasgow Observed, 209-10.

⁶⁵ Blake, Heart of Scotland 209-10.

⁶⁶ Blake, Heart of Scotland 209-10.

⁶⁷ Blake, Heart of Scotland 209-10.

the 'lower depths/diseases metaphor extends readily into the era of mass culture'.⁶⁸

Judging from the tenacity of Glasgow's bad reputation, it would appear that such Victorian views of slums and working-class people have not yet died out.

During the 1920s and 30s, however, there were some sympathetic writers attempting to regain control over Glasgow's literary image, with mixed results. Burgess views 1936 as an 'annus mirabilis' for the short stories of George Friel, whose writing tackles the class system at work in Glasgow.⁶⁹ Edward Shiels's Gael over Glasgow (1937) focuses on similar issues to those of No Mean City – unemployment, strikes and shiftless young men, although the narratorial perspective betrays a sentimental rural vs. urban dichotomy so characteristic of the outsider's view of Glaswegian working-class life. Grassie Gibbon's Grey Granite (1934), in which 'Dun Craig' is perhaps best seen as an amalgam of all Scottish industrial cities, explores on one level of interpretation the damaging effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on working-class life, although the text favours the rural, anti-city and anti-Glasgow standpoint of Chris's son Ewan: 'the usual keelie things, dogs and horse-racing and sleeping with whores, poor devils – it had nothing to do with him' (GG 372). Overt middle-class criticisms of class ideology in Glasgow were on the increase. Dot Allan's Hunger March (1934), like her Makeshift (1928), shows up the prejudiced attitudes of bourgeois Glaswegians. James Barke's Major Operation (1936) focuses on the city's industrial culture through a hospital-based relationship between a worker and a businessman. The men's seeming equality in the face of their operations implies that they are the same under the skin, despite surface differences in lifestyle, accent, finances and power. George Blake's The Shipbuilders (1935) traces the effects of a closing shipyard on the finances and class identities of Leslie Pagan (the shipyard owner's son), and Danny Shields, a riveter. As Maurice Lindsay points out, this

⁶⁸ Ralph Willett, The Naked City: Urban Crime Fiction in the USA (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996) 4-5.

⁶⁹ Burgess, Imagine a City 151.

best-known of Blake's novels demonstrates an 'acute understanding of the social distinction, real or fancied, which in these islands separates men and women into "classes"'.⁷⁰ The British class system, of interest to many Glasgow writers, was under intense and critical scrutiny as the decade progressed.

Despite the attention given to working-class Glasgow during the 1930s, No Mean City's appearance in 1935 was a bit of a shock – its publication sparked the powder keg of anxiety about Glasgow that had been building up for decades. The archives of the publishing firm of Longmans, Green show that the book's publishers were simultaneously bemused, alarmed and optimistic about the controversy:

Glasgow is up in arms about it and several booksellers will not stock the book; a Glasgow paper will not review it and the question of its suppression has been raised in official circles in Scotland. I am doubtful whether action will be taken, but if it is, we shall defend ourselves with vigour. It is all rather unpleasant but we feel strongly that we are justified in publishing. In our publicity here we are being very careful...though such publicity over here would probably promote sales, we are being very careful what we say. We have the backing of a number of important and dignified people who are disgusted that the book should be called obscene and maintain that the conditions described in the book can to this day be seen in Glasgow.⁷¹

The novel is also problematic because of Alexander McArthur himself. McArthur remained working class; unlike many other Scottish authors, he did not write his novel after he had escaped the financial and social restrictions of his low status. He wrote from an inferiorised position within the very milieu which gave rise to the mythology of razor kings and Gorbals as gangland. Alcoholic, unemployed, educationally limited and with very few sympathetic contacts in the wider literary world of Scotland, McArthur managed to produce a work which achieved instant fame, even notoriety, at national and global levels. With the assistance of H. Kingsley Long – an English journalist – and a London publishing house, McArthur became for a short time an internationally-recognised Scottish

⁷⁰ Maurice Lindsay, History of Scottish Literature (London: Robert Hale, 1977) 427.

⁷¹ Longmans, Green, Unsigned letter to E.S. Mills, Longmans Green & Co., New York (22 October 1935) 1-2. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, The Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc#891704/Shelf#293.

writer in spite of class prejudice, censure and ostracism. At the same time, No Mean City seemed to confirm, rather than counteract, the negative image of the Glaswegian working class by criticising the Gorbals as the site where poverty and crime emerge. Finally, the novel attacks the British class system directly as a state of mind that pervades all levels of society – not just the middle and upper classes – with ideologies of power, oppression and exploitation. The working classes are often shown at their worst – they can be complicit in reproducing the politics of victimisation through competition, greed, stupidity, ignorance, cruelty and betrayal. Urban kailyarderie No Mean City is not.

Clearly, No Mean City was not a complete departure from urban literary trends in Scotland during the first half of the twentieth century. The Scottish working class – and especially the *Glaswegian* lower orders – had been a popular subject of fictional and non-fictional works decades before McArthur submitted his manuscripts to Longmans, Green in 1934. One of the keys to the novel's success and the controversy it caused was McArthur and Long's blunt engagement with scandalous subjects – sex, male sterility, incest, domestic violence, rape, inner-city crime, Protestant-Catholic antagonism, and prostitution. No Mean City stole the national and international literary stage in a way unsurpassed by any other Glasgow novel, completely overshadowing its rivals.

With very few exceptions, the early reviews of No Mean City indicate a sense of hysteria about the potential effects of the book. For instance, the Evening Citizen was worried that the novel would reinforce Glasgow's notoriety: 'Glasgow has got a bad name, and Glasgow is suffering because of that bad name; and this book, which is widely noticed in the Press, will tend to confirm the evil reputation of our city'.⁷² Such was the furore caused by No Mean City's publication that McArthur had to explain his motives. As a

⁷² Review of No Mean City, Evening Citizen (28 October 1935). In Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher, eds. Kevin McCarra and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 31.

response to negative reviews of the novel (which will be examined in more depth in the next chapter), he published an article in the Daily Record entitled ‘Why I Wrote ‘No Mean City’’ (1935). Although his tone is at times defensive, this is understandable given the objections he received in the papers. First, he tackles the issue of who he thinks is and is not qualified to judge the quality of his novel:

Having read the various criticisms of the book, ‘No Mean City,’ I am bound to say from their nature that, in my opinion, none of the critics are (sic) really qualified to pass a responsible opinion on such a book.⁷³

He then posits the reactions of ‘fellow slum-dwellers’ in opposition to the responses from the literary establishment: ‘[The] reactions of fellow slum-dwellers to the book have added to my conviction that I, or someone in a similar position, must have written such a book’.⁷⁴

By allying himself with his own people, McArthur makes his loyalties clear – he sees himself not simply as a member of the working class, but more specifically part of a sub-category of the proletariat – a slum class. He asserts that one of his reasons for writing about slum culture was to raise people’s awareness about the differences between the generalisation of working-class people in the discourse of political socialism, and his own examination of a particular working-class subculture. He distances himself from the arena of labour politics:

I have never been in any working-class “labour” party, though I know what it is to labour through the day and through the night; so that it must not be understood that I mean “class-conscious” when I mention “slum-conscious”.⁷⁵

McArthur refines the definition of the working classes. Workers are people who labour, do not necessarily harbour revolutionary political aspirations, and have identities as much influenced by their location in a city (the slums) as by their position within externally-imposed class hierarchies. This complex picture of working-class people not only problematises any simplistic view of class relations, but also validates the perspectives of

⁷³ Alexander McArthur, ‘Why I Wrote ‘No Mean City’,’ Daily Record and Mail (1 November 1935) 7.

⁷⁴ McArthur, ‘Why I Wrote ‘No Mean City’’ 7.

⁷⁵ McArthur, ‘Why I Wrote ‘No Mean City’’ 7.

people from the working class and the slum tenements, including McArthur himself. He continues to emphasise his blue-collar pedigree, declaring that he 'was never used to a very high standard of life'.⁷⁶ He then draws attention to his own unemployed status, revealing how he benefited as a writer from the feelings of inferiority that idleness brought him – '[Unemployment] gave me time...to see that demoralisation has many forms'.⁷⁷ At the same time, McArthur is being tentative about his own political leanings. His careful avoidance of politics, and his desire to counteract ignorance about working-class culture, betray a sharp and pragmatic mind.

McArthur then narrows his focus to personal thoughts about the Gorbals, and indicates how degrading surroundings can damage people's sense of self-worth: 'For years I have been convinced that bathless homes, without lavatories, were not up to the standard for people of the twentieth century'.⁷⁸ As he goes on to say,

I saw that the old Scottish pride had been carried to such an extent as to become a liability... To conceal poverty may be a good thing in its way, but for working-class people to go on living and ignoring their "weaker" brethren, not caring how low they may have fallen, is, to me, a social crime of the most dangerous kind.⁷⁹

McArthur seems to be addressing the working class directly, warning against the social crime of ignoring poverty and deprivation. He hints that there could be a more general tendency towards concealment at work in Scottish culture. As Ian Spring points out, this may indeed have been the case:

For there was still, in the thirties, despite the travails of the Glasgow people, a powerful pride in the city itself that is evident in the popular press of the time. Because of this, Glaswegians harbour a very ambivalent attitude to the most notable work of fiction featuring the city of the time – the novel *No Mean City*, by McArthur and Kingsley Long.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City', 7.

⁷⁷ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City', 7.

⁷⁸ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City', 7.

⁷⁹ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City', 7.

⁸⁰ Ian Spring, *Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990) 72.

Ralph Willett suggests that an overweening pride in a city and the simultaneous suppression of the underclasses are perhaps connected with middle-class paranoia:

The circulation of bodies since the nineteenth century has been governed by political philosophy based on notions of class and social stability. Keeping the city 'clean' has assumed symbolic significance in the idea of the lower depths, associated with the lumpenproletariat, the recognisable exterior of the forces that exist and emerge from below. Bourgeois imperatives sought to control dangerous elements in the urban population by keeping them out of sight. Distinguished geographically from the 'healthy' respectable working class, marginalized groups... were stigmatised by images of disease, fuelling an alarmed discourse, prioritising the protection (by separation) of the wholesome and productive sectors of society.⁸¹

In more moving and less academic language, McArthur asserts the need for a thorough examination of this underclass, the raising of people's 'slum consciousness' despite pride and the desire to hide poverty – 'I want to see a real investigation of the Glasgow slums...[the] knowledge that unknown men and women had lived lives and died deaths of a sordid kind added to my belief that they did not do so in vain...I hope 'No Mean City' has not been written in vain'.⁸² McArthur draws attention to the connection between the concealment of deprivation in Glasgow slums on the one hand, and the subsequent perpetuation of the problem on the other. He wants *No Mean City* to be seen as a testimonial: 'I am glad I wrote 'No Mean City'...because it gives me gratification to know I am the natural 'implement' which put the poorest of Glasgow's citizens on the map in a way that is looked upon as unique'.⁸³ He presents the novel as more of a campaigning tract than a work of art. McArthur is aware of the significance of the fact that *he is a working-class author writing about the working class*. He was right to say that this was a rare occurrence; as I pointed out earlier, most working-class novels were written by members of the middle class.

From McArthur's point of view, his novel is as much an attempt to record working-class experience, culture and history, as it is an appeal to his readers to help the

⁸¹ Willett, *The Naked City* 4-5.

⁸² McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'' 7.

⁸³ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'' 7.

Glaswegian poor. McArthur is keenly aware of the prevailing reactions to his novel, and that the narrative could be misconstrued as an overly negative representation of working-class people and lifestyles: 'Some assert that 'No Mean City' will do Glasgow a lot of harm...[but] if these could only be made to realise that the harm already done to working-class people is bound to take many years to remedy, they surely could not write or utter a word of condemnation'.⁸⁴ In response to charges of sensationalism, he says the following: 'The greater the "sensation" caused by "No Mean City," the more was "No Mean City" required. Time must reveal that'.⁸⁵ McArthur concludes with the following assertion of integrity and hope: 'I have been true to myself, and also to Glasgow. "No Mean City" will serve Glasgow well; and I hope that before many years pass Glasgow will appreciate "No Mean City"'.⁸⁶

There were governmental, commercial and religious attempts to suppress No Mean City. Its wide distribution was achieved through the Sunday Mail, which began serialisation on 3 November 1935. The editor included an article entitled 'The Book that Shocked the World: Why I am Publishing 'No Mean City'' to justify this, and as a pre-emptive strike: 'My reason for the publication is that, beyond doubt, this moving work of enthralling and tremendous power is, as has been admitted on all hands, a social document of first importance'.⁸⁷ As he goes on to say, No Mean City is not intended to cast aspersions on Glasgow, but rather to tell the truth, to produce a literary social photograph:

No Slur Cast

I would emphasise the author's explicit contention that the events recorded apply only to a section of the area dealt with, and that a similar story could be written about the slums of many another city...I would also underline what everyone already knows, that a book dealing with a section of the people should not be blamed for casting a slur on neighbours, who, escaping the malign influences of a dreadful environment, emerge as strong, self-reliant citizens, all the greater in moral integrity

⁸⁴ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'' 7.

⁸⁵ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'' 7.

⁸⁶ McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'' 7.

⁸⁷ Editor, 'The Book that Shocked the World: Why I am Publishing 'No Mean City',' Sunday Mail (3/11/1935) 19.

and strength of character, in that they have surmounted the horrors of overcrowding, unemployment and impoverishment...I hope that the wide publicity given to the book through its appearance in the *Sunday Mail*, will give rise to a reformative zeal which will remove the whole cancer of slumdom.⁸⁸

The article is a disclaimer that simultaneously defends the integrity of No Mean City and its authors, mollifies offended Glaswegians, and emphasises the novel's role in social change. The editor emphasises the factual, rather than the fictional nature of the book, which shifts attention away from the constructedness of the narrative and, perhaps, is an attempt to grant the novel moral authority. At the same time, though, the pious clichés of the editor's disclaimer could be said to mask the hope that such a shocker of a story would help to sell lots of newspapers.

The newspaper serialisation of No Mean City counteracted the effort to smother the flames of the book's notoriety. The *Sunday Mail* published a copy of the 'Publishers' Note,' which appeared at the beginning of the first edition of the novel, but which was excluded from all later copies. We are told that McArthur submitted two short novels to Longmans, Green in June of 1934. The publishers did not consider either manuscript to be 'suitable for publication,' but were intrigued by McArthur's 'astonishing revelations concerning life in one section of the Empire's second city'.⁸⁹ One of the novellas was entitled 'Idle Years,' and focused on the demoralisation of unemployment, perhaps a reflection of his own experiences of being out of work.⁹⁰ His 'scene,' the article continues, was 'always the slums of Glasgow and his characters the men and women who shared with himself the tenement houses and the streets'.⁹¹ H. Kingsley Long is then introduced as McArthur's ghostwriter. A London journalist, Long worked as a reader for Longmans. He read McArthur's manuscripts and visited him in the Gorbals in September of 1934.⁹²

⁸⁸ Editor, 'The Book that Shocked the World' 19.

⁸⁹ Editor, Introduction, *Sunday Mail* (3/11/1935) 19.

⁹⁰ Editor, Introduction 19.

⁹¹ Editor, Introduction 19.

⁹² Editor, Introduction 19.

Upon Long's return to London, Longmans invited McArthur for a series of interviews to satisfy themselves 'as to the essential truth of his account of slum life in one section of Glasgow'.⁹³ Long also had 'many interviews' with the Gorbals writer, during the course of which the two men decided to collaborate.⁹⁴

The first edition of No Mean City received eight impressions between 1935 and 1939; Damer estimates that 16, 000 copies of the novel were produced before the Second World War.⁹⁵ In 1956 Neville Spearman bought the paperback rights and printed three more impressions. Corgi acquired the rights in 1957 and printed twenty-seven impressions of the novel, selling 539, 000 copies in total.⁹⁶ Transworld Publishers, which bought over Corgi, now holds publication rights for No Mean City. Damer is correct to point out that the novel 'remains popular to this day, selling a steady 3000 or so copies annually. These figures alone would make one want to know more about Alexander McArthur' and, indeed, his co-author Herbert Kingsley Long.⁹⁷

The collaboration between Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, which led to the publication of the most notorious Glasgow novel of the twentieth century, was an unlikely partnership. The contrasts between the lives and characters of these two men are striking. Arthur Alexander McArthur was born in the Gorbals on 22 July 1901. He was raised in the slum and trained as a professional baker. At the time of No Mean City's publication, he was unemployed and living with his mother and brother James in a Gorbals tenement on Waddell Street. Mrs. Fullagar and Mr. Newell, two people who knew McArthur, provide anecdotal evidence about his character. Mrs. Fullagar was a child during the 1930s. She remembers the writer as a big, well-dressed man who always 'had a

⁹³ Editor, Introduction 19.

⁹⁴ Editor, Introduction 19.

⁹⁵ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 33.

⁹⁶ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 33-4.

⁹⁷ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 34.

good drink in him'.⁹⁸ He frequented local bookshops and was constantly typing, even through the night.⁹⁹ Newell found McArthur an unfriendly man who would stride through the Gorbals in a 'dizzy,' as if he was 'writing a book in his mind as he was walking, kind-of-thing'.¹⁰⁰

McArthur worked as a baker at Bilslands, but was fired either before or during the time he began work on No Mean City.¹⁰¹ Newell claimed that he worked with McArthur for a firm called Kirkwood, Mackie & Tulloch from 1930 to 1935.¹⁰² The question of McArthur's employment status is difficult to resolve. According to David Hedley,

McArthur had turned seriously to writing in the early 30s after the slump had robbed him of his full-time living...from then until his death he lived penuriously by casual employment, devoting most of his energies to the production of a considerable amount of work – novels, short stories, and plays.¹⁰³

Whatever his employment status, McArthur spent the years between 1929 and 1935 writing and submitting short stories and novels to various publishers, entirely without success.

McArthur was a voracious reader. His letters carry references to Ibsen, O'Casey, Chekhov, Joyce, Conrad, Wells, Hardy and Maugham.¹⁰⁴ He agreed with Ibsen's emphasis on utilising 'cotemporary material' in dramatic productions: 'But then Ibsen really was a Master Builder'.¹⁰⁵ He admired O'Casey in particular as one of the great playwrights.¹⁰⁶ Between 1929 and his death in 1947, McArthur produced a substantial

⁹⁸ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 25-6.

⁹⁹ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 26.

¹⁰⁰ Mr. Newell, Interview with Seán Damer (typescript) 26-7. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹⁰¹ Mrs. Fullagar, Interview with Seán Damer (typescript) 14. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹⁰² Newell, Interview 1.

¹⁰³ David Hedley, 'Research,' Scottish Society of Playwrights Newsletter (Feb 1979) 20.

¹⁰⁴ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 38. Also see Alexander McArthur, Letter to William McLellan Ltd. (12 March 1945) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc#891704/Shelf#293.

¹⁰⁵ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Citizens' Theatre (17 February 1945) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Guy Aldred (9 March 1947) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

body of work, including short stories, plays and full-length novels. After the publication of No Mean City, and armed with income from his twenty-five percent share of the royalties, McArthur bought his tenement flat, an unusual move for an unemployed slum dweller, especially during the Depression.¹⁰⁷

H. Kingsley Long's daughter Gillian Prentice believes that McArthur's suicide on September 4, 1947 was the result of his inability to handle money and alcohol.¹⁰⁸ Mrs. Fullagar's father thought that the publicity from No Mean City was too much for him: 'I don't think he realised that it was going to snowball the way that it did and the way it would hit the public'.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps the contrast between his success with No Mean City and his subsequent failure to get much else published ate away at McArthur's self-confidence. He was plagued by his apparent inability to produce 'publishable' work. As he wrote in 1937,

In reply to your letter which reached me this morning, I have to say I gladly give my permission to have the book No Mean City published next Autumn as 2/-6d edition. And I hope that any remuneration which I may become due will reach me here as soon as possible.

In the meantime I am making slower progress with the Unemployment book than I have usually done in the past. But I want to make this book publishable.¹¹⁰

McArthur may have thought that No Mean City's success would lead to further publishing deals. His novel No Bad Money appeared in 1969, but the author had been dead for twenty-two years by this time. Jack House knew McArthur between the publication of No Mean City and his death in 1947, and asserts that his writing was 'unpublishable':

I can't remember which of the three Glasgow evening papers I was working for at the time, but he was a regular caller. He would hand over a batch of his latest effusions, always written by hand and full of grammatical and other errors. They were totally unsuitable for publication. At the same time you could see that he had a

¹⁰⁷ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 35.

¹⁰⁸ Gillian Prentice, Interview with the present writer (Edinburgh: 27 November 2000) 3.

¹⁰⁹ Fullagar, Interview 8.

¹¹⁰ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Longmans, Green (22 June 1937) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

strong sense of observance...he traipsed round the newspaper offices and was always turned down.¹¹¹

It should be noted here that I have not yet seen evidence for the existence of these handwritten effusions; all of McArthur's extant letters, short stories and novels were typed.

The Second World War further reduced McArthur's chances of getting published. Magnus Magnusson notes that the Scottish publishing industry was 'at its lowest ebb' during the 1940s.¹¹² William MacLellan – publisher, writer, and staunch advocate for Scottish culture – saved McArthur from complete obscurity. MacLellan included one of McArthur's short stories – 'Life Renews' – in an anthology entitled New Short Stories: 1945-1946.¹¹³

Censorship taxed McArthur's patience and undermined his confidence. He claims to have had a book entitled Glasgow Variety published in 1942 by Nicholson & Watson of London: 'One of the stories called 'Baker Born' was resented by Baking Interests in Glasgow with the result the book, 'Glasgow Variety' was withdrawn'.¹¹⁴ I have not yet found evidence for the existence of this. At any rate, the Glasgow publisher William MacLellan seemed to have been a bit uneasy about the subversiveness of McArthur's work: 'McLellan has many stories of mine. He's got started with his publishing and his apprehensions concerning censorship are not now so acute. He has a copy of 'Glasgow Variety' a book of mine published and Banned (sic) in 1942'.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Jack House, Personal Communication with Seán Damer, in Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 38.

¹¹² Magnus Magnusson, 'William MacLaren MacLellan, publisher,' The Scotsman (21 October 1996) 6.

¹¹³ Alexander McArthur, 'Life Renews,' New Short Stories: 1945-1946, ed. John Singer (Glasgow: William MacLellan, 1946).

¹¹⁴ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Messrs Carruthers, Gemmil & McKillop, Solicitors (18 August 1946) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹¹⁵ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Denham Studios (16 August 1946) 2. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

The most stressful event in McArthur's life was the alleged plagiarism of one of his plays. In 1945, McArthur's The Mystery of Gorbals Terrace was rejected by the Citizens' Theatre. He sent the play to Unity Theatre in October of the same year.¹¹⁶ Director Robert Mitchell gave McArthur's manuscript to Robert McLeish to read and, apparently, 'McArthur never saw it again'.¹¹⁷ McLeish's The Gorbals Story appeared in August 1946. McArthur was furious, and accused McLeish of plagiarism in a volley of letters to the following: the Citizens' and Unity Theatres, William MacLellan, Guy Aldred, the Lord Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for Scotland, the Lord Provost of Glasgow, the Arts Council, Sean O'Casey, the Chief Constable and James Bridie. In his letter to the Director of Welfare of Glasgow on 4 September 1946, McArthur claimed that McLeish's play resembles his own in terms of characters, setting and timing.¹¹⁸ To Paul Vincent Carroll of the Glasgow Evening News, he wrote that McLeish 'couldn't alter even the timing of the acts. He changed the scene from the hallway of the six room and kitchen house, to the kitchen, thereby making the thing unreal to the point of puerility'.¹¹⁹ McArthur stated his plagiarism case to James Barke, who had been a member of the original Citizens' reading panel which rejected Gorbals Terrace in 1945: 'there is no other course but to bring an action against Unity Theatre'. According to the irate Glasgow writer, The Gorbals Story was nothing less than 'literary piracy'.¹²⁰

The plagiarism issue was officially settled by an independent team of solicitors nominated by the League of Dramatists on 31 August 1946. In their letter to McArthur, the lawyers concluded that 'Neither in dialogue, incident, or dramatic situation was there

¹¹⁶ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 35.

¹¹⁷ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 35-6.

¹¹⁸ Alexander McArthur, Letter to the Director of Welfare of Glasgow (4 September 1946) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹¹⁹ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Paul Vincent Carroll of the Glasgow Evening News (24 August 1946) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹²⁰ Alexander McArthur, Letter to James Barke, Glasgow Evening News (24 August 1946) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

what seemed to be any point of identity or even similarity to your play'.¹²¹ McArthur suspected conspiracy, asking the following about Robert McLeish, James Barke and Robert Mitchell: 'Who is behind that vile trio? What vested interest is supporting them'.¹²² Seán Damer thinks that McArthur's mind was 'becoming increasingly unhinged' by his obsession with plagiarism.¹²³

The Gorbals writer felt that his work was being suppressed: 'Glasgow is going to use me up thoroughly'.¹²⁴ The fact that McLeish read Gorbals Terrace before writing his own play may have aroused McArthur's suspicions. As Guy Aldred's anarchist newspaper The Word points out,

The question arises: If Mr. McArthur had not submitted his "Mystery of Gorbals Terrace" would there have been a "Gorbals Story"? Is this not a fair question to ask in face of the similarities in the plays?...we do think that there exists, in justice, a case for investigation.¹²⁵

Linda Mackenney, editor of The Gorbals Story by Robert McLeish (1985), finds no evidence for plagiarism: 'She felt further that given Unity Theatre's commitment to working-class theatre something like *The Gorbals Story* would have appeared in any event'.¹²⁶ Damer thinks that McArthur's play may have 'detonated the idea for a Gorbals play in McLeish's head. Had he not submitted his play to Unity Theatre there would have been no *Gorbals Story*, in my view...McArthur had every right to feel aggrieved'.¹²⁷

Edward Gaitens's review of The Gorbals Story, which appeared in Unity Theatre's publication Scots Theatre, is scathing:

'The Gorbals Story' is merely the rough material for a play obviously punched and pummeled into some semblance of unity by a worried and perspiring producer. Not knowing Robert McLeish, I went to the Queen's Theatre in the hope that the Gorbals

¹²¹ 'A "Gorbals Story",' The Word (March 1947) 88.

¹²² Alexander McArthur, Letter to the Editor, The Glasgow Herald (30 January 1947) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹²³ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 37.

¹²⁴ Alexander McArthur, Letter to the Chief Constable of Glasgow (25 October 1946) 2. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹²⁵ 'A "Gorbals Story",' 88.

¹²⁶ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 36.

¹²⁷ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 36-7.

story, which is but a page of the Glasgow story, had been re-animated, presented anew by an original and vigorous mind. I was disappointed to see only another 'No Mean City' on the stage. From scene to scene I was reminded of that sensational book until I began to suspect that it had inspired and strangely (sic) influenced the work of McLeish.¹²⁸

Mackenny was discouraged by McLeish's family from including this review in her edition of The Gorbals Story.¹²⁹

The tantalising plagiarism question at least draws attention to McArthur's political leanings, about which the Gorbals author was always coy. Evidence suggests that McArthur may have been involved in some way – however limited – in the Glasgow-based Anarchist movement led by Guy Aldred. Certainly The Word carried an article about the alleged plagiarism case, and supported McArthur in his investigations. McArthur thanked Aldred for this moral support.¹³⁰ Upon the writer's suicide in September 1947, The Word stated that as the 'organ of those who struggle against privation,' they would 'reprint McArthur's short story "Life Renewed" (sic) and also publish his play, whether it is good or bad, "The Mystery of Gorbals Terrace." He merits, at least, so much remembrance'.¹³¹

McArthur's involvement with anarchism may not have gone far beyond his immediate concern with his own writing career. The Word notes that his association with the anarchist newspaper damaged his reputation in the eyes of the law.¹³² The anarchists could have been using McArthur's allegations of plagiarism, added to his Gorbals working-class background and fame as the co-author of No Mean City, to further their reactionary political agenda. Perhaps each party was using the other.

¹²⁸ Edward Gaitens, 'The Gorbals Hoary,' Scots Theatre (No. 3. November 1946) 11.

¹²⁹ Linda Mackenny, Personal communication with Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 36.

¹³⁰ 'A Gorbals Tragedy,' The Word (October 1947) 20.

¹³¹ 'A Gorbals Tragedy' 20.

¹³² 'A Gorbals Tragedy' 20.

McArthur was a pragmatist. His socialist connections may have been his way to get publicity. In a letter to the Editor of the Daily Express, McArthur refers to Edward Rennie of the Scottish Workers' Republican Party.¹³³ Rennie knew Guy Aldred, and had been involved in free speech demonstrations on Glasgow Green.¹³⁴ According to Rennie's son Gordon, his father was jailed sometime in the 1920s for his political activism.¹³⁵ Rennie was supportive of McArthur's writing career. In a letter to Longmans, Green in 1949, H. Kingsley Long refers to a possible filmed version of No Mean City:

No Mean City

This is to thank you for your letters...in reference to the film rights of this book. I should have answered the first of these letters sooner had I not been anticipating a visit from Mr. Rennie. He has since called at my office and he intends, I believe, to prepare a scenario from the book and hopes eventually to direct the resultant film. I told him that I had no personal objection to this project, but no agreement of any sort was discussed by us.¹³⁶

Nothing came of Rennie's attempt to make a movie from McArthur and Long's novel. On the other hand, he backed McArthur in his investigations into plagiarism. As McArthur writes in a letter to James Barke, Edward Rennie had told him that his play would be produced 'under somebody else's (sic) name'.¹³⁷ Gordon Rennie told me that his father owned a bookshop in the Gorbals; perhaps this is where McArthur first met his socialist friend.¹³⁸

Rennie was also responsible for the posthumous publication of McArthur's novel The Blackmailer (1950).¹³⁹ The plot follows the exploits of three Glaswegian men: Ian Gourock, a baker; Tommy Goodman, a policeman; and George Bronze, a factor.

¹³³ Alexander McArthur, Letter to Editor of the Daily Express (19 August 1946) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹³⁴ John Taylor Caldwell, 'The Battle for the Green,' Workers' City: The Real Glasgow Stands Up, ed. Farquhar McLay (Glasgow: Clydeside Press, 1988) 31.

¹³⁵ Gordon Rennie, Letter to the present writer (1 January 2002) 1.

¹³⁶ H. Kingsley Long, Letter to Longmans, Green (26 August 1949) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹³⁷ Alexander McArthur, Letter to James Barke (24 August 1946) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

¹³⁸ Rennie, Letter 1.

¹³⁹ Alexander McArthur, The Blackmailer (Glasgow: Freelance Library, 1950).

Goodman has a plan for making a profit from the subletting of tenement flats, and the three men proceed to rent out apartments to unemployed people and prostitutes. Goodman begins a blackmailing campaign by taking photographs of well-to-do male clients who patronise the flats of the prostitutes. He is caught by his superiors at the local police station with these incriminating pictures, but there is little evidence that Goodman intended to blackmail, so the case is dismissed from court.

The Blackmailer has similar themes to No Mean City, such as violence, alcoholism, poverty and unemployment, but its scathing reflections on power politics amongst working-class people are more acute. The Blackmailer's characters do not elicit sympathy. Gourock is described as being in his

twenty-eighth year, and he knew that Goodman was a year younger, 'physically,' as he termed it to himself. Mentally, he put himself years, many years, too, ahead of Goodman, and Tommy Goodman was thinking similar thoughts himself in relation to Gourock. Both admired the other, and both took great satisfaction from the inward convictions that that (sic) other was ever so slightly inferior, mentally.

(B 8)

The novel shows people abusing and exploiting one another in the pursuit of power, financial gain and respectability. Goodman and Gourock gloat about their housing scam: 'It's funny, isn't it?' laughed Gourock, 'that the poor unemployed men are so essential in this world?'" (B 17).

In 1947, McArthur committed suicide by drinking Lysol, a disinfectant. Jack House and Seán Damer think that he had become disillusioned about his literary failures and was depressed about the death of his mother:

He had just received a royalty payment for 'No Mean City' and he decided to splash it out and then, appropriately, drown himself in the Clyde. He asked a dozen or so of his Gorbals friends to dinner in the Grosvenor Restaurant in Gordon Street, one of the best restaurants in town at that time. They met in a private room and had a grand meal with champagne and lashings of whisky. McArthur said good night to his friends and walked down to the banks of the Clyde. He had a bottle of Lysol in his coat pocket. His plan was to swallow the Lysol, then throw himself in the river. He climbed over the railings and went across the grass and sat down to drink the Lysol. He swallowed a mouthful and the champagne came up and he was violently sick.

He never made the river and was discovered unconscious by two policemen on the beat. He was taken to hospital where he died.¹⁴⁰

Unfortunately, perhaps, this is the only account we have of McArthur's suicide. Damer thinks that House's version of events is largely reliable. At any rate, McArthur's death, added to the fact that neither he nor his brother James had any children, meant that the possession of McArthur's manuscripts – not to mention his 25% share of the royalties from sales of No Mean City – passed into the hands of strangers.

Herbert Kingsley Long's career differed markedly from that of his Gorbals writing partner. Long was a successful journalist, short story writer and novelist. He was always well-off financially, and had very few problems getting his work published. Long was born in India on January 4, 1890 to missionary parents.¹⁴¹ The family stayed in India until he was nine years old, when his pregnant mother took him and his brother and sister back to England. Long's father stayed on as a missionary, but died of diabetes two years later.¹⁴² Long studied at Clifton College in Bristol. His writing career began early: he had his first short story published in Punch when he was seventeen. After leaving Clifton, Herbert taught English to three young Belgian girls and learned to speak fluent French.

Long's dream was to be a journalist. A year after taking the teaching job, he made his way to France a few years before the beginning of the First World War, and was hired as junior reporter with the New York Herald in Paris by Gordon Bennett, after Long stopped his open carriage on the Champs Elysées and asked him for a job. According to Prentice, Bennett was 'amused by his audacity'.¹⁴³ By the time he was twenty-four, Long was night editor of the paper.¹⁴⁴ The Great War broke out, but due to a childhood injury, Long was

¹⁴⁰ Jack House, Personal Communication with Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 38.

¹⁴¹ Gillian Prentice, letter to the present writer (20 November 2000) 1.

¹⁴² Prentice, letter 1.

¹⁴³ Prentice, letter 2.

¹⁴⁴ Prentice, letter 1-2.

considered physically unfit for active service and became an Intelligence Officer instead.¹⁴⁵

At the end of the war, Long returned to England and married Gladys Haines, the sister of a lifelong friend he had met at Clifton College. Soon, however, he got a job as manager of Dunlops in Rome, where he lived for over a year until the branch was closed. Upon his return to England, he co-founded a school of journalism with a friend.¹⁴⁶ When this venture failed, he returned to journalism and was hired by The People as a member of a team instructed to improve the newspaper's image.¹⁴⁷ Within a year, the newspaper became one of the most popular Sunday editions in the United Kingdom, with its sales doubling and reaching a market of one million.¹⁴⁸ Long also wrote the leader page for the newspaper – 'Man of the People' – but made the mistake of 'not insisting on using his own name'.¹⁴⁹ He continued to write short stories for such lightly entertaining middle-class magazines as the Strand.

Geoffrey Belton Cobb, who worked with Longmans and was a close family friend, was contacted by a man named James Spenser in the early 1930s; he was looking for someone to ghost the story of his life as a gangster in the United States.¹⁵⁰ Cobb contacted Long, who agreed to the collaboration. The result was 'Limey': An Englishman Joins the Gangs (1933). Spenser was a convict in San Quentin Penitentiary, California, during the 1920s. Before that, he spent time in Borstal and Dartmoor. In the Author's Foreword, Spenser admits to being a criminal who wanted to 'tell the world about [his] own experiences and about certain aspects of American gangster and prison life' (L12). 'Limey' draws

¹⁴⁵ Prentice, letter 2.

¹⁴⁶ Prentice, letter 2.

¹⁴⁷ Prentice, letter 2.

¹⁴⁸ Prentice, letter 2.

¹⁴⁹ Prentice, letter 3.

¹⁵⁰ Prentice, letter 3.

attention to the 1920s and 30s as a time of prohibition and gangster activity in American cities:

I claim that it was just that – a true picture, as I saw it, of the American gangster, the American prison, and the rotten system of graft and rackets which made every big American town stink of corruption.

(L12)

Spenser's aim, in acquiring H. Kingsley Long as his ghostwriter, was to give 'the real low-down on gang life from the English point of view' (L 12). Long then wrote and published another novel tackling the theme of American gangsterism, entitled 'G'-Men (1935), which is an adaptation of the Warner Bros' Picture that claims to tell the 'truth about the dangerous and desperate war that 'G'-men wage with gangsters'.¹⁵¹ As the general editor for the publication points out, Long's skills as a writer were well established:

Mr. Kingsley Long treats the story in that concise and vigorous style that is so valuable in holding the reader enthralled. Mr. Kingsley Long, like many other successful novelists, gained his early training in journalism. And there is certainly no better school.

He was for some time on the staff of the Paris Edition of the *New York Herald* – the paper owned by the famous James Gordon Bennett, and later he was correspondent in Rome for the *Daily Express*, at the time when Mussolini was winning his way to power, and Fascism was in its infancy. Among his other novels may be mentioned 'Limey,' the first version of King Kong, and his recently successful collaboration in the startling novel of Glasgow slums, that has created such a sensation, entitled 'No Mean City'.¹⁵²

Long's interest in American popular culture, combined with international experience in journalism, made him an ideal ghostwriter for aspiring but inexperienced authors such as James Spenser, and indeed Alexander McArthur.

After the 'Limey' project, Gillian Prentice says, 'it naturally followed that when McArthur sent a completely unpublishable novel to Longmans containing a wealth of material on the conditions in the Glasgow tenements and the gangster element in the slum population,' Cobb passed the manuscript to Long for an opinion.¹⁵³ Long, intrigued, went

¹⁵¹ H. Kingsley Long, 'G'-Men (London: Queensway, 1935) dustjacket.

¹⁵² Editor's Note, in H. Kingsley Long's 'G'-Men (London: The Readers Library Publishing Company, 1935) 9-10.

¹⁵³ Prentice, letter 3.

to Glasgow in 1934, 'discovered the conditions behind the respectable façade of the red block tenements that lined the streets of the city's slum land, saw for himself the appalling deprivation and decided to write the book'.¹⁵⁴ Despite the visit to the Gorbals, and the subsequent interviews with McArthur in London, his approach to the Gorbals author and the No Mean City project was detached. There is no evidence that the men's relationship went beyond the purely professional. As his daughter remarked, McArthur was a 'slummy'.¹⁵⁵ Even though Long was pleased with the commercial success of No Mean City, he harboured ambivalent feelings towards McArthur himself and the Gorbals district. As Prentice pointed out to me, 'the middle class never had anything to do, never mixed, with the ordinary working class. There was an enormous barrier there'.¹⁵⁶ Although Long took his daughter to the Gorbals during a holiday in Scotland, she was shown only the outside of the tenements: 'we were really kept away from the seamy side of life'.¹⁵⁷ No Mean City did not exaggerate the living conditions of slum-dwellers. As she asserts, the tenements 'had a façade of respectability, well you couldn't tell by looking at them that they were particularly bad, until you went in them and then you knew pretty quickly they were, appalling smell, and no hygiene'.¹⁵⁸ There appears to be no extant correspondence between McArthur and Long, and Prentice is not certain there ever was. There is also no evidence of any contact between the two men after the publication of No Mean City; the novel was a long-distance project for the English journalist, and his meetings with McArthur before starting on the manuscripts were the sum total of the men's acquaintance.¹⁵⁹ Since there appears to have been no correspondence, and, because after the interviews, Long then went on to work without McArthur's input, then it would seem

¹⁵⁴ Prentice, letter 3.

¹⁵⁵ Prentice, Interview 13.

¹⁵⁶ Prentice, Interview 13.

¹⁵⁷ Prentice, Interview 13.

¹⁵⁸ Prentice, Interview 13.

¹⁵⁹ Prentice, Interview 14.

to be reasonable to suggest that Long's contributions to No Mean City were both decisive and major.

Prentice thinks that No Mean City is an interesting novel, but she is still surprised that it 'has done so well, and had such enormous success. Reading it, it's a good book, but I wouldn't put it as a classical (sic) book'.¹⁶⁰ According to Prentice, Long was a good writer who used McArthur's manuscripts as the raw material for the development of a single, coherent narrative. The original story, she thinks, was 'a very light...magazine-like story'.¹⁶¹ Using McArthur's material, Long created the Johnnie Stark character and the plot. He took six weeks to come up with the title, and found it in Acts 21:39, Paul's reference to the city of Tarsus. His daughter maintains that the striking title has contributed to the novel's success.¹⁶²

After the publication of No Mean City, Long continued working for The People until after the Second World War, when sales slumped and a new editor took over. Long took early retirement and went to live in Devon. He spent the last two years of his life with his daughter and her family.¹⁶³ Prentice asserts that her father should have 'written more but he enjoyed life, liked travel and was a keen bridge and billiard player'.¹⁶⁴ When Edward Rennie approached Long with his plan to turn No Mean City into a film, Long was interested but sceptical. In a letter to Longmans, Green, he wrote 'I agree with you that this film project may come to nothing and that further efforts to trace McArthur's executors or next of kin can well be postponed until some definite offer for the film rights is made'.¹⁶⁵ As far as I am aware, Rennie's plans fell through; no script of No Mean City the movie has ever come to light.

¹⁶⁰ Prentice, Interview 7.

¹⁶¹ Prentice, Interview 1.

¹⁶² Prentice, letter 3-4.

¹⁶³ Prentice, letter 4.

¹⁶⁴ Prentice, letter 4.

¹⁶⁵ H. Kingsley Long, Letter to Longmans, Green (26 August 1949) 1. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc# 891704/Shelf#293.

Long's short stories appeared in Punch, The Passing Show and Gaiety magazines throughout the 1920s, 30s and 40s. Most are light, romantic comedies which focus on the middle class. Long's interests, however, extended to other subjects. His Daily Herald article 'Where Our "Tin" Comes From' (1933), for instance, shows him to be a thorough researcher with an interest in working-class realities. In preparation for writing this piece, Long travelled to Cornwall to find out how tin mines are operated. His perspective on the miners seems sympathetic. When the Herald photographer who accompanies Long down a mineshaft remarks that he wouldn't want to be a miner, Long agrees. He points out the dangers and discomforts of the mining industry: 'Sometimes there may be a fall of roof, and, occasionally, a miscalculation in blasting. Sometimes men stumble and fall in the narrow caverns they have dug'.¹⁶⁶ As with the No Mean City project, Long approached this particular writing assignment with the attitude of an investigative reporter.

Long may not have been completely unbiased in his approach to working-class people. His short story 'Over a Coffee!' (1946), for example, recounts a middle-class man's encounter with a homeless person in the streets of London. On finding a 'particular heap of rags' lying in a doorway, the gentleman prods it with his walking stick and offers the 'human form' which emerges half a crown, a cup of coffee and a sandwich. The homeless man is described as a dirty, flea-ridden, clownish figure who speaks 'in the crudest and most offensive cockney.' The narrative blames the man for his own poverty:

'All right,' he said, 'you win! No names, no pack drill, but I live like this because I like to, see? I've come down in the world, if you think so. I may have been a 'varsity' man and you can say I went to the devil because of drink, or a woman or because I was cashiered for cheating at cards.

'Say what you like; the truth is I just got fed up. I took to the road and liked it. You can get used to anything. You think it's horrible not to have a bath every day. So did I. Now I hate the idea of washing even in hot water. You're frightened of

¹⁶⁶ H. Kingsley Long, 'Where Our "Tin" Comes From,' Daily Herald (3 April 1933) page number unknown. Gillian Prentice's private collection.

being penniless. I know dam' well that whenever I am quite flat some mug will come along —and give me half a crown?'¹⁶⁷

The story suggests that the lower classes choose to be poor and dirty. Poverty is a function of people's unwillingness to remain well-off. The anecdote seems to imply that morality, not economics, determines social status. The poor are spongers who live off the charity of well-meaning but naïve middle-class people. When the gentleman suggests that the Cockney could win money on the football pools, the man replies, 'Blimey...if I did win I might turn all respectable and kind-earted — like you! This would be the ruin of me!'¹⁶⁸

H. Kingsley Long's contact with Alexander McArthur, as has been indicated, was very brief, and Prentice insists that there was little — if any — communication between the two writers, both during the preparation of the final manuscript, and after the novel was published in 1935. So although McArthur wrote about the Gorbals from an inside perspective, Long's social, financial and geographical distance from the subject of Glasgow slum culture, as well as from McArthur as the source of information, is significant for understanding how No Mean City can be approached as a novel by two, vastly different authors. The two original manuscripts were, as I have pointed out, considered unworthy of publication by Longmans, Green, which was why Long — with his experience in journalism and ghostwriting — was called in. No Mean City is the result of a combined effort. There seems to be a tension throughout the narrative between two points of view — the working-class perspectives of the characters, and the interpretative framework of annotations, definitions and asides. For instance, it would seem to be reasonable to say that some of the translations of Glaswegian terms throughout No Mean City were done by Long rather than McArthur. An entire paragraph is devoted to a discourse on 'cavity beds' in the Glasgow slums: 'These beds are no more than

¹⁶⁷ H. Kingsley Long, 'Over a Coffee!' (source unknown; 31 March 1946). Gillian Prentice's private collection.

¹⁶⁸ Kingsley Long, 'Over a Coffee!'.

windowless closets – little tombs about five feet by five by three and a half. The door of each closes against the side of the bed and flush with the wall of the room itself' (NMC 7). Indeed, Burgess thinks that Long is behind the 'in-text glossing of dialect words, which experience would tell him non-Glasgow readers could not be expected to understand; and possibly the phrasing, if not the existence, of the quasi-anthropological asides... which litter the text'.¹⁶⁹ It is an unavoidable – not to mention frustrating – fact that McArthur's original manuscripts seem to have disappeared; at the same time, there is no hard evidence of the exact alterations made by Long to these lost documents. As a result, any examination of authorial control of the narrative voice in No Mean City must by necessity be speculative. Other than subjecting the novel to computer analysis in order to provide a stylistic comparison, it would seem to be an impossible task to decide which author made which contributions to the final product; McArthur's Scottish working-class voice has become interwoven with Long's sociological and journalistic narrative attitude towards the fictional representations of Glasgow, the Gorbals, crime, violence and the slum characters. McArthur's impressions of raw experience have in essence been appropriated and translated by an English author and publishing house – whatever No Mean City was in McArthur's hands is probably not what it is now. Revealingly, the contract drawn up between McArthur, Long and Longmans, Green on January 5, 1935 promises seventy-five percent of the royalties to Long, and only twenty-five to McArthur himself. Whether or not the Agreement's terms reflect the respective weight of authorial involvement is unclear.¹⁷⁰ The partnership set up by Longmans, Green certainly places more *financial* value on Long's contributions than on McArthur's original ideas. As for *literary* worth,

¹⁶⁹ Burgess, Imagine a City 166.

¹⁷⁰ Copyright Agreement between Alexander McArthur, H. Kingsley Long, and Longmans, Green (5 January 1935) 1-3. Seán Damer's Archival Deposit, Glasgow Room, Mitchell Library, Glasgow. Acc#891704/Shelf#293.

No Mean City required the contributions of both writers. As Burgess puts it, 'even if Long may be firing the bullets, McArthur has loaded the gun'.¹⁷¹

The dualistic nature of No Mean City is not a complete departure from other Scottish novels that were written by one author only. Indeed, in highlighting the strains between an outside, middle-class narrator and inside working-class Scottish viewpoints, No Mean City focuses on issues pertinent to other Scottish writings, including for instance George Douglas Brown's The House with the Green Shutters (1901), where there are moments of glossing and pseudo-anthropological commentary from the narrator, suggesting an outsider's stance; at other times, the narrative voice is much more that of an insider. The collaborative nature of No Mean City, then, though it may have intensified such tensions, was not wholly responsible for them.

The problems involved in trying to discern who really wrote No Mean City provide a clue to understanding the Scottish urban novel traditions that have emerged over the course of the twentieth century. McArthur's pragmatic decision to allow his novel to be made publishable stands as testimony to the power of not only the English publishing industry but also the influence of non-Scottish, non-working-class points of view on narrative representations of Scottish working-class experience. As Paul Lauter points out in 'Working-Class Women's Literature: An Introduction to Study' (1979), there are intrinsic problems in trying to define literature as 'working-class' (and, by extension, 'middle-class'), because we need to discern between the class of the author, the subject and the reader.¹⁷² Long's involvement, combined with McArthur's insider views of the slums, makes it difficult to classify No Mean City along class lines.

¹⁷¹ Burgess, Imagine a City 166.

¹⁷² Paul Lauter, 'Working-Class Women's Literature: An Introduction to Study,' Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 837-40.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the characterisations of the Glaswegian slum class in No Mean City betray a keen interest in the intersections of class and gender in the formation of identity. No Mean City's shifting inside/outside view of hard men and hairies has helped to push back the boundaries of what is considered suitable material for Glaswegian cultural forms, and at the same time draws explicit attention to the tensions and contradictions at work in fiction in general. Chapter Two seeks to overturn generalisations about No Mean City as a working-class novel by offering a detailed textual analysis of McArthur and Long's narrative, focusing on the representations of working-class masculinity and femininity in relation to the British class system, and examining the critical tradition surrounding No Mean City as a precursor to understanding the nature and extent of the novel's influence.

Chapter Two

Of Hard Men, Hairies and Bad Books: Criticising *No Mean City*

This chapter considers the critical tradition surrounding *No Mean City*, examines the literary and political significance of the novel's representations of working-class individuals, and lays the groundwork for tracing the book's influence on Scottish urban literature. The publication of *No Mean City* caused a fuss. Many early reactions to the novel emphasise its supposedly shocking subject matter and focus on its social criticism. Some reviewers disapprove of McArthur and Long's revelations about working-class experience; others see the novel as a powerful and/or frightening catalyst for social improvement. Some reviews in 1935 and 1936 view the text as confirmation of fears about Glaswegian working-class criminality, socialism and discontent. Here, for instance, is an excerpt from the Times Literary Supplement:

The accounts of the battles in dance halls and streets, the single-handed duels when a fallen opponent is trampled and pounded and kicked even after he is unconscious, make appalling reading. The home conditions are little less appalling in their frank disregard of normal moral sanctions and their savagery, and such conditions cannot be described without repellent details.¹

The Scotsman is especially offended: 'This is an exceedingly sordid novel and it is on account of its very sordidness that it will startle readers'.² The New York Times defines the book variously as a combined paper documentary, a gangster novel, journalistic fiction and fact.³ Edwin Muir's review – which appeared in The Spectator on 8 December 1935 – analyses *No Mean City* in relation to urban culture both in Glasgow and on an international level. Muir thinks the book has 'great value' because 'it describes from the inside a kind of life which exists not only in Glasgow but in all large manufacturing towns,

¹ 'A Glasgow Slum,' Times [London] Literary Supplement (2 November 1935) 693.

² Review of *No Mean City*, The Scotsman (31 October 1935) 15.

³ P.M. Jack, Review of *No Mean City*, New York Times (13 September 1936) 7.

yet is guessed at by very few people'.⁴ His use of the phrase 'from the inside' draws attention to McArthur's role as representative and spokesman for the working class. McArthur's status – social, financial and geographical – is seen as relevant to understanding his novel: he is an unemployed member of the working class from a bad Glasgow slum, a product of the urban environment which also birthed No Mean City. 'Born and bred' in the Gorbals, McArthur and his story are judged to be 'frank' and 'honest'.⁵ Muir approaches the novel not simply as a fictional construct, but also as an 'appalling' disclosure of objective truth. It should be noted that Muir himself may have had an embittered view of cities in general, and Glasgow in particular, most likely based on his 'dispiriting experiences of Glasgow, Renfrew and Port Glasgow'.⁶ He makes a connection between McArthur's membership in the working class and the definition of his novel as more a paper documentary than a work of art. Muir couches his examination of the characters and 'subsidiary detail in the book' within a discussion of urban gangster culture, unemployment, overcrowding, and lack of tenement hygiene.⁷ The main thrust of Muir's review defines No Mean City and McArthur as part of an 'alarming' emanation from the 'kind of life' described in the novel itself. By declaring that the novel is not 'deliberately sensational,' Muir implies that the fictionalised events of the book are not meant to be melodramatic, but more likely representational.⁸ Muir's defence of the validity of McArthur's story helps to legitimise the working-class subject matter of No Mean City and McArthur's right to express himself as a working-class writer.

⁴ Edwin Muir, 'Glasgow Slums,' The Spectator (8 November 1935) 788.

⁵ Muir, 'Glasgow Slums' 788.

⁶ Douglas Dunn, 'Report: Tracing the Shadow of *No Mean City*: Aspects of Class and Gender in Modern Scottish Urban Working-Class Fiction' (St Andrews: University of St Andrews, 4 January 2005) 2. Also Douglas Gifford, in 'Report on PhD Thesis by Sylvia Bryce' (Glasgow: University of Glasgow: 6 January 2005), points out that Edwin Muir may have been embittered 'due to unhappy personal Glasgow experience' (2).

⁷ Muir, 'Glasgow Slums' 788.

⁸ Muir, 'Glasgow Slums' 788.

Seán Damer thinks that the review in the Glasgow Evening Citizen, which appeared on 28 October 1935, was 'typical' of the reaction within Glasgow to the publication of No Mean City.⁹ The Evening Citizen review does repeat some of the stock phrases used to describe McArthur and Long's text: words like 'appalling' and 'horrible' pepper the analysis, as do references to the 'fidelity' of the book to objective reality in the Gorbals.¹⁰ On the other hand, this review goes further than the others in moral judgments of the book, seemingly investing it with a strange sort of malevolent power:

Unfortunately, it seems to us that the book may positively be harmful. The reputation of our city is undeservedly evil...Glasgow has got a bad name, and Glasgow is suffering because of that bad name; and this book, which is widely noticed in the Press, will tend to confirm the evil reputation of our city.¹¹

Significant, perhaps, is the direct allusion to the rumour of Glaswegian evil. The reviewer places great value on the city's reputation, and on its identity as it is perceived in England in particular:

The wild language and hooligan behaviour of a handful of men who represented certain local constituencies in Parliament after the war, made good 'copy' for newspapers all over the world. People, everywhere, judged Glasgow by some of the men who represented Glasgow in Parliament, and whose wild talk gave the impression that the Clydeside was a hotbed of the most ferocious revolutionaries. It was natural, then, that every little disturbance in this area should be reported throughout the British Press and magnified beyond all reason. A clash between two groups of corner-boys in Maryhill becomes a riot, and the very efforts of social workers in our city are taken as evidence of the savagery of our population!¹²

Analysis has slipped from a discussion of the novel to a defence of Glasgow's image in international newspapers and the political arena. The reviewer sees a clear connection between the book and the urban culture it is supposed to represent, but objects to the novel's potentially harmful effect on public opinion regarding Glasgow.

⁹ Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher, eds. Kevin McCarra and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 31.

¹⁰ Review of No Mean City, Evening Citizen (28 October 1935). In Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher, eds. Kevin McCarra and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 31-2.

¹¹ Evening Citizen review, 'No Mean Writer?' 31.

¹² Evening Citizen review, 'No Mean Writer?' 31-2.

The concern for Glasgow's reputation as expressed in the Evening Citizen review seems to have been widespread. Some letters to the editor of the Sunday Mail, the paper which serialised the novel, harshly criticise No Mean City. As one reader wrote, '[As] a biography it is a gross libel on the City of Glasgow'.¹³ Another reader stated, 'It is made up of vile filth and lying statements'.¹⁴ There were some readers, however, who approved of No Mean City's social criticism, and argued for the novel's authenticity: 'The story is a true one, and requires plenty of publicity, so that the conditions of the slums of Glasgow be brought before the public'.¹⁵ There is a prevalent feeling of embarrassment, and even denial, about the existence of poverty and crime in Glasgow. This desire to hide or deny the existence of Glasgow's underbelly may have been one reason why some reviewers and readers questioned the legitimacy of No Mean City's representations of the slums. McArthur's response to the criticisms levelled at his novel emphasise the need for social criticism: 'Some assert that "No Mean City" will do Glasgow a lot of harm; but if these could only be made to realise that the harm already done to working-class people is bound to take many years to remedy, they surely could not write or utter a word of condemnation'.¹⁶

The Evening Citizen, besides expressing concern about Glasgow's reputation, takes its critique of No Mean City to the extreme of hinting that it should be censored. No Mean City's content is unacceptable: '[the authors] have gone to the utmost limits of what would be tolerable and permissible in print.' Indeed, the book should not exist at all because it does not fulfil any purpose:

Now, a book of this sort may be justified upon two grounds. Firstly, it may be justified on the ground of artistic merit. That is the justification for some of the great works of Zola, Tolstoy and others. Secondly, it may be justified on the ground that it serves a useful purpose by awakening the public conscience to terrible aspects

¹³ 'Letters to the Editor,' Sunday Mail (8 December 1935) 28.

¹⁴ 'Letters to the Editor' 28.

¹⁵ 'Letters to the Editor' 28.

¹⁶ Alexander McArthur, 'Why I Wrote "No Mean City"', Daily Record and Mail (1 November 1935) 7.

of society which had hitherto been ignored.¹⁷

No Mean City fails as a work of art. The book is not 'an epic story nor is it an example of unusual literary power. It is quite well written, but it is not a great work of art.' Its value as a potential catalyst for social improvement is also questioned. The reviewer continues:

On the other hand it does not deal with a social problem concerning which the public conscience has been apathetic. In every city the problems of the slums, and the still more difficult problems of slum dwellers, are only too well known. They engage the attention of politicians of every party and remedial measures are in the forefront of every political programme. The efforts of social workers, of the churches, and of all sorts of welfare organisations, are concentrated upon them; and, in the Press, various aspects of these problems are constantly discussed and brought to the notice of the general public. Therefore we are forced to the conclusion that this book is not likely to have much social value in the sense that the novels of Charles Dickens were valuable.¹⁸

In other words, McArthur and Long should not have written their novel because they are complaining about a social problem that is already on its way to being solved. To argue that a writer should not have written a book in a certain way is one thing; to insist that he/she should not have written it *at all* is puzzling. Taken *ad absurdum*, the reviewer seems to be suggesting that no one should write about a subject that has been written about before. We already have Charles Dickens's fictional treatments of working-class experience to pique the social conscience, and therefore no one else can or should write about working-class experience ever again. By this line of reasoning, such writers as Irvine Welsh, Ian Rankin, Alasdair Gray and Janice Galloway (to name just a few) should not write about social problems or working-class subject matter because Dickens has already done so. This objection to No Mean City is bizarre.

The Evening Citizen review suggests that No Mean City's alleged failure to be either aesthetically pleasing or educational lowers its value. Class politics are at work here: 'The book is an appalling but undoubtedly faithful picture of life amongst the lowest of the low

¹⁷ Evening Citizen review, 'No Mean Writer?' 31.

¹⁸ Evening Citizen review, 'No Mean Writer?' 31.

– the corner-boys, the so-called ‘gangsters,’ the dwellers in the filthiest slums. *Naturally*, the incidents which the authors describe, and the language which their characters use, are hideous’ (italics mine).¹⁹ There is an assumption here that there is a natural correlation between finances and humanity. Slum dwellers are filthy criminals who cause problems for social workers, politicians and religious authorities *because they are slum dwellers*. They speak an ugly foreign language because it is not standard English. No Mean City is judged in similar terms. The reviewer refers to it as a book ‘of this sort,’ and dismissively relegates the work to the bottom of the literary class system.²⁰

Irene T. Barclay’s review, entitled ‘Unemployment to Blame?’, appeared in the New Statesman and Nation on November 16, 1935. Her reaction to the novel also weighs its value as literature against its effectiveness as positive social propaganda:

A revolting story, full of tedious repetition, without humour, and written in undistinguished English – *No Mean City* is, notwithstanding, a significant and devastating book. You cannot put it down as a rather poor novel which has no interest for you. You have to read it, and to say “If this is at least part of life in Gorbals – and it is – what can be done about it?”²¹

Despite her misgivings about No Mean City’s ‘literary’ qualities, Barclay acknowledges its importance as a tool that can be used for social change. She applauds McArthur and Long’s courage in dealing with subject matter which most people would presumably find repellent. The novel, she implies, is not meant to be light entertainment – it is intended to spur people into action. The use of the adjective ‘devastating’ indicates Barclay’s opinion that No Mean City, while not meeting the criteria of great literature, is nevertheless a threat to the existing social order. Its power seems to be a function of its content rather than style.

As in most other reviews, however, Barclay blames the sufferings of the poor on everything *except* society. She argues that McArthur and Long ‘consider unemployment

¹⁹ Evening Citizen review, ‘No Mean Writer?’ 31.

²⁰ Evening Citizen review, ‘No Mean Writer?’ 31.

²¹ Irene Barclay, ‘Unemployment to Blame?’ New Statesman and Nation (16 November 1935) 743.

and overcrowding mainly responsible for the conditions they describe'.²² Barclay's assessment of the authors' message is only partially correct. The book's social analysis cuts deeper than this. No Mean City does not argue that unemployment and overcrowding are the root causes of social disorder; rather, the book shows, albeit indirectly, that inhumane living conditions, poverty and social disorder are *all* symptomatic of a classed society. The book explains aberrant aspects of slum culture as problems which emerge from the British class system. No Mean City examines the Gorbals as British society in microcosm.

In contrast to Barclay's study of No Mean City, The Saturday Review values the novel both as art and social criticism. This short commentary, which appeared on November 2, 1935, refers to the work as a 'grim, outspoken novel of slum life in Glasgow, written with an obviously intimate knowledge of the subject'.²³ McArthur and Long's representation of the Gorbals is defended: "'No Mean City' (Longmans) is not propaganda'.²⁴ On the other hand, the revelations about the 'misery, terrorism and crime prevailing in some of the worst afflicted of our "distressed areas"' can be viewed as an appeal for social change:

Nevertheless the urgent necessity for slum clearance schemes and for the direction of youthful energies along properly controlled channels is amply demonstrated. The demoralising effect of the appalling conditions in certain slum areas, combined with the tragedy of long-continued unemployment, is vividly described.²⁵

No Mean City is therefore a sociological novel, a species of the problem novel, in which a thesis about societal conditions is explored in fictional form. The reviewer maintains that the implicit argument of the book is that slums, unemployment and disaffected youth are indicators of a crisis which can be remedied by governmental intervention. This assessment of No Mean City differs slightly from the other reviews under consideration in that the reviewer not only demonstrates that the book belongs to a recognised literary

²² Barclay, 'Unemployment to Blame?' 742.

²³ 'Latest Fiction,' The Saturday Review (2 November 1935) 407.

²⁴ 'Latest Fiction' 407.

²⁵ 'Latest Fiction' 407.

genre, but also shows how it is a potentially effective example of this kind of writing. McArthur and Long's style is 'outspoken' and 'vivid,' and the book itself is, 'in its own way, a remarkable piece of work'.²⁶ Unlike the Evening Citizen, which denies No Mean City either literary or social value, The Saturday Review seems to validate the book on both counts. No Mean City succeeds as art and as social criticism.

The New York Times published P.M. Jack's scathing and somewhat confusing review of No Mean City on September 13, 1936. Jack's analysis defines the book variously as a paper documentary, a gangster novel, journalistic fiction and fact:

The story is a tenth-rate gangster story. It hardly belongs with fiction at all, but rather with the modern genre called *reportage* – a kind of writing better known and practiced in America. The only interest of the story is factual, and the only reason for it is the possibility of improvement. In the end, this is newspaper work, not the work of fiction, and if Mr. McArthur's book sends the Glasgow reporters into the slums, and inspires their editors with the importance of printing their reports, it will have done its job.²⁷

Jack seems to find No Mean City difficult to define. On the one hand, it is a bad gangster novel; on the other, a long newspaper item. It is both fiction and fact. Despite the uncertainty, however, Jack's analysis is text-based; criticisms are directed at No Mean City's performance as a reportage novel, which is deemed to be unimpressive in comparison with American examples of the genre. At the same time, the novel's realism is emphasised, and its role as a stimulus for the examination and eventual treatment of a social malady is underscored. So although No Mean City is barred from the realm of fiction (and by implication, from literature), Jack correctly labels the book as belonging to a specific genre of realism. Like The Saturday Review, which discerned the potential efficacy of the novel for sparking social reform, Jack thinks that the factual basis to No Mean City, added to its demand that something ought to be done to remedy the slums, could make it a potent example of its kind. Although Jack offers no valid reason to deny

²⁶ 'Latest Fiction' 407.

²⁷ P.M. Jack, Review of No Mean City, New York Times (13 September 1936) 7.

No Mean City its place as a fiction or literature, the review demonstrates that the book can be considered part of a recognised (if undervalued) international literary trend which fused naturalistic representation with social analysis.

Canadian Forum published R. S. Knox's review in February of 1936. Knox draws immediate attention to the novel as a work of realistic social analysis, but admonishes the authors for not focusing on the role played by the class system in producing the conditions which give rise to poverty and crime: 'Of the underlying causes or of the drab daily sufferings from which, for some, those excitements may be the savage but only relief, we are given no more than an occasional glimpse'.²⁸ Knox is concerned about No Mean City's message because it may not be unambiguous enough:

We are too seldom taken within so that we might realize the waste and pity of it. Probably counter to their intention the authors of No Mean City may help to foster the too general attitude that slum dwellers are incurably depraved and outside the human pale. They make us continue to think of the slums as demanding the police or even the church instead of an awakened social conscience.²⁹

The Canadian reviewer thinks that McArthur and Long were being too tentative in their social criticism. There is no 'shock/horror' reaction in Forum; neither are there any of the usual pleas of ignorance, or hasty 'passings of the buck' to the Press, the Church or social workers. Instead, Knox turns a critical eye on the part played by all of society in the perpetuation of inequality: 'The setting is the Gorbals, the last ditch of Glasgow's squalor, *into which society has herded its weakest and most unfortunate*' (italics mine).³⁰ Knox does not blame the lower classes for being lower class, as many of the reviewers tend to do; rather, society in general is shown to be guilty of ignorance, prejudice and indifference. Slum poverty and crime are symptoms of an unfair society, not the result of the inherent inferiority of slum dwellers. For Knox, class ideology is an aberration open

²⁸ R.S. Knox, 'Novels,' Canadian Forum (February 1936) 31.

²⁹ Knox, 'Novels' 31.

³⁰ Knox, 'Novels' 31.

for analysis, whereas the majority of reviewers skirt around the role played by entrenched inequalities in the perpetuation of social problems.

There have been changes in approach to No Mean City since the mid-1930s. Gone is the shock/horror reaction to the violence, sex scenes and language. No longer do critics plead ignorance about the sufferings and crimes of the poor. Some things have not changed, however, most notably the general consensus that the novel is of little, if any, literary value. No Mean City has few outright defenders. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, while several critics seem to echo some of the early newspaper reviews, others foster the belief that McArthur and Long were out *only* to make money from their writing, as if financial returns from professional writing (or lack thereof) are any indication at all of literary worth. One wonders if Dickens (or any canonised novelist) would be subjected to similar criticisms. Many critics still think that No Mean City is a bad book, in both the aesthetic and moral sense of the word. Its literary and cultural influence is, in general, deplored. The critical tradition surrounding the novel has become more openly dismissive. At the same time, a few critics hang onto the idea that No Mean City is libellous, and that by implication it should be seen as propaganda or hate literature. Since most treatments argue against the literary quality of No Mean City, there are some recent analyses which – as I will show – stand out from the rest, wherein the critics consider the book on its own terms as a naturalistic fiction and social problem novel, rather than dismissing it out of hand without valid reasons.

Between the initial responses to No Mean City and more recent treatments is a gap of almost forty years; the resurgence of interest over the last three decades seems to coincide with the second wave of the Scottish literary renaissance, starting in the early 1970s. At the same time, many recent studies of the Glasgow novel, or of modern Scottish urban fiction in general, overlook No Mean City; others lift it up for momentary scrutiny and put

it aside again, leaving the narrative under-examined. For many scholars, the title No Mean City has itself become little more than a critical reflex – a rhetorical device – used as a signal that better novels will be discussed next. Recent treatments of No Mean City suggest that the majority of critics do not like the *manner* in which the novel is written. With its focus on the physical details of working-class life, the book's style is strongly naturalistic, which is often seen as an inferior approach to literary representation. Indeed, some critics think that realism is inimical to good working-class literature. Christopher Whyte, for instance, argues that realistic writing is 'appropriate to a middle-class author's perception of working-class life'.³¹ Although this definition of the scope of realism is too narrow, other critics, such as Manfred Malzahn, agree that there is a

tendency in Scottish working-class writing to set up new distorted pictures of reality for old ones found inadequate, the distortion coming in through exaggerated claims of significance or representativeness of certain types, e.g. the elevation to 'a mythical figure of the swaggering Glasgow hardman' in fiction and drama, or the creation of one's 'own delusive myth about the working classes'.³²

No Mean City is seen as part of this realistic trend in Scottish fiction, recognisable by a factual and direct approach to violence, and with plots devoted to drink and fighting.³³ Although it is true that McArthur and Long's novel adopts a matter-of-fact attitude towards its working-class subject matter, it would be more precise, perhaps, to read No Mean City's plot as committed not to alcohol and violence *per se*, but rather to the *analysis* of the urban subculture – the Glaswegian working class – for which these characteristics are a major concern.

In a sense, No Mean City is a casualty of literary fashion. Literary works which betray a devotion to naturalism are often viewed as stylistically regressive. Recent trends in

³¹ Christopher Whyte, 'Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century, eds. Joachim Schwend and Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990) 319.

³² Manfred Malzahn, Aspects of Identity: The Contemporary Scottish Novel (1978-1981) as National Self-Expression (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984) 95.

³³ Malzahn, Aspects of Identity 83.

literary criticism devalue realistic and naturalistic writing: writers who traffic in 'social issues, society and classes,' Carla Cappetti argues in her study of 1930's and 40's Chicago novels, are frequently charged with producing 'inferior literature lacking in the ambiguities, paradoxes and ironies that define great literary works'.³⁴ The inferiorisation of naturalistic fiction is symptomatic of a bias in literary studies that routinely views realistic and non-representational writing as both different *and* unequal. Naturalistic novels like No Mean City, which seem to be unselfconsciously representational, are generally, though not always, seen as the weaker sisters of novels that expose and/or undercut the literary conventions of realism. As Cappetti points out, books labelled as naturalistic, proletarian or sociological are often given short shrift by the critical establishment:

The lack of critical insight, sympathy, and interest toward the literary practices encompassed by those labels has created a de facto situation where to use the label *naturalism* is either to be patronizing or dismissive: "naturalism" has second-rate status in literary studies.³⁵

Books that are deemed to be realistic are held in less esteem than those whose techniques are thought to rebel against the realistic status quo. Realism is usually thought of as an easy read; anti-realism is often considered to be more difficult. Understanding a naturalistic novel like No Mean City may appear to take little intellectual effort, but its surface simplicity is deceptive.

Another explanation for the general devaluation of No Mean City is the idea that style and content are somehow separate entities, or to put it another way, that aesthetics are divorced from politics. My critical perspective of McArthur and Long's text does not regard style and content as mutually exclusive categories; what is considered 'good' (or, indeed, 'bad') writing is influenced by politics. As Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price

³⁴ Carla Cappetti, Writing Chicago: Modernism, Ethnography, and the Novel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) 12.

³⁵ Cappetti, Writing Chicago 3.

Herndl point out, literature has a 'definite function in society beyond simple aesthetic pleasure. Aesthetic pleasure itself...is clearly tied to the way literature acts as a social agent...[literature] does not exist in a realm that is somehow independent of social and political questions, but is intricately involved in our understanding of culture and the shaping of society'.³⁶ No Mean City, then, uses realism to analyse the 'issues' of class and gender; McArthur and Long show how the line between aesthetics and propaganda, between style and content, are blurred. It should be noted, however, that most critics have not yet acknowledged this subversive move in No Mean City; indeed, the novel's naturalism is attacked as a sign of its literary inferiority.

Moira Burgess's pioneering survey The Glasgow Novel 1870-1970 (1972; 1984) still stands as the definitive evaluation of No Mean City's literary worth. She classifies the book as the quintessential 'gangland' novel that evokes 'a community...crowded with gangsters, 'hard men', and loose women'.³⁷ McArthur and Long's book is seen as having spawned a 'brood of inferior imitations,' such as John McNeillie's Glasgow Keelie (1940), Bill McGhee's Cut and Run (1962) and John Burrowes's Jamesie's People (1984).³⁸

According to Burgess, No Mean City lies at one end of a 'scale of realism,' directly opposite to the urban kailyard school of sentimental fiction populated by 'ministers, dominies, pawky weavers and consumptive students'.³⁹ 'Urban kailyard' is a phrase coined by Burgess to denote the sentimental, 'lace-curtain view of city life' as epitomised, perhaps, in J.J. Bell's Wee Macgreegor (1902).⁴⁰ Burgess charges the kailyard and gangland schools with projecting a one-sided view of Glasgow life, the one overly positive, the other excessively negative:

³⁶ Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds., Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 833.

³⁷ Moira Burgess, The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition (Glasgow: Glasgow District Libraries, 1986) 33.

³⁸ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 44.

³⁹ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 33.

⁴⁰ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 12, 39.

No community – much less one containing over a million human beings – consists of nothing but bourgeois or nothing but unemployed...⁴¹

No Mean City is viewed as the ‘apotheosis’ of gangland Glasgow fiction.⁴² The potential of gangland to explore questions of class, ideology and gender is completely ignored within the survey, a flaw that this chapter will attempt to rectify.

Burgess’s conviction that No Mean City can be relegated to the gangland school derives in part from an essentialist view of Glasgow literature:

‘The Glasgow Novel’...has been taken to imply a novel set wholly or substantially in Glasgow (or in a quasi-fictional city readily recognisable as Glasgow) or which, though perhaps containing only a short Glasgow section, *conveys a genuine picture of the life, character or atmosphere of the city...*(italics mine)⁴³

There appears to be one defining characteristic of real Glasgow novels. Glaswegian literary representations, Burgess argues, should project an authentic image of the city and its inhabitants. What she means by this is unclear. The word ‘genuine’ – with its connotative meanings of ‘true,’ ‘pure,’ ‘legitimate’ and ‘real’ – is a loaded term which is left unexamined. Burgess’s vision of the development of the Glasgow novel is a progressive one, and ‘bad’ novels are presented as the prototypes for the ‘good’ novels which came later. She discerns an increase, for instance, in both the quantity and quality of recent novels which resist her cataloguing efforts:

The appearance during the last decade of novels which do not neatly fit in any of these categories – for instance Friel’s *Mr Alfred M.A.* and Gray’s *Lanark* – is a very healthy sign of new life in the Glasgow novel.⁴⁴

With her use of the word ‘healthy’ Burgess seems to be suggesting that up until Friel and Gray the Glasgow novel tradition has been diseased. No Mean City and other failed works are seen as literary viruses which have infected Glasgow’s cultural forms and undermined the normal development of the city’s imaginative life. This disease metaphor alienates and

⁴¹ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 34.

⁴² Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 34.

⁴³ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 11-12.

⁴⁴ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 12.

demonises No Mean City. The book is seen as a dangerous invader of Glasgow's cultural body rather than part of its lifeblood. No Mean City is held up as the epitome of what Glasgow fiction should *not* be.⁴⁵

Burgess judges No Mean City along what Joanna Russ calls the 'linear hierarchy of good and bad'.⁴⁶ This approach to literary aesthetics is the traditional approach to judgments of value:

However, it is perhaps unfair to judge the writers of the urban kailyard and the gangland schools by too high a standard... There is little point in blaming these writers, notable for generally limited talent and frequent commercial success, for not carrying out a task which most of them can hardly have known to exist.⁴⁷

Burgess's judgments of literary texts are influenced by the canonical process of exclusion/inclusion which reinforces the binary oppositions at work in literary criticism between 'high' and 'low' forms of literature. She divides writers into two groups: the good ones who 'know' what literature is meant to do and can be considered literary, and those (including McArthur and Long) who have neither the talent nor the awareness that literature has a job to do, to be considered as anything other than bad.

Burgess straitjackets No Mean City into her definition of gangland. The hallmark of the gangland novel, she states, is a 'lack of effort, a contentment in serving up stock characters with stock responses... to violence and lust...'.⁴⁸ Burgess does not interrogate gangland texts for evidence that may undermine the perception that they are merely tales of hard men and hairies. Her analysis of No Mean City is rudimentary. She briefly explains how the book came about:

No mean city was published in 1935 under the names of Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long. The publishers' preface to the first edition sets out clearly the arrangement whereby Long, a journalist, organised McArthur's striking but poorly presented manuscripts. One would not expect a literary masterpiece to emerge in

⁴⁵ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 33-4, 44.

⁴⁶ Joanna Russ, 'Aesthetics,' Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick and New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 210.

⁴⁷ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 34.

⁴⁸ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 34.

this way, and indeed *No mean city* is loosely constructed and clumsily written.⁴⁹

There is no evidence that McArthur and Long's narrative is either loose in construction or clumsy in style; as I will demonstrate later on in this chapter, the prose of No Mean City is actually a striking example of how the matter-of-fact manner of documentary realism can be successfully married to overt sociopolitical motives. It should be noted, however, that not all critics share my positive view of McArthur and Long's style. Burgess's assessment undermines the literariness of the novel by questioning the value of its social description:

Whether such descriptions are purely sensational or factual reportage is perhaps for the sociologist to decide. There are many small touches of social description in *No mean city* which do have the air of truthful reporting, if only because they add nothing in particular to the story.⁵⁰

Burgess's analysis excludes No Mean City from the world of literature, relegating it instead to the realm of the social sciences. She continues:

There is even some attempt, as we have said, to explain the violence of the slums as arising from intolerable living conditions; amateur psychology no doubt, and hardly profound enough to give *No mean city* a high ranking among Glasgow novels...⁵¹

For Burgess, then, No Mean City is a half-baked attempt to explain the reality of Glaswegian slum life, and should be given low priority for serious critical attention from the literary community. In her 1998 study Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction, Burgess reiterates her earlier contention that No Mean City – though doubtless well-known and influential – is a blight on Glasgow's literary scene. She acknowledges, however, that the book has become one of the 'icons' of Glasgow fiction.⁵²

Burgess's queries lay the groundwork for a more serious and sustained investigation. The novel's 'importance has not been widely recognised...by later critics; very few writers on Glasgow fiction mention it at all'.⁵³ She explains the novel's tenacity as a combination

⁴⁹ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 44.

⁵⁰ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 44.

⁵¹ Burgess, The Glasgow Novel 44.

⁵² Moira Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 138.

⁵³ Burgess, Imagine a City 162.

of two things: its ability merge fact with fiction, and its sensationalistic descriptions of Glaswegian slum life.⁵⁴ In the end, however, Burgess cannot adequately account for No Mean City's influential presence in the Glaswegian literary arena: 'Fact, fiction, sensationalism, sober description: the whole question of *No Mean City* and its shadow awaits further examination in terms of Glasgow myth'.⁵⁵

While maintaining her own reservations about No Mean City's quality, Burgess is surprised that most present-day critics either ignore or dislike the book. As she points out in Reading Glasgow (1996), recent criticism tends to focus on No Mean City's style:

No Mean City, in this view, is pulp fiction and beneath consideration. When Alasdair Gray writes in *Lanark* "imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music hall song and a few bad novels," it's a safe guess which particular bad novel first springs to mind.⁵⁶

Burgess's assessment of recent critical treatments of No Mean City demonstrates the terms by which the novel has been pushed outside the bounds of canonical interest. McArthur and Long's book is viewed as a popular fiction, and so is generally not given sustained or serious attention from literary critics. As Burgess points out – perhaps ironically, given her own low opinion of No Mean City – the book has not been given a fair hearing.⁵⁷

Few critics adopt an evenhanded approach to No Mean City, and sustained investigations into the question of its literary value and cultural influence are scarce. Most continue to either misconstrue or downplay No Mean City's potency as a naturalistic fiction and literary icon. Even so respected a critic as Douglas Gifford, in The Dear Green Place? The Novel in the West of Scotland (1985), calls it the '1935 shocker novel of the Gorbals,' notable for its 'crass stupidities and dangerous distortions'.⁵⁸ He dismisses

⁵⁴ Burgess, Imagine a City 170.

⁵⁵ Burgess, Imagine a City 170.

⁵⁶ Moira Burgess, Reading Glasgow: A Book Trust Scotland Literary Guide to authors and books associated with the city (Edinburgh: Book Trust Scotland, 1996) 60.

⁵⁷ Burgess, Reading Glasgow 60.

⁵⁸ Douglas Gifford, The Dear Green Place? The Novel in the West of Scotland (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985) 7.

McArthur and Long as having 'greedy' and 'twisted' minds, and their novel as being neither serious nor worthwhile.⁵⁹

In 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945,' Gifford maintains that the 'highest' and 'finest' endeavour in fiction is the 'attempt to celebrate and ennoble man's life in art'.⁶⁰ Works whose central theme is the conflict between 'personality' and a 'backward, narrow and intolerant' Scotland, he argues, represent the best in Scottish fiction.⁶¹ *No Mean City* is doomed within Gifford's framework, where it ranks low on his list, despite the fact that the novel does explore the issue of working-class identity. McArthur and Long's novel, he states, is the harbinger of a negative literary tradition where Scotland is viewed through a 'bitter' lens, and works are marked by 'melodrama,' 'pessimism,' and 'barely-controlled anger'.⁶² He argues,

[The] tradition of *No Mean City* (1935), of the naturalistic, bitter-sweet, raw Scottish industrial novel continues unabated - so much so that one feels that the stereotypes are now a serious danger to the novelist.⁶³

No Mean City, with what Gifford calls its 'overall bitter view of Scottish life,' has established a harmful trend in Scottish literature.⁶⁴

Gifford at least considers *No Mean City* as worth taking seriously; other critics are more dismissive. Freddy Anderson, in his *Cencrastus* article 'Early Days at Glasgow Unity Theatre' (1993) deports *No Mean City* from Scotland altogether:

McArthur, who in conjunction with an English hack journalist had written that infamous horror story about Glasgow called *No Mean City* - a good title ruined by its rubbishy contents. This novel of the 'submerged twelfth' of the slum tenements sold thousands of copies, especially south of the Scottish border, and it very conveniently provided black propaganda to explain away the red radicalism of Clydeside in the 'Hungry Thirties'...*No Mean City* became in effect a kind of 'English Bible' of falsified opinion about Glasgow...mere thuggery and razor

⁵⁹ Gifford, *The Dear Green Place?* 7.

⁶⁰ Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945,' *Scottish Writing and Writers*, ed. Norman Wilson (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head, 1977) 13.

⁶¹ Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945' 13-14.

⁶² Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945' 20-21.

⁶³ Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945' 23.

⁶⁴ Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945' 20.

slashing.⁶⁵

Anderson attacks No Mean City as the villain in the story of Glasgow's literary tradition – a trashy horror novel, an English attack on Glaswegian socialist politics, and a bogus indictment of Glasgow. Even Burgess is amazed that he 'can remain so vitriolic about a book sixty years after its publication'.⁶⁶

Other critics, such as Edwin Morgan, offer more dispassionate and text-based appraisals of No Mean City. First he covers what have become the customary responses to No Mean City. Along with Gifford and Anderson, he maintains that the novel 'distorts reality through crude overcolouring and selective melodrama'.⁶⁷ He argues that the 'violence-packed action' of No Mean City's plot, and the 'crude excitement of the whole story,' lent it both notoriety and commercial success.⁶⁸ Morgan goes a bit further than most critics by drawing attention to the socio-historical dimension of the book, stating that some chapters, such as 'The Sherricking of the King' (where the narrator provides information about the ritualistic significance of some forms of street violence), 'have real historical interest'.⁶⁹ This is a back-handed compliment. As Humm, Stigant and Widdowson point out in Popular Fictions (1986), valuing popular writing only for social content can reinforce the arbitrary division between canonical and non-canonical texts – canonic narratives 'receive intensive formalistic reading,' but non-canonical books are 'collapsed back into the conditions of production from which they derive'.⁷⁰

Elsewhere, Morgan sees No Mean City as something more than a history lesson. In 'Glasgow Speech in Recent Scottish Literature' (1990), he states that 'crude and

⁶⁵ Freddy Anderson, 'Early Days at Glasgow Unity Theatre,' Cenchrastus (1993) 18.

⁶⁶ Moira Burgess, Letter to the present writer (9 December 2001) 1.

⁶⁷ Edwin Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 89.

⁶⁸ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 89.

⁶⁹ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 89.

⁷⁰ Peter Humm, Paul Stigant and Peter Widdowson, Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History (London and New York: Methuen, 1986) 2.

melodramatic though it was, [it] had a certain archetypal power about it'.⁷¹ To put this another way, Morgan is arguing that No Mean City set in motion a particular way of representing Glasgow and Glaswegians – it is the archetypal, or paradigmatic, hard Glasgow novel whose themes of violence and poverty have characterised many Glasgow fictions ever since, nourishing a tenacious image of hard men, mean streets and gangs: 'Something which has lasted so long, and which has sold so many books, obviously cannot be simply written off, even if it is deplored'.⁷² Morgan harbours a deep concern about Glasgow's image as a city overrun with dangerous criminals, and blames references to No Mean City on the covers of some Glasgow novels for keeping the iniquitous image of the city alive: the book, he argues, has been the 'mainspring of a long-standing opportunism amongst publishers'.⁷³ Although he claims that there is 'still no mean number of very hard men in the city,' he objects to the convention: 'It is almost as if the Glasgow writer, like the Glasgow man, should not be seen to be soft, should not be seen to be not macho'.⁷⁴

The style of No Mean City, which combines naturalistic description with sociological analysis, is also notable for its realistic rendering of Glaswegian working-class diction and accent. Morgan credits McArthur and Long with having broken new ground in the use of Glaswegian English in literary forms:

[No Mean City] was also a landmark in the wide currency it gave to Glasgow dialect, even though its London publishers, with an eye to their English readers, put those always irritating, non-accepting inverted commas round words like 'buroo', 'rammy', 'model', 'single-end', 'flymen', 'hairy', and 'sherricking'.⁷⁵

No Mean City's dialect breakthrough could be tainted with anti-Glaswegian prejudice. On the one hand, McArthur and Long's inclusion of Glaswegian words and pronunciations indicates a willingness to legitimise the use of a traditionally devalued form of urban,

⁷¹ Edwin Morgan, 'Glasgow Speech in Recent Scottish Literature,' Crossing the Border: Essays on Scottish Literature (Manchester: 1990) 314.

⁷² Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 90.

⁷³ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 89.

⁷⁴ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 91, 90.

⁷⁵ Morgan, 'Glasgow Speech in Recent Scottish Literature' 314.

working-class Scots. On the other hand, as Morgan correctly points out, the inverted commas make the vernacular words stand out from the standard English used in the bulk of the text. Glaswegian is presented as an idiosyncratic variation on normal, coherent English. Whether or not this technique is irritating and non-accepting is open to question, but at least *No Mean City*'s authors and publishers are using the vernacular in a way that can be understood by Glaswegian and non-Glaswegian readers alike. As Anette I. Hagan points out in *Urban Scots Dialect Writing* (2002), a book-length study based on her Ph.D. dissertation,

The authors' [McArthur and Long's] intention seems to be to demonstrate the non-standardness, even outlandishness of Glaswegian to a standard-reading audience who do not wish to be bothered with too much phonological detail as long as they get an impression of what Glaswegian and its speakers are like.⁷⁶

Although Hagan is not convinced that *No Mean City* is completely successful in rendering the Gorbals dialect, I would argue that the novel nonetheless helped to push back the boundaries for the use of non-standard forms of English in literary forms. The use of Glaswegian also lends the novel an authenticity of style, which reinforces the naturalism of its descriptions of working-class realities. With the narrator using educated, standard English, the result is a book that comes across as a fly-on-the-wall documentary. The perspective throughout is almost cinematic – the view shifts between extreme close-ups on details of character and setting, and long-shots complete with translations and a measured, seemingly objective voice-over.

Despite the novel's deft combination of different styles and perspectives, Christopher Whyte's analysis of *No Mean City* begins with the usual attack: he denies *No Mean City* either subtlety, craftsmanship or quality of prose. The style and structure of the narrative, Whyte maintains, are too 'crude'.⁷⁷ He draws attention to Chapter Nineteen, where he

⁷⁶ Anette I. Hagan, *Urban Scots Dialect Writing* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002) 254.

⁷⁷ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 322.

detects a weakness in the writers' attempt to 'vary the repeated battle scenes by recounting one in retrospect'.⁷⁸ In contrast to Burgess and Morgan, he interprets the narratorial 'interventions' of the plot not as irritating distractions, but rather as part of a distancing technique which aids voyeuristic pleasure by cushioning the reader 'so that the violence...and general sexual promiscuity take on a vicarious attractiveness'.⁷⁹ I would argue differently: the narrator, rather than being a comforting buffer between plot and reader, is more of a facilitating guide for the action. As for characterisation throughout the novel, Whyte sees the men and women of *No Mean City* as a 'polarisation of the male and female principles (as cultural constructs)'.⁸⁰ Johnnie Stark, Peter Stark and Bobbie Hurley, he argues, are different manifestations of male impotence. Johnnie, although he 'embodies the ethos of the Glasgow 'hard man,' mindlessly violent and sexually rapacious,' can nonetheless be understood as a man who becomes anti-social because he cannot keep down a job or improve his lot: 'There is no question of social betterment or a career for him, so he affirms himself by means of physical and sexual violence'.⁸¹ Peter and Bobbie are hen-pecked husbands whose feelings of emasculation cause them to become 'social climbers' who 'gravitate to houses with bathrooms before slipping back into the morass of poverty'.⁸² Women, on the other hand, are part of the degrading Gorbals environment that brings about the downfall of the men. Peter's wife Isobel 'tames' her husband with the threat of separation.⁸³ Bobbie's wife Lily 'reproaches' her man to be more 'manly'.⁸⁴ Lizzie feeds the Razor King's lust by procuring female lodgers, and contributes to his criminal career by encouraging him to fight.⁸⁵ Her infidelities and

⁷⁸ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 322.

⁷⁹ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 323.

⁸⁰ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 319.

⁸¹ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 323, 324.

⁸² Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 324.

⁸³ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 323-24.

⁸⁴ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 323.

⁸⁵ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 323.

pregnancy by another man humiliate Johnnie even further.⁸⁶ Whyte's gender analysis of Johnnie Stark is accurate enough, although the assessment of Peter and Bobbie's characters targets women, rather than the men themselves, as most responsible for their husband's failures, a conclusion which, as I will show later in this chapter, oversimplifies McArthur and Long's explorations of working-class masculinity and femininity.

Despite the almost unanimous view that No Mean City is a shabby work of sensationalistic fiction, the book does have its defenders, although they are in the minority. In Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow (1990), Ian Spring sees the novel as a 'reasonably well-written' fiction which introduced the double-edged theme of poverty and crime that 'would not go away and...perhaps constituted the thirties' major contribution to the mythology of Glasgow and set the agenda for subsequent discussions of the nature of representations of the city'.⁸⁷ At the same time, he calls McArthur and Long's book an infamous 'old bête noir,' a work whose influence is as 'insidious' as it is 'notable'.⁸⁸ Notwithstanding Spring's acknowledgement of the potential value of No Mean City's style and theme, his comment about plot leans towards the reductive: the novel is 'a sensationalist account of the career and eventual demise of a hoodlum'.⁸⁹ As I will demonstrate, No Mean City is about more than this.

Most of the criticisms levelled at No Mean City conform to a predictable pattern. Two lines of attack are launched: one against the book's style, narrative and characters, and the other against its literary and cultural influence. Burgess, Morgan, Gifford, Anderson and Whyte all agree that McArthur and Long's book is a badly-written and sensationalistic work of naturalistic fiction. Spring stands out as one of the very few defenders of No Mean City on the level of stylistic quality. Although Burgess, Morgan and Whyte defend

⁸⁶ Whyte, 'Imagining the City' 323-24.

⁸⁷ Ian Spring, Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990) 72, 73.

⁸⁸ Spring, Phantom Village 53, 56, 72.

⁸⁹ Spring, Phantom Village 72.

certain aspects of the narrative - for instance its use of the Glaswegian dialect, the close attention to detail, and the strength and directness of the prose and characterisation - they reaffirm rather than challenge the prevailing view that No Mean City is both inferior as a work of literature and detrimental in its impact on Glasgow literary forms.

A fresh perspective of No Mean City is needed; as things stand, the denigration of McArthur and Long's work not only suppresses an important chapter in the history of Scottish urban fiction, but also masks the full force of the novel's influence on the style, characterisation, plots and themes of many novels and short stories produced in Scotland. Cappetti's suggestions may be of help here:

New assumptions, categories, and methods must be invented to free critics of the aesthetic biases and ideological burdens that *naturalism* and the many literatures associated with that label – ethnic, proletarian, African-American, urban, realist – carry with them at present...⁹⁰

Instead of automatically relegating naturalistic fiction to the proverbial basement of literary studies, we should aim to produce a framework of enquiry that focuses on the 'specifically formal properties' of all kinds of fiction 'at the level of specific texts'.⁹¹ A text-based approach to the style of McArthur and Long's novel, coupled with attention to the narrative's construction of working-class masculinity and femininity, could provide a more nuanced critical lens through which its significance in the evolution of Scotland's urban writing can be appreciated.

No Mean City is especially significant for its engaged and sometimes insightful portrayal of gender and class. Further, for all that the novel has been seen as the epitome of macho writing, it is – as I will demonstrate – surprisingly revealing and honest in its exploration of female characters and experiences. The surface of No Mean City is a simple story of drinking, fighting and sex; underneath is an exploration of a desperate

⁹⁰ Cappetti, Writing Chicago 3.

⁹¹ Cappetti, Writing Chicago 4.

power struggle amongst working-class men and women. The book's scrutiny of social relations cuts deep to expose each character's complicity in reproducing the politics of victimisation. No Mean City can be examined as a textual exploration of how class and gender ideologies intersect. McArthur and Long show how working-class men and women both adhere to and rebel against the implications of their gender and class designations; the characters of No Mean City provide an early illustration of Berthold Schoene-Harwood's suggestion that 'gender is a formative imposition which individuals resist, appropriate and transgress at their own existential peril'.⁹² McArthur and Long problematise gender with considerations of class ideology, however, so that the issue of identity formation is complicated by what Pamela Fox sees as a tense undercurrent of shame and resistance at work in writings on lower-class experience; No Mean City's slum characters, besides contending with oppressive gender roles, also have to define themselves in reaction to the experience of being poor and lower class.⁹³ Add these complexities to our awareness that the novel is the outcome of a collaborative partnership between a middle-class English journalist and an unemployed baker from the Gorbals, and the tensions at work in No Mean City's narrative descriptions of slum life – besides being a function of the authors' engagement with class and gender ideology – are also, perhaps, the stylistic by-products of a mixed literary alliance.

As Christopher Whyte indicates, much of No Mean City's narrative attention is devoted to men. The actions of the male characters are, in general, more violent than those of the women, and their downfalls more spectacular. As I will show later on in this chapter, however, McArthur and Long's women are by no means given short shrift in terms of characterisation; indeed, the novel's construction of working-class femininity is decidedly

⁹² Berthold Schoene-Harwood, Writing Men: Literary Masculinities from *Frankenstein* to the New Man (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 3.

⁹³ Pamela Fox, Introduction, Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945 (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994) 2-3.

subversive in its attention to the effects of gender inequality and poverty on women's identities and experiences. *No Mean City* emphasises the performative nature of gender; like class, masculinity and femininity are shown to be the products of social and cultural forces rather than the natural outcome of inherited biological difference.⁹⁴

Men in *No Mean City*

Working-class masculinity is defined throughout *No Mean City* as a product of tradition, competition, machismo, poverty and violence. The first male character we meet is Johnnie's father. He is lying in bed, cursing because he is a shilling short of the rent. Stark is unemployed. He fears starvation and eviction, because the Factor (rent collector) will demand payment whether or not he has the money:

"Ay," thought John Stark bitterly, "and the bliddy auld bastard will be standing on the stair-heid again next Friday if we canny pay him before. That will be fifteen and tenpence and we can fill oor bellies on what's left."

(NMC 8)

Mr. Stark's worry about the rent prevents him from complaining about the overflow from a blocked communal toilet: 'If it hadny been for the rent money being short...I wid have spoken to the Factor the morn. I telt the O'Learys I wid. It's six days now since their closet was stopped up and it's a bliddy disgrace, eviction or no eviction' (NMC 9). He cannot escape the brute reality of the Factor's ability to render the Starks homeless; he hates the Factor because he has the power and Stark does not. As he reflects bitterly to himself, 'I'd like fine to own this bliddy tenement' (NMC 8). Stark is vulnerable to another man's will, and he drinks to escape the humiliating realisation of this blow to his masculinity.

⁹⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990) 140.

Predictably, Stark takes out his frustration on his family through violence. He resents women because in his view they add to his feelings of helplessness: 'he wondered grimly how it was that all the women in the slums seemed to want kids...' (NMC 10). The need to provide for his children is the main reason that Stark fears the Factor – children are 'a bliddy nuisance to a man' (NMC 10). He wants to blame his wife for the financial burden of a family, even though he knows that 'it was his fault as much as hers' (NMC 10). Even sex is a source of Stark's feelings of emasculation. He resolves grimly to suppress his sex drive: 'there'll be nae more breadsnappers if I can help it' (NMC 10). His fear of having more children to provide for leads to symbolic self-castration. Stark is trapped by his poverty. His surreptitious journey to relieve himself in the kitchen sink is thus a symbolic – though pathetic - assertion of his damaged manhood.

Mr. Stark's misogyny, violence and ultimate destruction are component parts of both his attempt and failure to live up to an ideal of working-class manhood – his identity is formed along the trajectory what Schoene-Harwood calls a 'death-bound' definition of masculinity, and within the parameters of Fox's self-defeating loop of working-class shame and rebellion.⁹⁵ Stark's hardness is a function of his vulnerability. Unfortunately, the legacy of defeat does not end with his death, and his son Johnnie picks up where his father leaves off. The intertwined traditions of 'death-bound masculinities' and working-class shame and resistance continue unabated.

Johnnie Stark's reign as the hardest man in the Gorbals has as its origin his early upbringing by a man who defined his maleness as power. Mr. Stark is Johnnie's 'Factor,' the shadow under which Johnnie thinks he needs to fight for his sense of manhood. The mere sight of his drunken and abusive father, with his eyes 'red-rimmed and his chin dark with stubble,' immobilises the boy: 'Young Johnnie's heart was beating hard with a terror

⁹⁵ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 8; Fox, *Class Fictions* 2-3.

he could not quite control and he clenched his fists in desperation' (NMC 28). Johnnie learns that violence can be the means towards power and respect. Mr. Stark's incarceration and death allow Johnnie to take his father's place as 'head of the family' (NMC 31).

Mr. Stark's shadow of influence warps Johnnie's perception of masculinity. Johnnie learns that a man's physical strength can induce fear and submission. He works out at the open-air gymnasium on Glasgow Green, 'swaggering' when he notices the looks of respect he receives from other young men after he shows off on the parallel bars (NMC 33). The money he earns as a coalman's boy becomes a status symbol. After giving his mother most of his pay, he leaves the house to show off with the rest, buying a twopenny packet of cigarettes, flinging surly nods at his acquaintances, and sneering at Bobbie Hurley's job as soap-boy in Graham's barber shop (NMC 15). Johnnie is learning to equate male power with victimisation. Geordie the coalman rewards Johnnie's hardman tactics with the customers with praise and the promise of more money. At home, he is allowed to throw his younger brother Peter out of bed (NMC 24): "I'm in work...it's me for the long lie" (NMC 20). Johnnie is learning a dangerous lesson in masculinity: being a man means using money and violence to get submission and respect.

Fear underpins and motivates Johnnie's sexual and physical aggression. His first sexual experience had been with his cousin Maggie, and he is worried that people will find out about the incest:

He was terribly afraid of the neighbours, but of their laughter, not of their indignation. He did not know how he would "haud up his heid" if whispers should follow him and he should guess that people were saying: "Hey, hey! That'll be young Johnnie Stark. His mither caught him in bed wi' his cousin that canny get a man, and skelpit the pair of them."

(NMC 27-28)

Johnnie's fear is of being seen as an abnormal, not immoral, man. He is anxious for others to think of him as a mature, independent and sexually desirable male. The rumour that his

mother had scolded him for being a dirty little boy would damage the image of hardened masculinity he is striving to erect. Further, sex with Maggie – a girl viewed as undesirable and desperate – gives Johnnie little to brag about. Mary Hay, on the other hand, who is known for her beauty throughout the Gorbals, is ‘talent of more than ordinary charm’ (NMC 41). Other men want her, which increases her value in Johnnie’s eyes, and his own in other men’s. Squaring his shoulders and thrusting his chin forward defiantly, Johnnie’s heart is ‘proud with conquest’ when he is with Mary (NMC 41). Conquering an extraordinary woman makes him feel like an exceptional man. Johnnie reflects, ‘She’s about the best bit of stuff I’ve seen home from any of the halls yet...I might do worse than marry Mary Hay’ (NMC 40). His friends are ‘all impressed and envious,’ and the men at the billiards-room in Rutherglen Road look at him with ‘new respect and interest’ (NMC 41). Johnnie is triumphant: ‘Not many of them...cud get awa’ wi’ a bit of stuff like Mary Hay’ (NMC 41).

There are cracks in Johnnie’s ultra-masculine façade. He looks at Mary Hay with a ‘slanting mistrust, wondering whether she would have the hardihood to mention his cousin’s name or recall the old scandal which had been suffocated in its infancy’ (NMC 35). Mary’s nervous laugh startles him: ‘He thought, but only for a second, that she was mocking him. The cold dark close seemed to echo her laugh eerily’ (NMC 38). Like his father before him, Johnnie fears being taken for a ‘mug,’ which drives him to be harder, tougher, more stereotypically masculine. His journey towards manhood is dogged by his fear that ‘behind his back men were laughing at him’ (NMC 45).

Johnnie Stark’s public image as a hard man begins to take on a life of its own. A battle between a razor fighter named Gus MacLean and a group of Gorbals boys erupts at the Masonic Hall where Johnnie and Mary are on a dancing date. When Gus draws his razors, Johnnie charges into the fray:

...Johnnie was fighting mad and bayonets would not have given him pause. He ran three or four steps and then leaped clear off the floor at big Gus. They fell together with a crash that shook the floor, but Johnnie was on top. Quick as a cat, he regained his feet and kicked, and kicked again with iron-shod boot, against a defenceless head. Gus lay quite still.

(NMC 49)

Mary Hay spreads the rumour that Johnnie had stolen MacLean's razors, 'hacked his way out of the mob and even driven two policemen into the street before his flashing weapons' (NMC 52). Johnnie knows that these stories are 'wild exaggerations,' but is nonetheless grateful (NMC 52-53). When he walks into the Queen's Head three days after the fight, he is met with hushed respect and free drinks: 'Johnnie stood upon the threshold with his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, forcing the jacket wide open. The handles of two brand new "weapons" projected from the upper pockets' (NMC 50-51). Johnnie Stark has been lifted from the 'rank and file' of ordinary working-class hoodlums (NMC 44). As a young gangster at the pub exclaims, 'Who is this, eh?...Look at him, boys! The Razor King!' (NMC 51). The metamorphosis from boy to hard man has been accomplished by a strange alchemy of coincidence, gossip and Johnnie's anxieties about the precariousness of his own masculinity.

Johnnie's reputation as a razor fighter and womaniser becomes his reason for being. He must hide aspects of his identity that would be interpreted as weakness or fear, locking himself into the hard man stereotype; his sense of self-worth and his very survival in the Gorbals depend on the persuasiveness of his performance. When Johnnie decides to break off his relationship with Mary Hay, for instance, she decides to 'sherrick' him outside the dancing hall. A sherricking, the narrator tells us, is a public revenge ritual, a 'strange and wild appeal to crowd justice and crowd sympathy,' during which a woman verbally and physically attacks the man who has insulted or discarded her (NMC 60). When Mary accosts him outside the dance hall, Johnnie must play the part of hard man to perfection. He reflects, 'He could remember other

“sherrickings” at which he had been merely an onlooker – one in particular, where a soft-hearted fellow had held his hand and was suddenly overwhelmed by the mob and beaten and kicked almost to death’ (NMC 63-64). The act must be seamless; the strings of public opinion that control his behaviour must be invisible. As the narrator points out, the ‘least faltering by the Razor King would have turned the spectators into a pack of wolves’ (NMC 65). Tightening his lips into a ‘harder line,’ Johnnie punches, then kicks, the girl – ‘none observed the sudden change of balance that made the kick scarcely more than a prod’ (NMC 64). When Mary’s new boyfriend Joe Kendles intervenes, however, Johnny swings the pendulum all the way: ‘It was all that was necessary to steel Johnnie’s spirit. Rage took hold of him like an enemy. His razors flashed from his pockets and with two lightning lunges he marked Kendles for life’ (NMC 64). Johnnie’s *pursuit* of masculinity – rather than masculinity in itself – is turning him into a monster. Manhood has become for Johnnie what Schoene-Harwood calls ‘an inexorable imperative perpetuating itself beyond all human control’.⁹⁶

Johnnie’s appropriation of the hard man role has been a deliberate and conscious decision; he is learning that masculinity, far from being a natural phenomenon, is actually a performance based upon a ‘script’.⁹⁷ The sherricking, like the death of his father, is a turning point in Johnnie’s metamorphosis into a hard man:

...he had behaved as a razor king was expected to behave. He had vindicated his character by sheer, desperate ferocity. Far from damaging his reputation, the “sherricking” had confirmed and established it. He walked abroad like a king, indeed, and other young men coveted his surly nod of recognition.

(NMC 66)

The irony of Johnnie’s position is the terror and fragility behind his aggressive persona. He is in a self-perpetuating loop: his hardness derives from weakness, and his ferocity is born of desperation. The oppressor is the victim of his own need to be respected as a hard

⁹⁶ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 20.

⁹⁷ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 48.

man. As Razor King, Johnnie feels more secure in his masculinity by literally carving out a space for himself in the Gorbals. He slashes the faces, hands and necks of the men who laugh at his clothes, shouting 'Ah'm no mug!' (NMC 100). When his brother Peter calls Lizzie a 'bandy-legged tart,' Johnnie 'leapt into action at that taunt, his razors flashing...' (NMC 115). Johnnie's razors are a double-edged symbol of his own divided sense of selfhood. On the one hand, as a tool for shaving facial hair, they represent civilised, hygienic and domesticated masculinity. On the other hand, the open razor can also be a deliberate or accidental weapon – both the barber and the razor fighter can scar another man, defacing him in a literal *and* figurative sense. A nick from a careless barber and a wound from a Razor King challenge the external invulnerability of masculinity. Johnnie's use of the open razor to mark the faces of his enemies is significant. Razors can leave permanent scars, constant reminders of the fragility of a man's skin – the chinks in his armour. Stark inscribes an advertisement for his superiority as a man on the faces of other men, proof that they have succumbed to him, evidence for his own ferocity, cruelty and inhumanity. The scars Johnnie leaves are like a gang's graffiti – intended as a warning, a challenge and a statement of territorial power. He pierces the veneer of civilisation with one of its own inventions.

Johnnie constructs a fiction of manliness, defining himself in accordance with the only two models of masculinity he thinks are available to the working-class man – the proletariat and the criminal. This 'masculine self-fashioning,' asserts Gill Plain in Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction (2001), is both indicative of and meant to disguise a deep-rooted insecurity, but at the same time through inscription and representation risks the exposure of the fundamental weakness of masculinity *qua* gender construction.⁹⁸ Masculinity, she argues, 'must be constituted through repeated reinscription,' but with

⁹⁸ Gill Plain, Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) 78, 79.

'each new citation men risk seeing the reflection not of masculine self-containment, but of feminine excess'.⁹⁹ In other words, Johnnie's efforts to construct and maintain his hard man persona through repeated demonstrations of his virility, physical strength and ferocity may on the one hand reinforce his ultra-masculine façade, but with the concurrent effect that the soft, insecure reality behind the mask remains untransformed. Image becomes all. The effort required to balance his notoriety as a gangster with his desire for respect through employment and marriage to Lizzie Ramsay begins to tear Johnnie apart. He is both gangster and dedicated worker, both monster and man. And all the time, his subjective sense of self is defined by the fear of what other people think: 'before long they'll know Ah *can* work an' aw – wi' my weapons as well as the coal. If they think this is me finished, now Ah'm mairrit and at toil again, they've backed a bliddy loser, so they have!' (NMC 130). His manliness must always be demonstrated. He is only powerful insofar as he is seen to have power. Masculinity requires the testimony of witnesses for its survival.

The cruel irony of Johnnie's hard man persona is revealed by the fact that his masculine identity is a function of what society expects *and* allows him to do and to be. He is never a man in and for himself, but is instead overwhelmed by the momentum of the Razor King myth he has helped to create. During a dance in Cathedral Street, for example, he deliberately antagonises another hard man named McLatchie. A 'bloody affray' ensues during which Johnnie is knocked down, kicked in the face and besieged by McLatchie's followers (NMC 134). His face is now disfigured, and his reputation as Razor King soars. Fiction is rapidly taking the place of fact. The dance hall fight, which had been caused only because Johnnie was drunk and on the prowl for trouble of any kind, inspires the collective imagination of the Gorbals: 'The tale of the big "rammy" had reached Crown

⁹⁹ Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* 79.

Street long before Razor King' (NMC 135). Neighbours add fuel to Johnnie's mythology:

The neighbours had already told [Lizzie] how Razor King had marched into the hall at the head of his "division" and deliberately sought out and challenged the biggest fighter in all the Townhead crowd. The story grew with the telling.

(NMC 135)

As the narrator tells us, however, 'Johnnie had neither known nor cared whom he chose for his adversary. He picked the first likely fellow in his path' (NMC 135). Only Johnnie is aware of the truth about himself – he had overestimated his own power. His humiliation at having been defeated re-opens the old wound of fear. Once again he is worried that people will see behind his façade (NMC 135).

Johnnie's fear of losing his Razor King title makes him declare his intention to 'settle his accounts' with McLatchie (NMC 136). The tension in the slums begins to mount. As the narrator points out, 'A great gang battle seemed inevitable,' and indeed McLatchie challenges Johnnie Stark to a bare-fisted fight on Glasgow Green (NMC 147). As he stands waiting for his enemy in the Green, Johnnie gives himself over to the hard man mythos in a moment of combined terror and exhilaration:

For he was Razor King, the leader of his imposing "division", a man outstanding among his fellows, someone totally different from the ordinary. Soon that crowd would be cheering him, yelling his title, mad with excitement to see him win. Ay, by God! He was different from the rest of them and he'd show them; he'd show them! He'd *show* them!

(NMC 149)

Johnnie's fear of being 'ordinary' strips him of his humanity. He is an animal, a weapon and a machine all at once. His lips part in a 'wolfish grin,' his mouth snaps shut 'like a trap' (NMC 150). He rushes at McLatchie with his 'bullet head tucked into his chest' (NMC 150). He is strong and ferocious, his 'capacity to take punishment' allowing him to bear the 'whirlwind' of blows from his opponent (NMC 150-51). He obliterates McLatchie, crushing his face with his boot, and kicking at his body (NMC 151). The crowd surrounding the fighting men becomes a mob. Johnnie draws his razors and

ploughs through his maddened congregation, his eyes 'glittering insanely and his bleeding lips were parted in an animal snarl' (NMC 152).

Ironically, the negation of Johnnie's humanity by the Razor King myth keeps pace with a nagging self-awareness. In a rare moment of honesty and eloquence which surprises his brother Peter, Johnnie articulates his reasons for being a hard man:

But let me tell *you* something, Peter lad. You think I'm Razor King and can never be anything else. You think you're hellova clever and I'm a mug. Well, there's more than one kind of mug. I've seen your kind before – plenty of them, likely fellas, goin' to toil every day, kissin' the boss's backside when he throws them a good word; readin' books and newspapers; winchin' brainy bit of stuffs wi' good clothes over a duff figure; keepin' aff the booze, talkin' and walkin' and dressin' and mebbe spewin' like a bliddy bourgeois, and dead sure, every one of them, that they're going to get on in the world.

(NMC 113)

Here is the reason behind the razors. Johnnie's decision to be a hoodlum is based on a conscious, reasoned analysis of his own low position in a classed society. An identity based on violence derives from his realistic assessment of the available alternatives:

What happens to them aw? They get married and they have kids. An' the wages doesny grow with the family. An' they take to drink a little later instead of sooner. An' the shop shuts or the yard shuts down or there's a bliddy strike. An' there they go, back to the dung heap, haudin' up the street corners, drawin' their money from the parish, an' keepin' awa oot of the hoose all day, awa frae the auld wife's tongue and the kids that go crawlin' and messin' aroon the floor.

(NMC 113)

Johnnie is Razor King because he does not want to be a working-class man. The working class are, to his mind, the victims of an exploitative system. The criminal, on the other hand – the dehumanised, ultra-masculine monster – has a chance of success: 'Tell me this: are they no' *aw* gangsters who win in this stinkin' world?' (NMC 114).

Johnnie's destruction at the close of No Mean City is an effect of his adherence to the self-defeating script of masculinity *and* his concurrent rebellion against the class system. As he has pursued his criminal career, the remaining shreds of his sense of manhood have been gradually sliced away. Each success as Razor King entails Johnnie's failure as a

man. On the outside, Johnnie is powerful, virile and indomitable; inside he is sterile and soft. He is overwhelmed by the feelings of inferiority he has allowed to fester behind his fiction of maleness. He cannot ignore the evidence that he is literally and figuratively losing face. Even Lizzie seems to be surpassing him in hardness, 'out to be more of a gangster than himself' (NMC 242). Johnnie's attempts to keep his hard man persona intact are futile. He is crumbling inside:

Frequent battles and repeated wounds had had their effect upon Johnnie; prison had hardened and coarsened him; heavy drinking had dulled his intellect, and unemployment, which he had made no serious effort to escape, had, nevertheless, lowered his morale.

(NMC 255)

The Gorbals now respects him for his ruffianism and little else. Johnnie senses the difference, and is faced by his worst fear – 'Once, in a horrified moment of self-doubt, he asked himself whether he wasn't "ordinary" after all' (NMC 256). He goes through the motions of bare-fisted fights and pub raids just to keep his image alive: 'There wis a time once...when Ah had an idea we should try to *be* something, Lizzie an' me...Ah can fight...but it seems Ah can do damn aw else. Now Ah've just chucked up trying to *be* something an' Ah'm going tae *do* something instead' (NMC 298). Following his release from one of many stints in prison, however, Johnnie is chased by younger, more ambitious hooligans down Crown Street and beaten senseless (NMC 310, 312). The Razor King dies the following morning, a victim of his own rebellion against working-class masculinity.

Through the character of Johnnie Stark, then, McArthur and Long demonstrate how masculinity is an ultimately self-defeating category of identity; coupled with the shame of being lower-class, the pursuit of ultra-masculine ideals of power, strength and respectability becomes impossible to fulfil. As Schoene-Harwood suggests,

[Masculinity] ultimately represents a normative fantasy whose superheroic aspects condemn boys and men to live in a permanent state of paranoid uncertainty about

their personal adequacy and competence.¹⁰⁰

Johnnie Stark's failure is a function of his inability to resist the dictates of both his gender and his class designation; his humanity is defeated by the monstrosity of acting out – of *performing* – working-class masculinity itself.

It should be noted that it is to McArthur and Long's credit that their novel provides – through the character of Johnnie Stark in particular – such a perceptive presentation of hardened Glaswegian masculinity as 'performance.' *No Mean City*'s emphasis on the performative nature of the hard man persona has contributed to the text's status as icon; the power and depth of the book's exploration of the Glasgow hard man should therefore be seen in a positive rather than simply a negative light. In addition to a close examination of masculinity, however, McArthur and Long offer a remarkably perceptive presentation of women in the Gorbals; the novel's representations of the subjective experiences of working-class women are insightful, sensitive and convincing in their realism.

Women in *No Mean City*

McArthur and Long's examination of class and gender does not limit itself to exploring the conditions which lead to the formation of Glasgow hard men. Femininity, as much as masculinity, is examined as a damaged cultural construct; female identity too is bound up with the shame of poverty, fear of being a nobody, and violence. Women's self-definition, perhaps even more so than the men's, is a function of vulnerability. The class system, coupled with gender inequalities, turns working-class women into perpetual victims, conditions which some of them – like Lizzie Stark – resist at their own risk. On one level, then, *No Mean City* fulfils one of the aims of feminism, in that it – along with all forms of

¹⁰⁰ Schoene-Harwood, *Writing Men* 48.

feminist enquiry – exposes ‘the mechanisms upon which patriarchal society rests and by which it is maintained, with the ultimate aim of transforming social relations’.¹⁰¹ This is not to say that McArthur and Long had a feminist agenda in mind when they collaborated on their novel, but the text’s focus on the combined effects of class and gender – added to the references to gender as a performance demanding witnesses for its affirmation – suggests that both masculinity and femininity are viewed as malleable social constructions, not natural outcomes of biological determinism. Women in No Mean City are shown to be the victims of a definition of femininity which is based on self-defeating, but entrenched ideas about womanhood. As the narrator remarks: ‘In Gorbals, as elsewhere, girls are brought up in the belief that marriage is the natural destiny of woman’ (NMC 87). This acknowledgement and implied criticism of the supposedly ‘natural’ connection between womanhood and marriage indicates the authors’ consciousness of gender as an effect of nurture – a social construct that girls feel compelled to follow. As the narrator goes on to say, few of the women are ‘strong-minded enough to ignore’ the social pressure to get married (NMC 87). The implication is that women (and men) are coerced into accepting harmful gender roles.

No Mean City shows us that the obstacles faced by working-class women are many. The women of the tenements, like women elsewhere in society, simply do not earn as much money as men; their financial dependency makes them easy targets. Husbands can withhold their wages from their wives, forcing the women into a constant state of anxiety and submissiveness. Women have yet another strike against them – their physicality. Women are weaker than men and they can get pregnant. Men can easily terrorise women with actual or threatened violence. Having children burdens working-class women in a different way from their middle-class counterparts, or men from any class. The need to

¹⁰¹ ‘Feminist criticism, Anglo-American,’ Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms, ed. Irena R. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 39.

feed and protect themselves and their children forces working-class women to compromise their own safety and health. They put themselves in the firing line, using their bodies and tongues as a defence against their lovers', husbands' and fathers' violence. Although McArthur and Long do not compare the experiences and subjectivity of middle-class women with those of women from the lower rungs of British society, their awareness of working-class womanhood as a *specific categorisation of femininity* not only challenges the sexist view of women as an undifferentiated mass, but also takes into account how social class limits women's agency.¹⁰² *No Mean City* attends to both the materialistic circumstances of women's experience of poverty as well as to the interiority of their subjectivity.

The first female character we meet is Mrs. Stark, a representation of mature working-class womanhood. The image is a bleak one. Mrs. Stark is a broken woman, faded and silent, resigned to a life of endless drudgery, childbearing and brutality. Her personality is trapped in a cycle of day-to-day survival tactics; her energy is devoted to keeping herself and her family alive. The flat is infested with bugs; she relentlessly smears the woodwork with paraffin oil to keep them at bay (NMC 9). Her husband is violent and selfish; she keeps quiet, feeds him first, avoids asking for money, and buys his beer (NMC 11,25). She also tries to protect her children. When Johnnie is lying in bed on Sunday morning, she urges him to leave the flat before his father gets home (NMC 25). She wants to keep her children safe, fed and respectable. When she discovers that Johnnie and Maggie have had sex, she is at first shocked and 'tongue-tied' (NMC 27). She attacks Maggie, pulling her by the hair and slapping her until Johnnie intervenes (NMC 27). Her anger is laced with fear for Johnnie: 'You dirty little bitch,' she stormed. 'You canny get a man outside, an' so you wad tak' ma Johnnie' (NMC 27). Johnnie is part of Mrs. Stark's identity as a

¹⁰² Warhol and Herndl, *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism* 833.

woman; as his mother, she sees him as an extension of herself, an embodied vindication of her own defeat. Mr. Stark's return home is yet another threat. As he stands drunkenly in the doorway, she hands him her string bag of beer bottles to take his attention away from the young people: 'John,' she quavered, 'Ah wis thinking you wad be glad o' a drink o' beer' (NMC 28). When Mr. Stark grabs his wife and demands 'Whit's gaun on here?', she remains silent, refusing to betray her son. He punches her in the mouth (NMC 29). While Stark is thrashing at Johnnie's unconscious body with his belt, she interferes again: 'And then the mother intervened. She flung herself upon her husband's uplifted arm, and clung to it, an elderly woman, not strong, but roused to the final defiance' (NMC 30). Stark hits her on the head with a full bottle of beer; when she recovers from a fractured skull, she refuses to give evidence against her husband in court (NMC 30-31). She depends on Stark's unemployment money; the survival of her children is a function of putting up with his abuse.

After Mr. Stark's imprisonment and death, Johnnie becomes the man of the house. His survival must be ensured; Mrs. Stark panders to him, tries to guide him towards a better life. When Mary Hay spreads the rumour of her impending marriage to Johnnie, Mrs. Stark wants to discuss the matter, but is too frightened of her increasingly aggressive son. As the narrator points out, 'he was so much the head of the house at that time that none of them dared to comment on it' (NMC 41). She encourages Johnnie's relationship with Mary Hay by suggesting timidly that she likes 'yon lass o' the Hays'; Johnnie's grunt ends the conversation, and Mrs. Stark falls silent again, string bag in hand (NMC 41).

Mrs. Stark's love for her children does not prevent her favourite – Peter – from being ashamed of her (NMC 73). From Johnnie's perspective, his mother means 'very little' (NMC 75). But she continues to take care of them. Poverty and unhappiness grind her down. Peter notices his mother's suffering without realising its cause, 'She wasn't very

well that night and he thought how old and tired she looked, sitting by the fire with her worn hands still in her lap' (NMC 71). Despite her own physical weakness, Mrs. Stark continues to protect her sons. When Johnnie enrages Peter by teasing him about Isobel, she 'intervenes quietly from her folded-up bedchair' (NMC 74). After Peter strides out of the flat, she sighs and timidly asks Johnnie to leave his younger brother alone: 'Johnnie,' she whispered. 'whit for dae ye go on at Peter?' (NMC 75). Part of Mrs. Stark's motive in keeping her sons on track is based on self-interest. She needs them. When Johnnie tells her that he has been laid off from work, she is anxious and starts to cry (NMC 75).

Mrs. Stark is caught in a quandary. She is ensnared by her dependence on her sons. At the same time, as a mother she wants them to survive. She is torn between her own financial and physical vulnerability, and her realisation that she does not have the power to control the course of their lives. She allows Peter to leave home and live with the better-class McGilverys because, as she says to him, 'If you think you're gaun to better yourself...you should go and stay wi' them' (NMC 86). Although her voice is 'expressionless' and calm, her hand shakes as she lifts the kettle, and she hides her face by turning to the stove (NMC 86). Mrs. Stark even stifles her own qualms about Johnnie's razor-fighting career, because of her desire that he rise above the crowd. She looks away from the 'weapons' stuck in the pockets of his waistcoat, and stares out of the window, 'her mind busy with anxious, worried thoughts' (NMC 93). She does not want Johnnie to be a gangster, because it threatens his survival; at the same time, 'living in that home in that society,' where working-class men are given very few opportunities to improve themselves in positive ways, 'even Mrs Stark had a kind of fearful pride in her son's reputation. He was a bad lad, but at least he was out of the ordinary; no rank-and-file gangster but a real "Razor King"' (NMC 93). Mrs. Stark inadvertently encourages her son to be a criminal; she guides him towards his eventual destruction by not interfering. His

notoriety gives her a feeling of importance. His success is her success, even if it is at the expense of his and her own sense of morality and decency.

Mrs. Stark is dogged by illness. Even her self-centred sons notice that she is failing. Johnnie is worried, 'They tell me she's takin' an awfu' lot of medicine, Peter' (NMC 192). When Peter and Isobel make a rare visit to see Mrs. Stark, they find one of the sisters (Mary) alone and worried. Mrs. Stark is missing. Mary informs Peter that worry about Johnnie's involvement in gangsterism is exacerbating her illness: 'she's made up her mind Johnnie's on the road to a bad end' (NMC 195). Still Mrs. Stark does not return home; she is found dead of heart failure in one of the shared tenement toilets (NMC 197). Her degradation is complete – a crowd of gawking neighbours gathers round the door, 'the group outside the closet could just make out the figure of Mrs Stark huddled forward with her grey hair falling over her knees' (NMC 197). Mrs. Stark's death enrages Johnnie and Peter, but they hide their grief and guilt under hard, emotionless expressions, still concerned that they be seen as weak or sentimental (NMC 198-99). Even beyond death, Mrs. Stark's concern for her children is evident; she has kept up her insurance payments for a 'respectable' funeral, so that the ceremony will be 'to the credit' of her family (NMC 199). She covers the indignity of her death with a public display of decorum so as not to shame her family even further than she already has.

Mrs. Stark represents the gloomy destiny of most women in the Gorbals; her life is the status quo of working-class femininity and the image of her lonely and undignified death hangs over the textual representations of the younger generation of women. As such, No Mean City devotes most of its attention to showing *how* women end up in Mrs. Stark's situation, despite their attempts to resist the combined forces of gender and class ideology. The narrator discerns the origins of working-class women's victimisation in the feelings of inferiority passed on to them through their upbringing, noting for instance that girls who

reach their late twenties unmarried are openly disparaged as being unable to 'get a man' (NMC 87). He continues, 'Most of them feel their "inferiority" so acutely that they hasten to wed anybody obtainable, reckless of the consequences and definitely preferring a husband whom they despise or dislike to no husband at all' (NMC 87). For example, Maggie Stark, Johnnie's cousin, has very little confidence in herself because she has been told that she is both unattractive and unwanted. Johnnie takes advantage of this vulnerability: 'Maggie's *always* better oot o' the hoose...an she wad be away oot noo if there was ever a lad wad look at her twice' (NMC 25). The knowledge that men consider her ugly hurts Maggie and makes her desperate; she takes whatever attention they *do* give her. She has sex with Johnnie because he gives her a compliment while she is having a wash: 'Ye're no' a bad built lassie, Maggie...Ay, an' you're a big girl an aw!' (NMC 26). At first, Maggie thinks she is yet again being set up for a fall, but the boy continues, 'Ah'm no' kiddin'. You're right bonny the noo' (NMC 26). The narrator explains that Maggie, because she is 'undesired in her eighteenth year, was the victim of an inferiority complex peculiar to the daughters of the slums' (NMC 26). Johnnie's frank admiration of her body, however, gives her a sense of self-worth; seeing herself through his eyes as beautiful makes her feel that she is beautiful. His attention makes her grateful. She throws herself at him, and they have sex (NMC 26).

Even beautiful girls think little of themselves, and will give sex to men they think of as desirable. The potential power of Mary Hay's beauty, for instance, is undercut by her class – she is keenly aware of being at the bottom of the social ladder: 'She was, quite definitely, "one of the hairy" – a hatless slum girl conscious of her station in life' (NMC 37). Mary's lack of respectability has been conferred upon her by the norms of the classed and gendered society in which her sense of self has developed. Her identity has been forged at one extreme end of a 'spectrum of possible femininities'; as part of an

'underclass of foul-mouthed slatterns,' her character fulfils the stereotype of the 'hairy,' a social designation that could be viewed as the female equivalent of the hard man classification for working-class masculinity.¹⁰³ Certainly, like Johnnie Stark, Mary sees relationships with the opposite sex as a source of potential power. When Johnnie joins Mary for a fish supper, she is thrilled that he has shown preference for her. She 'turned her head this way and that, hoping that other people might see her with her escort' (NMC 35). She wants to be seen as a desired woman. As with masculinity, then, femininity requires witnesses. When Johnnie asks her out, Mary is overjoyed. This is proof of her value as a female:

She was delighted. She would have paid for him almost as gladly, but it was no small achievement to go to any dance as Johnnie Stark's "bit of stuff". For Johnnie was known in the Gorbals as not yet taking any interest in women. Some of the younger men even quoted his contemptuous comments on the folly of marriage and the unwisdom of getting tied down when lassies "ready to oblige" were ten a penny.
(NMC 36)

Mary sizes Johnnie up as a potential husband. He is handsome, respected and in work. She figures that he will reflect well on *her*; what she perceives as his superiority as a man will increase her value as a woman: 'She knew, above all, that if she could catch him she would be making something of a social success' (NMC 37). So she lets him have sex with her (despite her misgivings), and afterwards tries to extract a promise of marriage: "Johnnie, ye'll no' leave me?" (NMC 38-40). The next day, she broadcasts her news around the Gorbals. She now feels worthy: 'She wanted quite definitely to boast of her triumph. To have caught young Johnnie Stark was an achievement for a girl of her class' (NMC 41). She fuels Johnnie's notoriety. After Johnnie beats up Gus MacLean, she establishes Johnnie's reputation as Razor King (NMC 52). The narrator clarifies: 'The slum girls foster the vanity of the slum men. They shine in the reflected glory of their

¹⁰³ David Glover and Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 17.

protectors' ruffianism' (NMC 52). By boosting the idea of Johnnie's prowess, Mary hopes to make herself seem more valuable to other people. In turn, she encourages Johnnie's brutality.

When Mary falls pregnant, Johnnie refuses to marry her; she is devastated by his rejection. To vindicate herself, she tries to humiliate him in public. This is her only recourse as a working-class girl: 'For a slum lass in such case there is little hope of revenge except by a "sherricking"' (NMC 60). Outside the dance hall, she attacks Johnnie's new girlfriend Ella McBride, calling her a 'dirty whore,' pulling her hair, tearing her blouse, and slapping her face (NMC 62-63). She then head-butts Johnnie. Her ultimate aim, however, is to agitate the crowd against Johnnie. When he punches her in the stomach, she calls him a 'dirty pig' for trying to 'murder what's in therr' (NMC 63). She then accuses him of having taken advantage of her, and suggests that he likes 'wee lassies' (NMC 63). Johnnie knocks her out, however, and the sherricking does not succeed in undercutting Johnnie's standing in the Gorbals. On the other hand, her involvement with Johnnie makes Mary seem more valuable to other men. Joe Kendles proposes soon after the sherricking, and she agrees because she is pregnant and man-less (NMC 66). As Big Mourn, one of Johnnie's cronies, remarks, 'Being Razor King's girl wull get Mary a man, all right' (NMC 54). The narrator agrees: 'The mistress of a razor king has become a somebody. She has been lifted out of the rank and file. There will always be some obscure fellow flattered to wed the great man's cast-off' (NMC 54).

It is Lizzie Ramsay, however, whose characterisation dominates No Mean City's consideration of working-class femininity. Through her marriage to Johnnie Stark, and as his gangster career develops, Lizzie becomes the quintessential 'hairy,' that disreputable type of blue-collar womanhood marked by violence, sexual promiscuity and outspokenness. Like the 'hard man' ideal, the 'hairy' image seems to promise a woman

freedom from the restrictions of traditional femininity – certainly, there is a superficial sense of free expression in the supposedly slutty eschewal of hair-coverings. Lizzie’s transformation from respectable to unrespectable working-class femininity, however, is seen as a fall from grace throughout the text. At the beginning of the novel, Lizzie is a shy, neatly dressed girl who plays the violin. Her family is relatively well-off, and she lives in one of the better streets of the Gorbals. She is proud of herself because she takes weekly music lessons, but wears long skirts because she is deeply ashamed of the fact that her legs are not straight.

Despite her intellectual abilities, Lizzie’s strength of character is undermined by a lack of self-confidence brought about by the mockery of men. Like all women, her worth in men’s eyes is based on her suitability for sex, and she is shown to defer to the male gaze, despite her later attempts to free herself from the implications of being considered sexually desirable – that is, wifehood and motherhood. So when Johnnie saves Lizzie from being harassed by a group of boys near the beginning of the novel, she is meekly grateful, and expresses her admiration by flattering the boy’s ego: ‘It wis a sight tae watch they Plantation boys running away’ (NMC 17-18). Johnnie is attracted to Lizzie, but does not want to appear soft. So he humiliates her by shouting back ‘Away to your fiddlin’, Bandy!’ (NMC 18). Lizzie blushes and hurries away, publicly shamed.

It is not until several years later that Johnnie asks her out. Even then, however, Lizzie is not yet considered one of the ‘hairy,’ because she dresses well and wears a hat. Johnnie, on the other hand, is searching for a wife ‘who would do him credit,’ and Lizzie’s ‘better class’ appearance makes her desirable (NMC 89). Lizzie is still ashamed of her legs, but is becoming dangerously resigned to her supposed inferiority as a woman:

She could never forget her legs. Johnnie, leaving her after the rescue all those years before, had flung the word “Bandy!” at her as he staggered away. She remembered them uncomfortably, but without bitterness because the taunt was so familiar.

(NMC 89)

When Johnnie glances down at her skirt and laughs, she thinks he is trying to mock her (NMC 90). In keeping with traditional notions of femininity, Lizzie envisions redemption for her damaged self through marriage and motherhood. The narrator informs us that Lizzie is 'definitely on the look out for a young man' (NMC 90). She is attracted to Johnnie primarily because he is good-looking:

To Lizzie the fact that Razor King was well made and straight of limb mattered even more than his notoriety in Gorbals...She wanted to marry, and morbidly sensitive about her own legs, she was haunted by the fear of having many children who would have rickets and such misshapen limbs that they wouldn't be able to go about unaided.

(NMC 90)

Lizzie wants Johnnie so that her babies will be strong and healthy, and so that her inadequacy as a female might be overcome. So she addresses him as 'Razor King,' which appeals to his growing vanity (NMC 91). The seeds of Lizzie's defeat have been sown by society's expectations of physical perfection in women; male mockery, as a form of verbal abuse, makes her eager to please in other ways.

There is a striking similarity between Lizzie and Johnnie's characters, which has less to do with gender than it has to do with class. Like Johnnie, Lizzie uses the Razor King myth to make herself feel superior within the parameters of her peer group. During their first date, she looks about her at other young people and thinks, 'She felt that they were nobodies in comparison with Razor King and herself' (NMC 96). When Johnnie asks her out again, she is relieved and grateful. She accepts his proposal of marriage. The next day, Johnnie is presented with a new set of razors by a group of his followers. Lizzie stands with the Razor King in the midst of the cheering crowd, 'blushing and exalted, on his arm' (NMC 103). The couple marry and move to a new apartment. Although she wants her husband to continue working, she revels in his growing reputation as a gangster: 'She liked to feel that he was top dog among all the Gorbals fighting-men. She enjoyed

the notoriety he had won' (NMC 130). When Johnnie returns home one night with a 'disfigured face,' Lizzie screams, but then '[a] strange pride stirred in her heart as she stared at her husband's wounded and bandaged face' (NMC 135). Lizzie wants to share in Johnnie's notoriety.

Lizzie is similar in many ways to her gangster husband. Like Johnnie, she is torn between two forms of 'respectability.' At the beginning of her marriage, she enjoys her 'social superiority' to the women of Crown Street, but starts to feel self-conscious (NMC 137). She is also distressed by her family's 'scarcely veiled sneers' at Johnnie (NMC 137). Lizzie decides to throw her lot in with the Razor King:

Johnnie and me are as well-doing as any of them at home and maybe making more money! Ay, an' there's more people has heard of Razor King than ever heard of the old man or any of them. They don't think Ah'm good enough for the like of them in Mathieson Street! Well, Ah'll *show* them. Ah'll not put on any airs. But Ah'll go on making good money just the same, and Razor King'll not lose his reputation, not if I can help it!

(NMC 137)

Lizzie devotes herself to enlarging her role as a gangster's woman. She begins dressing like a 'hairy,' with a shawl and no hat (NMC 137). She encourages Johnnie to fight Big McLatchie, starts swearing, and pushes herself forward as an accomplice in his pub raids by telling him where to hide some stolen whisky (NMC 143). She is determined to share in Johnnie's power: 'She had married Razor King, a fighting man, and, by God! She meant to be the wife of the greatest fighter in the tenements!' (NMC 144). Even Johnnie is shocked by the change in Lizzie. He realises that her 'feverish anxiety' to make him a more notorious gangster derives from her feelings of inferiority in having married 'beneath her' (NMC 241-42). He understands that she wants to compensate for feeling low-class by being 'more of a gangster than himself' (NMC 242).

Lizzie's marriage to Johnnie gives her an ambivalent status amongst the working class. She begins losing her friends, and notices women at work looking at her 'askance' (NMC

155). She realises that she has achieved a similar form of notoriety to her husband: 'she was no longer the Lizzie Ramsay they had known, but, rather, the isolated, admired-despised and alarming wife of the Razor King' (NMC 156). In a sense, Lizzie is now identified with Johnnie Stark. She enjoys the 'fruits of their reputation as warriors in the district' (NMC 156). She pushes Johnnie in his gangster career to maintain her own growing sense of importance:

The truth was that she always thrilled to the knowledge of her husband's sheer male strength and ferocity. It was for that that she had married him; for that that she had completely lost touch with her own better-class family; for that that she was always ready now to go one better than Johnnie himself.

(NMC 179)

She joins Johnnie in drinking and street fights (NMC 180). Her fellow-workers are frightened. Although she knows that people think she is a low-life, there are nonetheless 'no open sneers because it wasn't safe to offend the wife of a razor king' (NMC 179). Lizzie's legs no longer seem to bother her; she has overcome her sense of inferiority by becoming a gangster herself.

Lizzie is plagued by another kind of humiliation – she does not have a child. Getting herself pregnant becomes a new obsession: 'Motherhood seemed somehow necessary to her self-respect' (NMC 181). She is still worried about what other people think of her as a woman: 'She felt that a baby boy would justify her even in the opinion of the neighbours' (NMC 181). Johnnie accuses Lizzie of being barren, and sneers contemptuously at her: 'Ah'll have to be the father o' some other wee lassie's kid some o' they days, so Ah wull!' (NMC 188). When she finds Johnnie in bed with another woman, Lizzie decides to have an affair with Frank Smith, a married man she has had her eye on (NMC 201). Frank is a foreman at the bakery where she works, and she admires what she sees as his social superiority. She begins to wear a hat again, declaring to Johnnie, 'I want to be the way I used to be,' and becomes the foreman's mistress (NMC 206, 208).

Although Lizzie is enjoying the company of what she sees as a steady, well-off gentleman, she still takes pride in Johnnie's gangster career. She is 'keenly interested in Razor King and his doings. She *still* wanted her husband to cut a figure in their world' (NMC 210). She continues to extract a sense of self-importance from her marriage, and boasts about her 'kudos' as a gangster's woman (NMC 210). She keeps up the appearance of being Johnnie's devoted wife by preparing his food and keeping his house clean. In addition, she supplies Johnnie with a succession of live-in lovers, which keeps him satisfied and her free to pursue her new relationship (NMC 216). She eventually becomes pregnant, but tries to soothe Johnnie's feelings of humiliation by encouraging his ambition to be a more powerful criminal (NMC 238-39). Like her husband, Lizzie seems to pursue two roles simultaneously: she likes being both a gangster's woman and a respectable mother. As the narrator comments, 'there was a double reason for Lizzie's inferiority complex. She wanted a baby, and no baby came. She fell in love with Johnnie, and decided to marry him chiefly because she thought him a perfect male' (NMC 242). There is a possible final irony in the revelation that hard man Johnnie cannot father a child – a deliberate insinuation of his ultimate impotence, despite his apparent virility.

Lizzie eggs Johnnie on towards his destruction because she feels that his Razor King status makes up for her infidelity and pregnancy by another man. 'Perhaps,' the narrator remarks, 'she felt that she owed him something for being so reasonable about Frank and the "breadsnapper"' (NMC 258). Lizzie is devastated when the child she gives birth to dies. When Johnnie attacks and wounds Frank Smith after the failed blackmailing attempt, Lizzie – already in despair about her dead baby – is grief-stricken, although at first she does not know that it was Johnnie who has razored her lover. When Frank tells her that Johnnie is responsible for his injuries, she is enraged, but is still 'eager to defend his name and reputation' as Razor King (NMC 281-82). She moves to a new street in the

Gorbals while Johnnie is in jail, but notices that her neighbours seem less respectful: 'she felt that they were almost *too* friendly, and the faint trace of patronage in their manner infuriated her' (NMC 283). She eagerly awaits Johnnie's release, 'he'll show them when he comes oot!' (NMC 283). At the same time, she maintains her relationship with Frank Smith, looking upon him 'almost as her husband' (NMC 284). Lizzie falls pregnant again, but Frank dies of a sudden illness. Lizzie finds herself the object of contempt once again. Frank's daughter looks her 'up and down with a hard stare' (NMC 287). When Johnnie returns home from prison, she cannot ignore his disdain (NMC 292). So once again, she pushes her husband onward into fresh exploits as a gangster:

Since Frank Smith had died, Lizzie knew that she had fallen out of esteem. People were actually rather sorry for her. It made her blood boil to be looked down on by the "scum" that hadn't dared to argue when Johnnie was home. *They* thought he was finished – Razor King and his wife, too.

(NMC 292)

During a bare-fisted fight between Johnnie and the boyfriend of a girl he has raped, Lizzie joins in the fray, and the couple are acclaimed by the Gorbals once again (NMC 293). Lizzie continues to dress respectably, gets a new job, and takes care of her baby daughter (NMC 298). Like Johnnie, she is trying to keep up the appearance of being successful at everything.

When Johnnie is jailed for causing yet another dance hall battle, Lizzie worries that his reputation as Razor King is waning. As she exclaims, 'Ah'm thinking he'll be forgotten by the time he comes oot' (NMC 304). She is also concerned about Johnnie's mental and physical well-being: 'He's lucky, in a way, to be whole wi' aw the bashing and abuse he's had. An' for damn aw when you think of it, Polly!' (NMC 303). She then makes a speech:

Whit does it matter to the heid yins what happens in Gorbals or Bridgeton or Garngad or Anderston, or in any ither bliddy slum in Glasgow for that matter, so long as we keep quiet? Do they care hoo we live or whit we dae or whit kind of derry hoose we have? No bliddy fears! They need wakin' up once in a while, and

it's fellows like Razor King that makes them remember we're alive.
(NMC 304)

Here is Lizzie's moment of insight. Through Johnnie, she thinks she is rebelling against an oppressive class system. She knows that it is a futile enterprise, that being a criminal is not a viable way to challenge the status quo, and that it leads to self-destruction; on the other hand, she thinks that notoriety could attract the attention of the upper classes, the 'heid yins.' The novel's thesis is at its most eloquent here: the working classes are socially invisible, and resentment against being nobodies can build up to social disruption.

Despite Lizzie's insight (or perhaps, because of it), she begins a new affair, this time with a fellow-worker named Harry Hay. She uses the money Harry gives her to buy whisky and red wine. Harry hides his relationship with Lizzie from his wife and family; Lizzie therefore cannot use him to make herself seem more important. She is nothing but a dirty secret, alcoholic and 'tearful' (NMC 306). Her new lodger, Sadie Bell, despises Lizzie, and mocks her behind her back: 'the girl had her own lover up to visit her, and they laughed together as she mimicked Lizzie's tedious stories over the red wine' (NMC 306). Lizzie has lost her standing, first as Razor King's wife, and as a woman. She dies in childbirth some months after Johnnie is attacked in Crown Street. The dead baby symbolises the ultimate futility of her ambitions to rise above the mass. The final irony is when Lizzie's parents adopt her daughter: they 'thought it only right that they should see to its upbringing' (NMC 313). The cycle has begun again.

As with its depictions of the Glasgow hard man, then, No Mean City's representations of Glaswegian working-class femininity are penetrating and insightful. It is a tribute to the artistic construction of McArthur and Long's novel that it allows for such thorough and nuanced examinations of class and gender as I have conducted here. The novel's frequent emphasis on the performative nature of the hard man and hairy gender paradigms, as expressed through the stark realism of McArthur and Long's narrative style, articulates a

subtle and complex understanding of the role of gender and class in the formation of identity.

No Mean City is a disturbing and pessimistic novel, but is at the same time a very honest appraisal of class and gender ideology in action. McArthur and Long's portraits of individual working-class characters using one another for personal, financial and/or social improvement are scathing. The dog-eat-dog world of the Gorbals, however, is not simply a criticism of, or even an explanation for the existence of unscrupulous slum dwellers trying to get above themselves by standing on one another's necks. The novel's analysis is more ambitious – and subversive – than this. The argument underlying No Mean City is that adherence to the British class system coalesces with the acceptance of abusive and exploitative gender relations, producing the social and economic conditions for the development of damaged working-class identity. The Gorbals is a microcosm: its pecking order mentality reflects the hierarchical structure of modern British society; the scramble for and veneration of power in the tenements reproduces and reinforces, at the lowest level, the internal mechanisms of an entrenched caste system. Mutually abusive gender relations in No Mean City are also indicative of an endemic, rather than localised, social malady. The men and women of the Gorbals destroy themselves and each other not because they are working-class, but because they inherit and replicate definitions of blue-collar masculinity and femininity which guarantee inequality, victimisation and sadism.

No Mean City has left Glasgow and Scotland with a problematic legacy. There are positive aspects, such as the use of the Glaswegian vernacular; the graphic and unidealised view of human relations, sexual and otherwise; the skilful stylistic blend of documentary realism, sensationalistic gangster fiction and progressive social propaganda. Further to questions of style, however, there is the authors' socio-political agenda: the theory that class and gender relations amongst working-class people mirror those of society at large

has been interrogated in many novels and short stories since the book was published, despite critical protestations against the importance and desirability of No Mean City's shadow of influence. McArthur and Long's novel established a nexus of working-class and gender issues that would become crucial to the Glasgow novel as the twentieth century progressed. Specifically, No Mean City played a major role in the masculinisation of Glaswegian fiction. It could be argued that before No Mean City, and due to the work of such well-known women writers as Catherine Carswell and O. Douglas, the Glasgow novel was to a certain extent a relatively gender-neutral genre (or at least less male-dominated) with a predominantly middle-class viewpoint. After No Mean City, however, women writers were outnumbered by men. As I will demonstrate in Chapters Three, Four and Five, the Glasgow novel became more masculine and working-class in focus and perspective. With some notable exceptions – such as Dot Allan and Margaret Thomson Davis – this state of affairs was not to change very much until the 1980s onwards, when female authors emerged in more appreciable numbers, and indeed with more critical recognition of their contributions to the development of Glasgow fiction. Chapter Six – which is devoted to Glasgow writing by women – will reveal how in recent decades the gender imbalance in Glaswegian literature is well on its way to being remedied.

Chapter Three

The Debate Begins: The Influence of *No Mean City* between 1935 and 1970

The immediate impact of No Mean City can be discerned in the media; newspaper reviews and articles in Glasgow fed the scandal surrounding the book's disclosure of the city's supposed evil. The book was condemned less for its literary failings, and more for its negative representations of working-class lifestyles and people. As Damer points out, 'a sense of outrage' erupted in 'middle-class Glasgow'.¹ The Glasgow Evening Citizen received complaints about the negative impact No Mean City would have on Glasgow's image. The Glasgow Corporation Libraries Committee excluded copies of the novel from local library shelves.² Some Glasgow bookshops boycotted No Mean City, and John Smith's was given orders 'that it was neither to be displayed nor promoted'.³ This negative publicity is an early indication of No Mean City's role as both a work of fiction and as an eventual sociocultural icon: notoriety would prove to be a large part of the novel's legacy to Glasgow and its writers. This chapter considers the shadow cast by No Mean City over a selection of Glasgow novels published between 1935 and 1970. The book's appearance marked a literary turning point in how the matter of Glaswegian working-class experience was portrayed in literature – hard realism without a heavy-handed socialist agenda; an emphasis on the interiority of blue-collar subjectivity noticeably lacking in most works of Glaswegian working-class fiction until the publication of No Mean City; the focus on the *criminal* underclasses as a subset of the proletariat. Indeed, the main thrust of No Mean City's impact, in terms of content, turns on the connections made in the novel between poverty and crime. McArthur and Long's theme – that participation in class ideology and mutually abusive gender relations can result in

¹ Seán Damer, 'No Mean Writer? The Curious Case of Alexander McArthur,' A Glasgow Collection: Essays in Honour of Joe Fisher, eds. Kevin McCarra and Hamish Whyte (Glasgow: Glasgow City Libraries, 1990) 28.

² Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 32.

³ Damer, 'No Mean Writer?' 33.

anti-social working-class identities – has been tackled by an increasing number of Glasgow writers over the decades.

This chapter limits its analysis to the following five novels: James Barke's Major Operation (1936), John McNeillie's Glasgow Keelie (1940), Edward Gaitens's Dance of the Apprentices (1948), Robin Jenkins's The Changeling (1958) and Bill McGhee's Cut and Run (1962). Glasgow Keelie and Cut and Run bear evidence of direct influence from McArthur and Long's novel in terms of style and content, and so are the most obvious inheritors of No Mean City's legacy in this chapter. Major Operation, as I will show, was Barke's attempt to *displace* the social and political impact of No Mean City, and as such can be seen as a criticism of McArthur and Long's book; besides being an important 1930s Glasgow novel in its own right, then, Major Operation is also an illustrative example of that part of my thesis which views No Mean City as a pressure against which many Glasgow authors write their fiction. There are other works which could be scoured for either direct or indirect evidence of No Mean City's influence – such as Alexander Trocchi's Thongs (1956), Clifford Hanley's Dancing in the Streets (1958), The Taste of Too Much (1960) and The Red Haired Bitch (1969), Hugh Munro's The Clydesiders (1961), and Robin Jenkins's A Very Scotch Affair (1968), amongst many others – but to provide a comprehensive overview would preclude in-depth analysis. Two additional considerations inspire the selection. The examination of No Mean City alongside works by Gaitens and Jenkins – two well-respected canonical writers – will help to undermine the divisions that are often made in literary criticism between popular and 'proper' literature. At the same time, unorthodox literary pairings such as these can be mutually illuminating. Gaitens's Dance of the Apprentices, as I will demonstrate, can be analysed as a subtle engagement with No Mean City's presentation of working-class masculinity and femininity. Jenkins's The Changeling, on the other hand, is the most unlikely of

McArthur and Long's inheritors in this particular selection; at the same time, however, the novel not only depicts working-class settings and characters in a similar way to No Mean City, but also extends the scope of the older novel by considering the involvement of the middle class in the perpetuation of class ideology. I wish to encourage the view that No Mean City, rather than being simply a book to discard or denigrate, should be seen as a vital part of the equipment for writers and critics of modern Scottish urban writing.

As Chapter Two demonstrated, No Mean City's influence on the style and content of modern Scottish urban fiction is usually either deplored or ignored. Studies of the Glasgow novel which either misconstrue or overlook the matter of No Mean City's literary influence are therefore incomplete. Despite the almost unanimous rejection of McArthur and Long's novel from serious consideration as a work of literature, however, there are critics who at least acknowledge the central importance of this book in understanding how Scottish urban fiction has developed throughout the last sixty-five years. Manfred Malzahn maintains that No Mean City is the prototypical tale of

a new kind of working-class hero who does not fight in solidarity with his comrades, who does not fight against exploitation for anything in particular, who does not fight for anyone or anything, not even himself; a hero who fights because it is the only way of life he can choose to lead.⁴

McArthur and Long's representations of working-class people deviated from those of the majority of Glasgow novels of the 1930s. Many urban books written during the Scottish Renaissance characterise working-class men and women as either humble urban peasants or oppressed proletarian socialists. No Mean City is a wild card, the *enfant terrible* in the story of Glaswegian literature – its depictions of hard men and hairies as being complicit in their own and others' victimisation established a disturbing counter-narrative. No Mean City is therefore a legitimate part of the 'legacy of the 1930s', and helped to create 'new

⁴ Manfred Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel,' The History of Scottish Literature: Volume 4, Twentieth Century, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) 233-34.

possibilities and possible trappings for those who followed'.⁵ Malzahn sees the book as a dynamic part of Glasgow's creative development: 'most of the books that did follow, right up to the present day, can be delineated against those dealt with so far'.⁶

Jack Mitchell also recognises the significance of McArthur and Long's novel: 'No Mean City was a challenge. Would it be taken up?'⁷ The authors' depictions of working-class people as criminals challenge the idealised Marxist view of the proletarian hero/heroine, and question the effectiveness of socialist politics for improving society even while they blame the proletariat *itself* for a lack of commitment to socialism. No Mean City's refusal to depict slum dwellers as hapless victims of class ideology diverged from the view of Glasgow as a proletarian stronghold of the communist world. This does not necessarily mean that McArthur and Long's text is conservative; on the contrary, its critique targets a *lack* of socialistic integrity amongst the lower orders, not socialism itself. Needless to say, this particular aspect of No Mean City's subversiveness continues to be overlooked. Mitchell argues that Barke's Major Operation, for instance, was 'planned as a counterblast' to McArthur and Long's novel:

[The] working class is portrayed as rich in full-blooded human relations. There is a life open towards other people. Their definitive characteristics are health, harmony and human solidarity. True happiness is attainable because their lives have a serious social action. The epic, the heroic are qualities native to them.⁸

Mitchell's affirmation of Barke's romanticised working-class characters begs the question of No Mean City's depictions of lower-class people, which are, by contrast, not idealised either as a group or as individuals. According to Mitchell, No Mean City is a 'twisted' and falsified portrait of the 'proletarian community' of the Gorbals.⁹ Indeed, McArthur and Long are critical of the efficacy of socialistic politics for making society more

⁵ Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel' 236.

⁶ Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel' 236.

⁷ Jack Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel: Part III – James Barke,' Scottish Marxist (8: January 1975) 39.

⁸ Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel' 42.

⁹ Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel' 39.

egalitarian. Whereas Major Operation is a 'passionate textbook' for 'worker and potential middle-class ally, proving the necessity for and possibility of a popular united front,' McArthur and Long's story has no similar polemical aim.¹⁰ Mitchell maintains that Barke's plot is informed by a 'conscious literary application of the popular and united front policy agreed on by the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935'.¹¹ Major Operation, in Mitchell's view, was an attempt to undermine 'no-mean-cityism,' but failed to do so because of the 'vitality' and 'persuasive effect' of McArthur and Long's more negative exploration of 'proletarian living'.¹² Mitchell implies that No Mean City's vision of the Glaswegian working class does not conform to Communist policy, and therefore the supposedly damaging influence of its un-marxist attitude towards social reform must be neutralised. His contention that Barke may have tried to defeat No Mean City's thesis is therefore useful for understanding one aspect of the novel's impact on the modern Scottish urban novel. The misrepresentation of the politics underlying McArthur and Long's attack on the *lack of solidarity amongst the working class* – as expressed through the text's concentration on and condemnation of slum dwellers who *do not* use socialism, but rather violence and crime, to better themselves – casts No Mean City as more conservative than it actually is. It could be argued that the novel's attempts to understand power-plays amongst the working class put into practice Marx's 'commitment to identifying, explaining and criticizing hierarchies of dominance and subordination'.¹³ At the same time, however, McArthur and Long do not necessarily blame economics alone for the degenerative lives of Johnnie and Lizzie Stark; their evaluation of the impact of class *and* gender ideology on working-class identity is more in line with the emerging Western versions of Marxist criticism during the first half of the twentieth century. As

¹⁰ Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel' 42.

¹¹ Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel' 43.

¹² Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel' 44.

¹³ William L. McBride, 'Marxism,' The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy. Second Edition, Robert Audi, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 540.

such, No Mean City's incorporation of Marxism into literature is more subtle and problematic than that of Major Operation.

Unlike No Mean City, however, Major Operation is part of a specific kind of working-class fiction, marked by an overt devotion to Marxist politics. Mitchell argues that Major Operation was a 'heroic attempt to lay, almost single-handed, the foundations for the proletarian socialist-realist novel in Scotland'.¹⁴ First of all, I would contest this claim; there were many precursors to Barke's novel, not least of all Grassie Gibbon's Grey Granite, which could be viewed as an earlier – and more elegantly written – textual participant in the development of Scottish proletarian literature during the first half of the twentieth century. As Burgess points out, Barke's book was *part* of a 'perfect spate of "realistic" Glasgow novels...[a] breakthrough of working-class fiction, or proletarian fiction'.¹⁵

As a representative specimen of the proletarian working-class genre, Major Operation is literary propaganda, and resembles No Mean City in its concern with male characters, relationships, concerns and perspectives. At the same time, whereas McArthur and Long structure their plot around the relationships between men and men, women and men, and women and women, the primary relationship in Barke's novel is between two principal male characters – George Anderson and Jock MacKelvie – and is based on what Malzahn coins the 'master/man hierarchy'.¹⁶ The socialism of Major Operation is underpinned by an off-putting androcentrism that simply does not exist in McArthur and Long's version of working-class culture. This difference between the two novels is significant. Despite Mitchell's claim that Barke's book was planned as a counternarrative to No Mean City, its

¹⁴ Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel' 42.

¹⁵ Moira Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 110.

¹⁶ Manfred Malzahn, 'Coming to Terms with Industrial Scotland: Two 'Proletarian' Novels of the 1930s,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century, eds. Joachim Schwend and Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990) 198.

similarity to George Blake's The Shipbuilders (1934) suggests that Barke attempted to pick up where Blake left off before the publication of McArthur and Long's work. Blake and Barke's plots revolve around the interactions between male representatives of the working and middle classes. This approach is both similar to and different from No Mean City. Like the authors of The Shipbuilders and Major Operation, McArthur and Long are interested in how class ideology influences male identity, relationships, concerns and perspectives. No Mean City, however, is a more complex consideration of how class and gender ideology intersect to produce the unjust social order that, in turn, impacts on the identities of male *and* female characters.

Major Operation, then, is influenced by *both* The Shipbuilders and No Mean City. Barke reiterates Blake's Marxist approach to the representations of characters, and reinforces the idea that the working class can change unfair social conditions through socialist politics. Characterisation in Barke's novel is overtly political: MacKelvie, as Marxism personified, attempts to teach Anderson about the sufferings of the working class and strives to convert the other man to the workers' cause; Anderson, with his bourgeois faith in the ideals of religion, love and class systems, becomes the sounding board for MacKelvie's (and Barke's) socialist discourse. Whereas No Mean City demonstrates that the working class are not always devoted to socialism, Barke's ham-fisted approach is an argument against McArthur and Long's social and political scepticism.

The representation of working-class women in Major Operation is also explicitly political. In No Mean City, McArthur and Long often show how the same woman can be variously passive, aggressive, nurturing, defiant, victimised and oppressive. In contrast, Barke focuses on various aspects of women's desire for emancipation, which is in keeping with the political agenda underlying his characterisation technique. Where No Mean City *shows* the plight of working-class women, Major Operation *tells* us about it. Bessie

Morrison is both 'ever ready to defend her sex' and 'quick to elaborate on the hardness of a woman's lot' (MO 106). She comments on the disparity between men's and women's work: 'Listen to them [Jock and Peter]... We don't know the difference between a Saturday and a Sunday. Our work's never done' (MO 107).

Barke's pro-feminist stance, however, is a means to an end. As MacKelvie makes clear, the emancipation of women demands a shift from capitalism to socialism. Women's inferiorised status in British society is blamed only on politics and economics; the participation of individual men or women in sexual inequality is given less attention. MacKelvie draws connections between women's subordinated position and a society based on capitalism: 'A woman was, and remains to this day, essentially property' (MO 323). According to MacKelvie, the socialist movement could ameliorate women's disempowered position in Glasgow (and elsewhere). The limitations of the socialist philosophy for understanding the processes whereby women are oppressed, however, are evident in MacKelvie's patriarchal view of marital love, and in his simplistic interpretation of women's lot in Russia:

Only in Russia do we find any fundamental difference, since there, for the first time in history, women are economically independent, are on a status of equality with men, and the tie of marriage only holds as long as both parties desire that it should hold.

(MO 324)

The subjugation of women can be solved through financial independence, equal status with men, and the ability to divorce their husbands. These goals were shared by many of the feminist movements of the time, of course, but MacKelvie disregards the significance of men's direct involvement in the oppression of women, the lack of opportunities (for employment and education) for most working-class women, and women's domestic and familial obligations – problems which substantially limit freedom and self-empowerment. The question of female emancipation, then, *is* raised in Major Operation; unfortunately,

the work upholds a manly dismissiveness of the urgency of women's concerns in favour of the main issue of socialistic reform. No Mean City takes a different stance: men and women are both victims and victimisers; socialist and feminist politics count for little in the day-to-day lives of the majority of working-class people, where a change from capitalism to communism does not guarantee social improvement for anybody. Barke's argument that leftist politics can change the lot of the Glaswegian lower orders is in many ways a defeater of McArthur and Long's social and political scepticism.

Unlike Barke's Major Operation – in which No Mean City's impact is implicit – John McNeillie's Glasgow Keelie (1940) betrays overt signs of influence in terms of content and style. Indeed, Moira Burgess argues that this novel is one of the earliest examples of a long-lived 'vogue' or 'bandwagon' in Glasgow fiction that conflates 'Glasgow streets, slums and gangs'.¹⁷ She sees the novel as an imitator of No Mean City's subject matter and writing style.

John McNeillie's fiction – including Wigtown Ploughman (1939) and Morryharn Farm (1941) – is usually about rural Scotland, and so Glasgow Keelie, with its focus on Glasgow, is a departure from his usual tales of ploughmen, byremen and crofters.¹⁸ Glasgow Keelie is, like No Mean City, a detailed and naturalistic study of the subjective realities of slum-dwellers, although the title suggests some hostility in the use of the slur 'keelie.' The narrator is less intrusive than the one in the earlier novel, and rarely stops the action to explain the motivations and actions of the protagonists. Glasgow Keelie, like No Mean City, has been pegged as a bad Glasgow book, and has received scant critical attention. Burgess's assessment of its literary quality is as brief as it is scathing: '...an

¹⁷ Burgess, Imagine a City 167.

¹⁸ John Manson, 'Ploughmen and Byremen: Novels of Barke, McNeillie and Bryce,' Cenocrastus (52: Summer 1995) 4. Also see Douglas Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 22 – 23.

unrelievedly grim slum novel, pedestrian and predictable in spite of its many scenes of violence'.¹⁹

Like Johnnie and Lizzie Stark, McNeillie's protagonists Jimmie Lunn and Jess Sylvester become urban outlaws. Jimmie is a country boy sent to live with his aunt and uncle in a Glasgow slum. He starts off as an apprentice, but quickly degenerates, a process of deterioration which resembles that of Johnnie Stark: both boys rebel against the 'honest working man' identity that society – in the guise of foremen and families – tries to impose on them. Jimmie decides instead to work as a bookie's runner, spends most of his money on fashionable clothes, and dreams of being a 'big shot' (GK 24, 30).

McNeillie's incorporation of American popular culture into his characterisation of a Glasgow hard man is significant: the use of such Americanisms as 'lousy joint,' for example, is more reminiscent of dialogue from a James Cagney film than it is of the mean streets of Glasgow. Indeed, Jimmie finds little in his own culture with which he can build up a strong sense of manhood, and so looks to romanticised Hollywood images of gangsters:

When Jimmie went out with a 'tart' he adopted a particular role for the evening. According to his taste in stars at the time he would be George Raft, Gary Cooper, Clark Gable or one of a legion of other 'tough guys' and whether the lady love, striving perhaps equally hard to be Garbo or Hepburn, realised it or not, he was Raft or Gable or Cooper from the moment he met her until the moment he bade her goodnight...

(GK 37)

Episodes of make-believe contrast with the realities of slum life: 'Raft he was until he reached home and climbed into bed, then, once asleep, he was just aspiring corner boy Jimmie Lunn, 'the bookie's stooge'' (GK 37). As McArthur and Long demonstrated in No Mean City, masculinity – as a gender construction – is a performance. Jimmie becomes a hard man by emulating cinematic gangsters. He adopts the gangster role because it gives him a sense of self-direction, empowerment and identity. He joins some

¹⁹ Burgess, Imagine a City 167.

of his friends in stealing a car: 'The drink he had had was slowly beginning to take effect. Pinch a car. They did it on the pictures, didn't they? It was easy, wasn't it?' (GK 41). When he is injured in a fight, Jimmie feels that he has surpassed his cinematic heroes, and the pain of his wounds becomes yet another way to impress the people around him – and himself – with his toughness. Everything that results from the decision to be violent is incorporated into this act, so that his identity is an amalgamation of both fiction and fact; he vacillates between the attempt to become a legendary criminal, and a desire to hide the vulnerability which spurs him to erect his own notorious mythology: 'He was supposed to be beaten up, so he lay back and looked at the ceiling, while she dabbed the blood on his brow. That really hurt...He gritted his teeth and gave up trying to grin and do the dying gangster act' (GK 104).

Unlike Johnnie Stark – whose admiration of movie gangsters is only given brief mention near the beginning of No Mean City – Jimmie Lunn's psychological involvement in imported American popular culture parallels his metamorphosis from frightened and rebellious working-class teenager into Glasgow hard man. References to Jimmie's descent into escapism litter the text of the novel: 'Jimmie felt like a gangster out of a film. This was the final stage of the hold-up. The get-away' (GK 256). He learns how to be a gangster from the movies: 'Fancy anybody being daft enough to keep a gang all in a bunch when the police were after them, so that they could all get killed at once. Far wiser to separate. The pictures had taught him that ages before' (GK 225). He sits with his friends Dorman, Beany and Nebb on the banks of the Clyde, and transforms the city into a movie set: 'The lights of the river – sounded almost like a title of a film. Make a fine picture all them lights and Nebb and Beany and him making plans' (GK 56). Jimmie's life as a gangleader becomes a series of plots – in both the scheming and cinematic sense of the word – which fuses the realities of Glasgow with the fictions of Hollywood.

McNeillie's examination of gangster psychology involves a simultaneous attempt at social criticism. Jimmie, as gang leader, organises his band of hooligans to reflect what he sees around him:

A union was a daft thing unless you were one of the bosses. It was just like a gang... Union men were just like socialists and communists. They talked a fine lot of tripe about every man being equal, but the ones who were leading them on were the smart guys. The guys who wanted to be bosses when what they were preaching about came. Just the same with the Jesus Christ business.

(GK 151-52)

Jimmie's rationalisation for leading a gang is based on his analysis of a classed society. He sees a stark choice – to lead or be led: 'That was the rotten bit. No matter what happened you were just a crowd of folks like fleas on a dog's back. You didn't know where you were going or what the hell it was all about' (GK 152).

Underneath Jimmie Lunn's bravado is a constant fear of failure and impoverishment. McNeillie, like McArthur and Long before him, attempts to explain the connections between masculinity, poverty, fear and violence:

Funny how you got scared thinking. You weren't scared when you talked. You weren't scared when you were with lots of other people, but you just got scared yourself; all on your own. Scared inside. Worried and restless. It wasn't the same as being scared of fighting anybody or doing anything. It was a different kind of scaredness. You were scared you couldn't go on doing the things you had been doing. You got scared of yourself... When you got like that and started thinking and then began to look at the ordinary things again they looked different for a while. The gaslight didn't burn so brightly and the sky wasn't so bright and you began to notice that your trousers were frayed at the feet or your shoes were going through at the sole.

(GK 232-33)

As the narrative shifts from third- to second-person narration, Jimmie addresses himself and the reader simultaneously, rationalising his decision to construct a hard man persona.

With the characterisation of Jess Sylvester, McNeillie draws a portrait of working-class womanhood which is both complex and problematic. Jess is a both a hairy and a prostitute:

Everyone knew the stories of a rise in wages and 'bonus' which Jess told Mama, and

Mama repeated to the people of the close, were nothing more than lies. Jess was a tart, but none of them had the heart to disillusion Mama. Jess was following the profession of more than one daughter of Beadle's Place, and there was no harm in her at all. She was a poor girl earning money in the best way she could.

(GK 51)

Jimmie starts out as one of Jess's customers, and ends up her husband. In defiance of Jimmie's wishes, however, she continues with prostitution. Like Lizzie Stark, Jess wants to be associated with an up-and-coming gangleader, so she sells herself *and* feeds

Jimmie's fantasies at the same time: 'Ye'll be boss o' the South Side yet' (GK 108).

Jimmie's ambition soars: 'She really did think he was a big shot! She thought he would boss the best gang on the South Side. Maybe he would. Maybe the South Side would be scared of him just like they were scared of Malone...He saw himself ordering his gang to smash up some enemy' (GK 108).

Jess's character is more than just a replication of that of Lizzie Stark. She also functions as a critical tool, analysing Jimmie's reasons for wanting to be a hard man:

He was just like the communists at the street corner. He wasn't so sure he was talking common sense, so he had to yell and shout. Just as if yelling and shouting made her think he was brainy. He was like those daft young sods who sang the Red Flag and didn't know what they were singing and weren't ready to do anything for their 'bloody revolution.' He was a gas-bag. He was full of wind and importance. Shouting at her. What did he think he was?

(GK 230)

McNeillie's characterisation of Jess entails an examination of the motives underlying the formation of gangsters in the Glasgow slums. Jess compares gangs to street-corner communists, accusing both organisations of stupidity and false promises. Jimmie's reflections on Jess's opinions extend the scrutiny further: 'Maybe he was like the communists, always shouting. Maybe they shouted, not because they weren't sure they were talking sense, but because nobody ever gave the poor sods a chance to explain what they were getting at' (GK 231).

One major difference between Glasgow Keelie and No Mean City is in how the novels

tackle the experiences and perspectives of working-class people who do *not* rebel against the class system. Whereas McArthur and Long do not give much attention to law-abiding slum-dwellers, McNeillie – as if to set the record straight – explores how some slummies disagree with and fight against crime and gangsterism. This anti-gangster thread is intertwined with the central plot of Glasgow Keelie; McNeillie gives voice to the perspectives of law-abiding citizens of the South Side, a task which the authors of No Mean City do not fulfil to any great extent.

Jimmie Lunn's mother Mary is a representative of the 'good' working-class population. She despairs of her son's behaviour, and tries to fathom how he went wrong:

Her Jimmie. If only she had been able to keep him herself, away from the hooligans and the criminals of Clydegate. Away from the dirt and the grime and the warped minds of the slum folk who lived on their wits; the vicious poor who didn't want to work. Her Jimmie had found a place for himself amongst them. He had made himself into the same kind of cheap corner boy with no idea of right or wrong. No soul; no God. That was the worst crime of all... Why had he become like it? Weren't there plenty of other good clean lads who worked in the yard, worked hard and got married and made good husbands? No, there was evil in his soul. He was of the devil... He was amongst the razor gang crowd. She had read about them in the papers. That scar down his face. She shuddered.

(GK 318-19)

Mary functions as a querying tool – well-meaning and naïve, she tries to discover the reason(s) why some working-class boys become hard men. Lack of religion, flawed genes, immorality and keeping bad company are possible causes, but she despairs of ever understanding how or why her son has turned from a country boy into a razor fighter:

It wasn't all the boy's fault; it was more the fault of the things round about him. The poverty; the slavery; the very blackness of life that lowered over him from the day he first went to school... how could anybody expect life to produce anything but criminals when life was throttled and strangled in dark little cells of tenement houses; when there was nothing but greyness and poverty about; when men drank to get away from themselves and women went on to the street to keep their families from being evicted.

(GK 366)

Mary scrutinises the faces of the downtrodden women pushing prams and the bleak looks of unemployed men standing on street-corners:

This was what had made her boy the criminal that he was; not the work he had done at the yard or the life he had had with Sarah and Bill, but the very atmosphere of bleakness and poverty. These youths were the sons of men and women who had lived a life in darkness and had bowed slowly and surely to the relentlessness of the system. Amongst them were the communists; the depraved; the criminals and the walking dead; the older men who had long since given up hope of work, and even with the prospect of work, had given up the hope of happiness... You could see that some were the walking dead and some were no longer resisting the cancer of despair and dejection everlasting. Even on the faces of the youngest of them there was a look of hopelessness; they were doomed; doomed from the cradle, and her Jimmie was of them; doomed, but failing to accept his doom; fighting against fate.

(GK 370)

The 'system' produces victims and rebels; Jimmie is both a casualty of the class system and one of its dissenters. Mary continues in her analysis:

It was more than unemployment that had damned their souls. Unemployment was but part of their doom and the cause of their doom. It was the poverty; the darkness; the endless struggle for existence; the very harshness of their surroundings. Here was where the religion for the soul and spirit was useless where the God of the spirit was helpless, for the soul was dead.

(GK 370-71)

This is the heart of McNeillie's exploration of working-class subjectivity, and the central question of both Glasgow Keelie and No Mean City: why do some working-class people choose to be hard men and hairies? This is the issue on which both novels turn. Each suggests that a combination of class shame, fear of anonymity, and a distrust of leftist politics contribute to the degeneration of some members of the lower orders.

The resolution of the novel completes McNeillie's scrutiny of the relationship between class, gender, poverty and crime. Bill decides to inform on Jimmie, and Mary tries to prevent her son's capture: 'She wasn't going to see her son fall into the hands of the police and be made into a real criminal' (GK 377). She goes to Jimmie's flat to warn him about Bill's plan to have him arrested (GK 381-82). Mary's attempt to save her son pushes the boy over the edge; he is determined to avenge himself on his uncle. Jimmie slashes the older man with his razor: 'Jimmie was no longer sane. He struck and struck again. The blood was on his hands and on his clothes. There was insane hatred in every blow' (GK

404). Jimmie is arrested, and realises that he has become what he has always wanted to be – a ‘big shot’: ‘You couldn’t be a big shot and not get caught some time, could you?...They had caught him, but that didn’t mean the end of everything, did it?...he was caught like a cat in a close’ (GK 408). Jimmie maintains the hard man façade until the end of the novel. He watches the faces of neighbours from the back of the police car: ‘He was a big shot. He wasn’t scared. It would be the same when he was free again. No matter what they did to him. It would be the same when he came out. He would still be a big shot...No, he wasn’t scared. He was a big shot’ (GK 408-09). The last image of Jimmie Lunn, however, is of a scared boy crying in terror (GK 409). The hard man is in reality a frightened – but dangerous and destructive – little boy. McNeillie’s analysis of working-class criminality draws to a close, and we are left with a portrait of fear and vulnerability behind the hard-boiled façade. McNeillie’s novel offers a more optimistic depiction of hardened Glaswegian masculinity than that provided by No Mean City. Unlike McArthur and Long, who punish their gangster by having him killed by younger hoodlums, McNeillie leaves us with a slightly more ambivalent, open-ended conclusion. Although Jimmie still harbours violent aspirations, his frightened tears are a sign of softness, and hint at the possibility for reform and rehabilitation. The suggestion is that there is hope for the Glasgow hard man. In McNeillie’s hands, the gangster retains his humanity, and the legacy of No Mean City is revised to allow for qualified optimism.

Another novel which Burgess sees as an inferior product of the ‘no mean city’ school, but which can also be viewed – like McNeillie’s Glasgow Keelie – as a revision of McArthur and Long’s influence, is Bill McGhee’s Cut and Run (1962).²⁰ McGhee’s book is often seen as a perpetuation of the gangster school of Glasgow fiction. Keith Dixon, for instance, classifies it as the imitator of ‘the virulently anti-working-class and misogynous

²⁰ Burgess, Imagine a City 167.

tradition of *No Mean City*.²¹ McGhee's story of Ben McNulty and Jenny Forrester undoubtedly parallels that of Johnnie and Lizzie Stark – as well as that of Jimmie Lunn and Jess Sylvester – in many ways. Echoes of McArthur and Long's prototypical tale of the formation of the Glasgow hard man resound throughout McGhee's text. Ben is described in terms similar to those used in reference to Johnnie Stark:

Ben was quite good-looking, his face as yet unmarked by the scars that were later to decorate it. Standing five-foot-nine, with a good square pair of shoulders on him, with a dark complexion that the girls seemed to like and jet-black hair wavy enough to give the impression that he slept with it wrapped in corrugated iron, he usually managed to get women to look favourably on him. He also had a good line of patter, which of course is half the battle.

(CR 11)

Like Johnnie, Ben is fashion conscious and sexually aggressive (CR 11). Violence is a way of life for him – he takes advantage of any opportunity to use his razors. When a boy asks his sister Isa out, Ben attacks him: 'Jist 'cos the young fella asked Isa if he could see her hame, that yin Ben goes ower an' hits 'im wi' a razor or somethin'' (CR 23). A man steals Ben's drink at the local pub, an incident which leads to another razor attack: 'Suddenly he was in possession of another mouth, at a slight angle to the original one' (CR 27). McGhee – like McArthur and Long in *No Mean City* and McNeilie in *Glasgow Keelie* – alludes to the influence of American popular culture in the formation of male working-class identity, again reiterating the suggestion that violence amongst Glaswegian youths is somehow sparked by an admiration for romanticised Hollywood criminal role models. Ben mimics his cinema screen heroes: 'Ben stood in the middle of the floor, behind the girl, feet apart, rubbing the knuckles of one hand in the palm of the other. I think he'd seen James Cagney or Humphrey Bogart do that in a film. He opened his mouth, sidewise. Just as the convicts do in these Yankee prison films' (CR 59). A fight between his gang and a horde of Gorbals youths leads to the same myth-making process

²¹ Keith Dixon, 'No fairies. No monsters. Just people. Resituating the Work of William McIlvanney,' *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 197.

which transformed Johnnie Stark into the Razor King. As his friend Bill notes,

My ears were festering, listening to the voices around us, especially the ones who were saying, 'You shoulda seen the way Ben took on that joker wi' the hatchet. He soon sortit him. Nae messin' about. An' if it hidny o' been for him an' Pat we might no' hae reddit them the way we did. Ben? He canny hauf shift. Ye shoulda seen 'im steamin' inty that mob. We soon showed them who we were.

(CR 40)

Bill watches as Ben is transformed into the quintessential hard man through the consensus of the 'yes-men': 'So it was unanimously carried that Ben was about the hardest case in Calton, the land where all the good fighters grow' (CR 40). Just as Stark is granted notoriety through the gossip of sensation-seeking slum dwellers, so too does Ben acquire his legendary razor-fighter reputation from the embellishments of his exploits. The portrait that McGhee draws of his Glasgow hard man is in many ways similar to those envisioned by McArthur and Long on the one hand, and McNeillie on the other.

A major difference between Cut and Run and the two previous gangland novels, however, can be discerned in the construction of the narrator. In both No Mean City and Glasgow Keelie, the narratorial stance is distanced, analytical and omniscient. McGhee's narrator is presented as both the author himself *and* as a central character in the novel. As Burgess notes, the publishers advertised Cut and Run as a story written by a man who was a slummie born and raised.²² Bill McGhee is, simultaneously, a Glasgow hard man who tries throughout the novel to extricate himself from Ben McNulty's influence, and an author/narrator whose retrospective rewriting of the events leading up to Ben's downfall casts doubt on the reliability of the text. McGhee provides a similar disclaimer for his novel to the one which appears at the conclusion of No Mean City:

A number of publications on the same theme have already been slated by some of Glasgow's prominent citizens for giving a distorted impression of the city, for showing its citizens as foul-mouthed, razor-slashing gangsters or lazy, street-corner louts. Let me forestall any such criticism, and put the reader straight about any misconception which might arise from what I say. The story which follows has nothing whatever to do with the ordinary people of Glasgow...But do not imagine

²² Burgess, Imagine a City 167.

that these furious and beastly outbursts of violence do not take place in Glasgow. Read a Glasgow evening paper dated to-day or a few days back, and you will read of something which is so endemic and peculiar to Glasgow that it no longer rates a paragraph in the national Press.

(CR 5)

McGhee occupies several points of view throughout Cut and Run: he is the tough-talking but cowardly henchman for Ben McNulty, the reformed hard man reminiscing about and explaining his past behaviour, and the cultural critic whose attempts to analyse the criminal depths of Glasgow necessitate an omniscient narratorial eye which transgresses the limits of subjective experience. The result is a hybrid novel which vacillates between personal memoir, social and cultural criticism, and apologia. As he remarks early in the book, 'I have always tried to find excuses for Ben, even for those deeds of his which won't brook any excuse or forgiveness' (CR 9). Caution is required when handling McGhee's account of the exploits of his fellow slum dwellers. His repeated appeals for belief are scattered throughout the text of the novel: 'We yatted away for about half an hour, Ben doing most of the talking, giving me the crude material for the beginning of this chapter' (CR 114). He insists on the reliability of his representations: '[Since] I didn't see Ben till a lot of water had passed through the mill, the remainder of his story will be more or less second-hand, but authentic' (CR 131). Cut and Run can therefore be tackled as both McGhee's analysis of the reasons for violence and crime in other working-class people, *and* as an indirect portrait of McGhee himself – the self-reflective hard man trying to understand his own reasons for being a violent criminal. The result is a complex work which is presented as simultaneous fiction and study, creative reconstruction and documented fact.

Despite the complications arising from McGhee's mode of narration, the text can still be examined as an analysis of the connections between poverty, shame, violence and crime. Gender and class inequality underlie McGhee's depictions of Ben and Jenny, and

his main thesis intersects with, but does not completely correspond to that of No Mean City. McGhee oversimplifies the issue by blaming low-life criminality on psychological problems and bad women. He points out that the 'general opinion was that [Ben] was just an incorrigible, destined from the very beginning to commit the almost unimaginable acts of violence and brutality that were chalked up to his horrifying score,' but then admits that he lays 'most of the blame' for Ben on Jenny Forrester, the woman in Ben's life (CR 9). Bill's animosity towards Jenny comes out in his descriptions of her character: 'Jenny Forrester was a born hairy if ever there was one. She was also a fine bit of stuff and knew it, and the constant admiration of men was meat and drink to her' (CR 9). Jenny emerges as a dominating, ruthless nymphomaniac who turns Ben into a monster. Bill admits to jealousy: 'That body and those legs, plus her perfectly featured face and Titian hair, were really something, and I have to admit that deep-down a certain amount of envy was stirring' (CR 12). Jenny tries to seduce Bill: 'She...encircled my neck with her arms, and gently bit my tongue. With her breasts pressed hard against my chest...I was on the verge of succumbing, but the good fellow in me took over. I pushed her from me, and put everything I had into a disgusted glare' (CR 80).

The characterisation of both Jenny *and* Ben casts Bill in a comparatively favourable light; his fear of Ben and violence, coupled with his professed dislike of Jenny and her charms, serve to differentiate Bill from the hard man and hairy class of slum dweller. He continues to vilify Jenny: 'She stood there like Hitler in a synagogue, with the hatred pouring from her eyes...[if] my upbringing hadn't taught me that man was the masterful sex, I think I would have been a bit frightened. In fact I wouldn't like to lay the odds that I wasn't' (CR 84, 85). Bill sums up the characters of Ben and Jenny in one sentence: 'What an unholy partnership in holy wedlock. A nymphomaniac and a psychopath' (CR 85). Even Jenny's beauty is seen as negative. Men are attracted to her like 'flies round a dry

latrine' (CR 92). Bill insists that 'vileness' lurks 'just beneath the skin,' and that he would never approach her sexually: 'I wouldn't touch her with a ten-foot pole, with crap on the end of it' (CR 92). According to Bill, Jenny uses her physical attractiveness to incite violence in men. She stands with her breasts pushed forward, 'asking for trouble, and yet everybody, bar her, was going to get it' (CR 94). Sure enough, Ben loses his temper at the male attention she receives, and a fight ensues in which Bill becomes an unwilling participant (CR 94). Like so many female characters in Glasgow fiction, Jenny encourages men to be violent: 'You could have a go wi' onybuddy noo, Ben... You're wan o' the hardest cases in Glesca' (CR 136). Like Lizzie in particular, Jenny shares in her man's gangster kudos. She was 'basking in her husband's glory... One of the qualities that endeared him most to her was his fighting record... her emotions were tied up in a legend' (CR 138). Also like Lizzie Stark, Jenny's infidelities serve to feed her husband's violence. Her affair with another hard man, Flash O'Hara, is seen as a turning point in Ben's downfall: 'A malignant, all-consuming hatred' fuels the 'fires of vengeance' that burn behind the 'hard shell that had become more impenetrable with time' (CR 149). Bill, like the narrator of *No Mean City*, watches as Ben becomes increasingly insane: 'The shock of his injuries and his wife's infidelity had been aggravated by the strain he'd been under during the past few days' (CR169).

Ben is obsessed with getting his own back with the man who has stolen Jenny's affections, and so hunts down and attacks members of O'Hara's gang, scouring the papers the following day for reports about his own exploits, using the media to build up the image of himself as the hardest man in Glasgow (CR 162, 167, 185). Finally, Ben attacks Jenny as she is leaving the cinema on the arm of O'Hara's brother (CR 195). Ben is finally arrested at his mother's flat, where he has been reduced to tears. Bill describes the encounter between the police and the now vulnerable Ben: '[Instead] of a real hard case

with a razor in his hand, here was a big boy crying on his mother's breast. I felt like telling Ben to draw his razor and prove to them just how right they had been in the first place' (CR 207-08). Ben's defeat parallels that of Jimmie Lunn. Just as Jimmie cannot maintain the hard man exterior when faced with the legal consequences of his crime and violence, so too does Ben project a helpless image of a boy turned bad, the misunderstood victim of his own psychological deterioration. Unlike Jimmie, however, who becomes a gangster to overcome feelings of inferiority, fear and shame, Bill shows Ben drawing a direct comparison between working-class criminals and working-class policemen. Ben accuses the arresting officers of being like him in nature, but superior to him in power: 'You're every bit as hard a case as Ah am. Only, because o' that badge ye abuse, it didny come oot in ye the same as it diz in me. Wi' me it wiz a razor. Wi' you, it's the happy feelin' yet get when ye see suckers like me squirmin' tae get oot the trouble we goat inty, tae keep a bastart like you in a joab' (CR 209). In other words, Ben discerns the class system at work in the relationship between lower-class criminals and the legal system. Both Ben and the legal authorities commit violent acts – Ben with his razor, and society with prison and the hangman's rope – but whereas society's violence is sanctioned, his own is not. Of course, Ben is rationalising his antisocial behaviour, and attempting to avoid responsibility for being a hard case, but the message is nonetheless clear – there is an imbalance of power at work in society, and the violence of the 'system' against the criminal lower orders mirrors and perhaps reinforces the violence committed *by* some members of the lower orders.

McGhee's analysis of the reasons for working-class crime and violence appears to be contradicting itself here. Up until this point, his argument has targeted insanity and bad women as the main contributing factors in the formation of hard men. Now, he seems to be making a case similar to that developed by McArthur and Long on the one hand, and

McNeillie on the other – that society creates the conditions for various forms of rebellion, including extreme forms of criminal behaviour. Bill's assessment of his friend's descent into crime, however, concludes with an accusation which reiterates the earlier view that violence and crime result from psychological problems. Laziness and greed, he argues, can undermine the ambitions of some slum dwellers and lead to the formation of gangs and hard men:

But of course there are plenty of slum kids who don't get the breaks, I philosophised. Sometimes, because they don't work hard enough for them.

Ben himself was like that. You see, he was really pretty intelligent, but he could never be bothered with any kind of studying. A good deal of brainwork, and he might have gone places, but he, with his infinite capacity for other things, preferred the pursuit of excitement, as the average slum-child does.

(CR 213)

So according to McGhee, Ben's unwillingness to apply himself in school, combined with a concurrent desire for pleasure, have conspired to turn him away from moral and legal forms of self-direction and improvement, and instead towards antisocial behaviour. The pursuit of money and power is also targeted as a variable in the hard man equation. Bill goes on to explain that Ben was 'always forming groups, of which he must invariably be the boss' (CR 213). Throughout childhood and adolescence, Ben has assembled gangs through which he can gain and wield power. Bill suggests that greed pushes McNulty towards gangsterism: 'Since Ben's constant spur was the accumulation of money in any form, nefarious escapades were numerous and the kitty was always in good shape' (CR 213).

The violence surrounding Bill and Jenny as well as other Glaswegian slum dwellers is blamed on psychological problems and femme fatales; part of McGhee's thesis is that hard men and hairies are faulty humans from the start, and that strong, sexual women can damage a man's sense of masculinity, turning him into a criminal. Another thread of the argument focuses on sectarianism as the basis for much of the violence amongst the

working class (CR 214). The influence of endemic class and gender inequalities is never explicitly put forward as a contributing factor. Instead, McGhee focuses on the symptoms of social malaise, thereby brushing over the root causes of working-class criminality. For example, he claims that '[hatred] and bigotry lie easy in the breast of the young Glaswegian. Most of them...have instilled in their minds a special regard for expressions like Fenian and Pope, or King Billy and Orangemen, depending on their respective denominations' (CR 214). He then makes the connection between religious bigotry and violence by stating that '[where] you get hatred you get fights, and Ben was in his element in those fights' (CR 214). This is followed by his main contention – that women are one of the central causes of male violence and criminality: 'The wee hairys (sic), for instance, used to cause a lot of barneys. They carried tales from one corner to another corner and they were wont to play two or more young fellows on a string at one time' (CR 214).

McGhee's belief is that his own fear of violence and crime – added to his preference for soft, compliant women like Ben's sister Isa – helped him to become a good slummie who eventually extricates himself from the Glaswegian underworld. Unlike No Mean City and Glasgow Keelie, Cut and Run reinforces the idea that the link between poverty and crime and/or violence turns on the natural inferiority of the hard men and hairies concerned, not on inegalitarian class and gender relations which can produce damaged working-class identities. Bill's analysis of Ben and Jenny accomplishes two things: first, he concludes that violence and crime result from mental and sexual aberrance; second, he claims that his own violence and criminality stemmed from his fear of Ben's wrath on the one hand, and Jenny's nymphomania on the other. Cut and Run is McGhee's attempt to exonerate himself from responsibility for his own antisocial behaviour. The novel becomes itself a crime against the lower classes; Bill McGhee the narrator dehumanises Ben and Jenny (as well as the other slum dwellers throughout Cut and Run) as a way to

make himself seem both different and superior. McGhee's book is *his* particular rebellion against and escape from poverty, shame, fear and inferiorisation. In the process of explaining his past involvement in gangsterism, he dehumanises his fellow slummies. Underneath his characterisations of Ben, Jenny and himself, then, is Bill's terror of being tarred with the same brush of low-life notoriety that has tainted his former acquaintances. For instance, he tries to find peace from the 'ominous shadow that was Ben. Razors, gangsters, police and prisons became things of the past' (CR 131). Ultimately, however, Cut and Run confirms the 'no mean city' hypothesis that connects poverty and crime with fear, shame and rebellion. Bill McGhee *demonstrates* the validity of McArthur and Long's contention that working-class people can oppress other people in their attempts to rise above the restrictions imposed by their class and gender.

The second group of novels examined here, namely Edward Gaitens's Dance of the Apprentices (1948) and Robin Jenkins's The Changeling (1958), is – as was noted earlier – a far cry from the gangland school of Glasgow fiction. Stylistic differences between the two groupings are the most obvious: Gaitens and Jenkins are less didactic in their approach to writing about the working class, although their work falls firmly within the bounds of realism; McArthur and Long, McNeillie, McGhee and Barke are harsher, more overtly political, in their naturalism, and their writing style takes second place to the development of a socio-political thesis. Nonetheless, Gaitens's work in particular agrees in many ways with McArthur and Long's explanation for the existence of blue-collar crime and poverty. Gaitens targets the class system, and people's inability or unwillingness to rebel against the class system in effective ways, as the primary source of oppression, prejudice and dehumanisation of working-class people. Most present-day critics of the Glasgow novel would argue that Gaitens's book has little if anything in common with No Mean City, except in superficial details like setting (the Gorbals) and

characters (young working-class people). Yet in the context of mid-century Glasgow fiction, these similarities are significant. Douglas Gifford views Dance of the Apprentices as part of a 'tendency towards distortion of social reality in order to emphasize the urban gloom' of Glasgow, a charge more often directed at No Mean City.²³ Christopher Whyte acknowledges that 'the problems raised in Glasgow fiction of the Thirties find a brief, fragile resolution in the stories of Gaitens,' a statement which would seem to include No Mean City as a contributor.²⁴ Gifford, however, takes McArthur and Long out of the influence equation by forging a direct link between Edwin Muir's Poor Tom (1932) and Dance of the Apprentices, a leap of sixteen years which excludes the possible cultural impact of not only No Mean City but also several other major works of working-class fiction, including most notably George Friel's angry short stories of the 1930s. Poor Tom, the story of Mansie Manson the socialistic working man, whose brother is 'spiritually infected by Glasgow and dies tragically,' supposedly 'sketched out' the theme of 'Glasgow as a kind of paralysing and even malevolent force, stifling creativity'.²⁵ Dance of the Apprentices, Gifford continues, picked up this thematic gauntlet by directing its attention to the issue of 'the sensitive mind, young and green, at odds with its place'.²⁶ As Burgess indicates, however, Glasgow as urban hell was already a well-worn theme by the time of Poor Tom's appearance. For instance, and although not a Glasgow novel, John MacDougall Hay's Gillespie (1914)

is an early manifestation of something which becomes a noticeable feature of Glasgow fiction from the 1930s on. This is the idea that Glasgow is not merely dirty, crowded, unhealthy – conditions explicable, and curable, in practical terms – but independently evil, a malevolent force.²⁷

²³ Gifford, 'The Return to Mythology in Modern Fiction' 39.

²⁴ Christopher Whyte, 'Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century, eds. Joachim Schwend and Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990) 332.

²⁵ Douglas Gifford, The Dear Green Place? The Novel in the West of Scotland (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985) 7.

²⁶ Gifford, The Dear Green Place? 7.

²⁷ Burgess, Imagine a City 173.

No Mean City, instead of anthropomorphising the city, depicts *people* as the main agents of the social inequalities which lead to hardship and delinquency. Dance of the Apprentices, like McArthur and Long's novel, does not blame the city, but rather the people living *in the city*, for class and gender injustice. Gaitens's book does not attribute poverty, crime, ignorance and violence to a nameless urban evil; the class system, mutually abusive gender relations and the efforts of the lower orders to resist or rebel, are the root causes of social problems.

Dance of the Apprentices is more cynical than No Mean City; whereas the criminal rebellions of the hard men and hairies of McArthur and Long's novel merit failure in a legal and moral sense, the downfall of Gaitens's ordinary slum dwellers seems to illustrate the injustice of class and gender relations even more clearly. There is a sense of street justice in Johnnie Stark's death – after all, he is a mad and violent criminal, a rapist, an abuser. The people in Gaitens's version of the Glasgow slums, however, are not gangsters. Their failure to change an unjust social order, and the punishments that they suffer for rebelling against various forms of the status quo, allow us to see just how dehumanising class and gender ideologies can be.

Gaitens shows how even honest and reasonable people participate in power politics. The character of Eddy Macdonnel is a case in point. Morgan argues that Eddy is a 'committed socialist' whose decision to become a conscientious objector during the First World War is based on his idealistic yearnings for social reform.²⁸ Eddy is a fervent young communist, attending political rallies and reading Marxist literature. At one political gathering, he is transported by emotion when the leader – Tom Mann – steps onto the stage: 'Eddy Macdonnel committed one of the proudest audacities of his young life by springing to his feet and impetuously singing the first notes of *The Red Flag*' (DA 47).

²⁸ Edwin Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 85, 86.

Youthful enthusiasm soon gives way to male competitiveness through politics. When his friend Neil Mudge congratulates Eddy for initiating the singing, Eddy feels proud:

He felt he had inspired the whole audience and when Neil Mudge dug him in the ribs, saying: "That was fine, Eddy! My, ye're coming out!" he foresaw himself in the near future as a great working-class leader. Fancy being praised like that by Neil Mudge...Eddy wanted to cap his triumph by asking a question at discussion time.
(DA 48)

Eddy begins using leftist politics to construct an identity for himself where he feels powerful, inspirational and valued; playing the communist is much like acting like a man – both personae allow men to escape the sordid facts of slum living.

Eddy superimposes a pecking-order onto the working class: 'He loved all this gathering of Clydeside workers...[they] were all intelligent and fearless, while those "others," the great mass of the city's wage-slaves, who put their "joabs" before the "cause;" the proud, snobbish middle-class that preferred property and comfort to ideals – were cowardly and ignorant' (DA 49). Eddy is yielding to class ideology. He feels himself part of an elite club of people who are more intelligent and courageous than anyone else: 'Eddy's feelings were like a desire to embrace the world...a condescending pity for misled human kind' (DA 49). After the meeting, Eddy shares Neil's resentment of their mutual friend Donald Hamilton, who has distinguished himself by addressing Tom Mann directly: 'Thank you, Mister Speaker!' (DA 50). As the narrator observes, 'they both looked enviously at Donald Hamilton's irritating mien of self-satisfaction' (DA 50). Eddy betrays an adherence to class prejudice, where he sees people as superior or inferior to one another. For instance, he compares himself unfavourably with the more confident Donald: 'Neil was a bookkeeper in a big city office, went to business every morning togged up in his best and was studying to become a chartered accountant, and his pince-nez gave him an air of refined authority which intimidated Eddy' (DA 58).

Eddy cannot escape his working-class background. As a boy, he railed against the

injustices faced by his drunken mother, the beatings from his father which have left her ugly and disfigured: 'Eddy began to sob bitterly...shaking clenched, small fists...at lunatic, incomprehensible cruel life' (DA 23). He tries to escape into the world of literature, but the realities of family violence and ignorance intrude, plunging him into despondency, undercutting the seeds of optimism:

He closed the door and returned to the kitchen. While the women gossiped he stood against the dresser looking at the big volume of *Pickwick Papers* which lay where he had thrown it down, beside a small wicker shopping-basket, two dirty cups and a quart milk-jug. The hours of delight it had promised had been ruthlessly torn out of his day. He thought no more of the jolly, human world enclosed in a book. After his tears, after all his tremblings and terror, he had fallen cold and dull. Aunt Kate, while serving cups of whisky, had distractedly placed her cup on the book and spilt some over it. A ring of whisky-wet and several small spatters were raising discoloured blisters on the blue cover, but Eddy turned indifferently away and watched his aunt putting the three dinners of mince and onions in the oven...

(DA 24)

Literature contrasts starkly with the harshness and gloominess of Eddy's slum life. When Eddy turns away from the defaced book, he is giving in to the numbing effects of poverty, allowing the literature he so cherishes to be devalued. As both the subject of Dickensian fiction and an observer of his own class, Eddy's consciousness is stretched between two worlds.

Eddy leads a double life. He is trapped within the circumstances of his class, but because of his literary and political interests he is no longer *of* his class. He begins hiding his books from his mother:

Eddy...slunk the literature from his pocket and slid it beneath the mattress of the bed where he had been hiding his books since the day he came in from work and found that his mother in a fit of insane rage had thrown the big tea-chest of books he and Francie had collected, into the backcourt midden.

(DA 62)

Eddy fights to maintain his idealism and ambition amongst people who seem to conspire against his attempts at escape – literal or intellectual. He wipes the 'filth' off the books he manages to save from the midden, and rescues the others from a group of children kicking

them around the backcourt (DA 62). He sits in the flat reading W.W. Jacobs while outside there is a 'foul, hideously ugly backcourt, paved with broken bricks, uneven with subsidences and littered with tin cans, bones, old boots and other garbage pulled from the overfilled midden' (DA 68). The constant intrusions of poverty and ignorance undermine Eddy's confidence; the sight of his drunken parents, for instance, plunges him into despair: '[He] felt deeply weak with his parents' weakness; nerveless, irresolute, afraid with a reasonless fear of himself before oncoming life' (DA 81). As in No Mean City, fear and shame begin to take their toll on the protagonist's character.

Like Peter Stark, Eddy uses politics to rebel against society. He decides to become a conscientious objector, using phrases picked up from the anti-capitalist literature he has been reading to construct an image of himself as a hero:

Phrases leapt to his mind, "Comrades! Fellow-Workers! Throw down your rifles! Revolt! Refuse to fight in a Capitalist War! You have no quarrel with your German fellow-worker!" Playacting the heroic agitator, he saw the busy soldiers, astounded by his shout, turn and listen to his passionate speech, throw down their rifles and follow him into the streets, the nucleus of a world-wide mutiny that would stop the War.

(DA 135)

When Eddy receives his call-up papers, he scrawls the following words across the form: 'I believe in The Brotherhood Of Man! I refuse to fight in a Capitalist War! I have no quarrel with the German Worker! To hell with Imperialism!' (DA 143). He parrots propaganda while the narrator chronicles, with compassionate satire, the destruction of his idealism. Eddy's planned revolt backfires; his defiance of the system leads only to arrest and incarceration. When he throws his papers down at the recruitment office, he forgets his 'fiery speech' but is heartened by the commotion he causes in the queue behind him (DA 145). The sergeant is enraged when Eddy begins urging the other would-be soldiers to refuse to sign up; the boy is handcuffed and hustled into a little room, where he sings *The Red Flag*, thinking himself a 'real hero of The Working Class Movement' (DA 147). As

the narrator remarks, however, 'no one took the slightest notice of him. Outside, the doctor was passing man after man into the Army and the ordeal of War' (DA 147). Eddy's dream of a world of 'millions of free equal human beings living in harmony and prosperity... free from competition, poverty and the fear of war... [a] whole world of people escaped at last from the iron cage of Fear' falls on indifferent ears (DA 147). The orderly's last words to Eddy are bleak: 'Ye're only buttin' yer heid agin a stane wa' (DA 146).

Eddy appears near the end of Dance of the Apprentices, in prison, full of disappointment and anger, the idealism and rebelliousness crushed out of his character by lack of freedom and dulling repetitiveness. The narrator comments, 'He was sick of the heroic attitude' (DA 247). Instead, Eddy's mind is possessed by violent urges, hatred and depression. He imagines attacking the prison chaplain, invents tortures and combats with his enemies, and rails mentally against the 'dead weight of mental dullness around him' (DA 248). On the inside he is becoming Johnnie Stark.

Eddy is being politicised, and the communistic pose that led to his imprisonment strips away to reveal impotent rage and despair. He is being punished for rebelling against society, his class and his gender. Gradually, Eddy the potential revolutionary is reformed into yet another fearful, ashamed and docile working-class man:

During that dark, long time he often recalled his ludicrous failure and, within himself, writhed in shame, walling himself round with inescapable inferiority, telling himself he lacked the talent and resolution to carry through that which he had attempted. He had acted from unworthy motives of pride and vanity... Never would he, in the humblest way, be a leader of men. He would day-dream of greatness in many ways, till advancing years deadened his power of dreaming and he would end, like his father and brothers, an obscure walker-on in the drama of life.

(DA 271)

The last image we have of Eddy Macdonnel is of a trapped man dreaming of daffodils in the darkness of a prison cell. The reality of incarceration and defeat by society smothers the last vestiges of Eddy's escapist dream: 'his vision of the earth and sky was blotted out

and his aura of flowers faded away as he stepped once more on his stool and drew the blanket used for blackout, across the window' (DA 275). The 'system' against which Eddy has been banging his head for most of his life has finally beaten him; his rebellion through literature and politics has led to his society's most extreme form of socialisation, and Eddy is being moulded into the kind of man he has always tried to avoid becoming. Dance of the Apprentices is as bleak in tone as is No Mean City and Glasgow Keelie.

The depiction of women in Dance of the Apprentices, like that of the men, emphasises the degenerative effects of poverty, shame, fear and class and gender relations. Eddy's mother is described in scathing terms: 'His mother woke, regarded him through drink-hazed eyes and, with a vacuous smile, slept again. She was unlovely. Her hair was haggish, her face inflamed by debauchery' (DA 11). Eddy attributes Mrs. Macdonnel's pitiable state to an abusive and unwise father, a failed marriage, poverty and alcohol. Mr. and Mrs. Macdonnel had started out as a 'happy, fairly well-off' young couple, but the inability of the husband to capitalise on the chandler's shop left him by his mother forces him to become a shipyard worker, then a dock-labourer, and finally a general labourer (DA 12). Frequent spells of unemployment and reduced income take their toll on the family's prosperity; Mrs. Macdonnel is obliged to scrub floors of churches, dance-halls and pubs (DA 12).

Eddy feels that his parents exist in a 'wasteland of weak resignation,' and is puzzled by their failure to rise 'out of the back-streets' of the slums (DA 13). Again, he blames his father for most of the family's hardships. He notices Mr. Macdonnel's overweening sense of masculinity:

Mr. Macdonnel strode with unnecessary, frenzied haste into the lobby, divested himself of cap, jacket and waistcoat, and dashed back towards the jawbox, rolling up his shirtsleeves, baring his breast, his hobnailed boots, streaked with clay, whitish with concrete, thudding violently the floor. His every motion bragged that he was the breadwinner; his hefty gestures, as he soaped and splashed at the tap, were like shouts of "I'm heid o' the hoose! I'm boss here!" his tough, middle-sized physique

hummed with self-esteem which egregiously pervaded the little kitchen.

(DA 15)

Eddy also observes his mother's reaction to Mr. Macdonnel's aggressive presence. She casts 'hateful looks' at her husband's back, and waits behind him with a steaming pot of potatoes, 'sullen with ill-will' (DA 15). Eddy feels oppressed with fear, but is reluctant to leave his mother (DA 16, 17). With the arrival of Eddy's brothers, the atmosphere erupts into a 'nightmare of violence' (DA 19). Mrs. Macdonnel, physically weaker than her husband, comes off the worst: 'Her arm, red-raw with years of scrubbing in water filled with washing-soda, hung limply...[her] eyes were bruised and puffed up, her lips swollen; blood had congealed in her nostrils. With the stained handkerchief round her forehead, her russet hair disarrayed, her crimson face, she was a horrible effigy of womanhood' (DA 23). Eddy is powerless against this violence; in his impotent rage, he tears his father's cap and flings it from the flat (DA 23). He absorbs these experiences, which undermine his own ambitions, optimism and self-confidence: 'within him was all the fear, hatred, pain and violence, the goodness and meanness of the principal actors. He had come out of their loins. They were in him; he was in them' (DA 25). Eddy turns on his mother, blaming her for her part in the family's failure: 'A spasm of bitterness against her flashed through him as he regarded the mean set of her mouth. She had often aroused violence by her niggardly behaviour at meals and her sheer inability to control her irritation at any time' (DA 25). He notices how his mother had 'egged' her sons on during the fight which has left her permanently disfigured (DA 19). Mrs. Macdonnel – the victim of both her gender and her class – nonetheless dehumanises her sons by turning them into weapons against her husband. On one level, she is a reconfigured Mrs. Stark, thereby illustrating a continuity of gender construction between No Mean City and Dance of the Apprentices.

The other novel which can be viewed on a par with Dance of the Apprentices in terms of official literary worth, but which also betrays signs of No Mean City's influence, is

Robin Jenkins's The Changeling (1958), a complex, perhaps romanticised exploration of the experiences of a somewhat superhumanly stoical slum boy, Tom Curdie. In matters of style, the fiction of Robin Jenkins combines documentary realism with the economy of expression made famous by Muriel Spark. Jenkins is one of the most respected novelists of the post-war era. His writing career spans fifty years, and his books now have an uncontested place in the Scottish literary canon. Like Gaitens and McNeillie, however, Jenkins's novels have not enjoyed an unbroken publishing history. As Alan Spence points out in his introduction to The Changeling, 'for many years the bulk of his considerable output was largely unavailable, out of print – a comment on the state of Scottish publishing rather than the intrinsic quality of the novels' (C v). First published in 1958, Jenkins's story of class conflict was not re-issued until 1989, a gap of over thirty years. Upon the book's publication, Scotland's Magazine reviewer Alexander Reid saw The Changeling as one of Jenkins's most important works 'to date'.²⁹

The plot of The Changeling focuses on the relationship between Charlie Forbes, a teacher in a slum area of Glasgow, and his student Tom Curdie, a slum child whose intelligence inspires Forbes to transgress class boundaries by taking him on holiday with his family in the Argyll countryside. Tom is Forbes's experiment in social change; he wants to save the boy from the degradation of poverty and a slum environment: 'It was possible, it was likely, that the boy would ultimately become debased. Who would not, born and bred in Donaldson's Court, one of the worst slums in one of the worst slum districts in Europe?' (C 2). Tom shows signs of becoming yet another working-class criminal. He is on probation for stealing butter from a shop (C 3). Later in the novel he steals money from his school, and goods from Woolworth's (C 30-31, 88). Forbes is undaunted by any evidence of Tom's criminal tendencies, and yet understands how

²⁹ Alexander Reid, 'The Limits of Charity,' Scotland's Magazine (October 1958) 43.

poverty and the class system could damage the boy's chances for success: 'So much wrong had been done to this boy. By whom it had been done, Forbes could not quite say, except that he as a member of society must accept share of the blame' (C 3). He thinks that he can help Tom by exposing him to a middle-class way of life: 'It seems to me the experience might give the boy some support in the battle he has constantly to wage against corruption' (C 6).

Forbes's decision to take Tom on holiday brings two classes together in conflict, and sets off a chain of events which leads to the boy's suicide. Jenkins's social analysis seems to implicate society at large for crimes against humanity. All of Jenkins's characters are simultaneous victims *and* victimisers; whether they are male or female, adults or children, working-class or middle-class, they participate in their own and others' oppression in pursuit of self-interested advancement. Tom's mother is as eager to blackmail Forbes to improve her financial and social status, as Forbes's wife is to nag her husband into wearing good clothes and aping bourgeois behaviour to maintain hers (C 179-80, 11, 12). Further, whereas Forbes could be seen as a snob who turns Tom into the instrument of his own self-aggrandisement as benefactor, Tom is nonetheless willing to forsake his friends and relatives in an effort to fit in with the middle-class family that has adopted him. The main thrust of the novel, however, centres on the process whereby Forbes becomes the agent of Tom's inferiorisation and downfall, which in turn transforms the teacher into as effective a victimiser as Johnnie Stark. The Changeling shows how hard men and hairies are not the only criminals at work in a classed society, and indeed that hardness itself is not exclusively a working-class attribute.

Forbes uses Tom Curdie to alleviate guilt and to enhance his own sense of self-importance. He sees his experiment with the boy as a way to 'make amends' for his part in social injustice (C 3). Improvements in Tom's manner or dress reflect well on his

teacher: 'He felt proud of Tom: that morning had seen a transformation; a bath and some new clothes had turned him into a boy that even Todd must have approved' (C 42). Like the hard men of the so-called Glaswegian gangster school, and like Eddy Macdonnell in Dance of the Apprentices, Forbes is keen to make himself seem important in his own and in other people's eyes; he dehumanises Tom in pursuit of glory. Upon meeting Forbes's children Gillian and Alistair, Tom rapidly becomes an object of scrutiny and a subject for discussion and exclusion. He is not allowed to sleep in the main house, but rather in a hut in the garden (C 65-6). When Gillian begins interrogating the boy about his knowledge of rowing and swimming, Forbes intervenes with 'Tom hasn't had your opportunities, Gillian,' thereby drawing attention to class differences and placing the boy at a disadvantage (C 43). Forbes 'inspects his protégé' for headlice, and his wife Mary worries about the boy's hygiene, glancing surreptitiously at his ears, neck and hair, and charging Forbes with the responsibility for keeping Tom clean (C 44, 45). Forbes's mother-in-law Mrs. Storrocks lets a compartment full of train passengers know that the boy is 'from a slum home, and wouldn't be getting a holiday at all if it wasn't for my son-in-law's kindness' (C 50). At every turn, Tom Curdie's poverty and blue-collar origins are reinforced by Forbes's middle-class family, which simultaneously fortifies the superiority of their own social and financial positioning. Along with McArthur and Long, McNeillie and Gaitens, Jenkins shows in his Glasgow fiction how class ideology *works*. As the narrator of The Changeling notes, 'Without doubt, at the very back of [Forbes's] mind from the very beginning had been the hope that his befriending of this slum delinquent child might reach the ears of authority' (C 50).

As the novel proceeds, Forbes and his family become increasingly resentful and suspicious of Tom. He becomes less than human – a 'changeling' that disrupts the self-satisfied comfort of their lives. They fear that their seeming immunity from the disgrace

of poverty is challenged by the boy's presence. Mary hisses to her husband, 'Remember who we've got with us... What's he going to tell the others when he goes back? What respect are you going to get? You'll not be able to show your face' (C 59).

Tom is inspected for signs of degeneration; any scrap of evidence that will verify that he is a low-life is used to undermine his humanity and similarity to them. With regard to Forbes's attentions, Mary thinks that Tom would 'without compunction steal what belonged to Alistair and Gillian' with 'a show of affection and gratitude' (C 62). Even Tom's good qualities are seen as suspect. When he plays with Gillian and Alistair in 'such a fair-minded, helpful way,' for instance, he 'shows up the quarrelsome and selfish attitude of Alistair' in particular. Mrs. Storrocks implies that there is something wrong with Tom, however, with the argument that 'it was the nature of healthy normal children to squabble at their games' (C 66). Tom's inscrutable face leads Gillian to think that he is constantly laughing at them all: 'I still think he's laughing at us, all the time; not just at Daddy, but at you too, Mummy, and Grannie, and Alistair. Even at me' (C 67). This fear of derision parallels Johnnie Stark's terror of being taken for a 'mug,' and as with Stark, this anxiety feeds the girl's paranoia and antagonism. When Tom kills a rabbit suffering from myxomatosis, the boy becomes monstrous in Gillian's eyes; she insists to Forbes that he enjoyed killing the rabbit, and Tom's calm demeanour seems to verify the girl's charge (C 72, 71). Forbes is influenced by this mood of suspicion, accusing Tom of a lack of finer emotions: 'You didn't enjoy killing that rabbit, but did you have any pity for it? No, you kept apart even then. And I haven't heard you laughing yet. You must let your heart thaw, Tom, if we're going to help you' (C 73). Tom is gradually being characterised by Forbes's family as a savage, a hard man in the making, callous and unfeeling; the mercy he had shown the rabbit, and even his strength of character, are interpreted as signs of shallowness and inhumanity.

Gillian's vendetta against Tom Curdie continues until she catches the boy stealing a can-opener and a tin of ointment at Woolworth's (C 88). Finally, here is confirmation of Tom's inherent criminality. Reid interprets the episode as a reversion to kind: 'Tom's intentions are consciously destructive – the theft...was in fact a vain clutching at his old destructive identity'.³⁰ Tom himself realises, however, that he resists change because he fears rejection by the Forbes family; he does not want to become too much like them since he knows he will soon be sent back to the slums. The narrator explains his motivations:

Tom had stolen the tin-opener and the ointment to convince himself he was Chick and Peerie's friend, and Alec's brother, and that his home was in Donaldson's Court, to which he must return. It was to destroy the delusion growing in his mind that Mr and Mrs Forbes were his parents, Alistair his brother and Gillian his sister, and that his home was their house in the avenue of gardens.

(C 102)

Gillian grows to understand Tom's fear of rejection. As she queries near the end of the novel, 'Did you...steal those things in Woolworth's because – because you didn't want – to get – too fond of us?' (C 185). The theft forges a link between Gillian and Tom, a strange sense of kinship and complicity which the girl tries to breach by putting the boy back in his place. Initially, when she first confronts him with the theft, she is dismayed to see 'a boy of her own age, smaller even than she, and much more perplexed and unhappy' (C 88). Eventually, however, she does tell on Tom, thereby recreating a sense of division between herself and the boy, reinforcing a class distinction that had been wearing away. The words 'changeling' and 'monster' are used in reference to Tom now (C 96). He is completely dehumanised by the Forbes family. Forbes, for instance, feels himself to be 'in the grip of inimical non-human forces, whose instrument was indeed Tom Curdie' (C 101). The parents become increasingly hostile towards the boy. Tom is 'astonished by the loathing' he sees in Mary's eyes, and is stunned when she loses her temper at him for asking to borrow Gillian's bicycle (C 107, 108). Forbes mutters the word 'Changeling' at

³⁰ Reid, 'The Limits of Charity' 44.

Tom, and in a literal and symbolic act of exclusion, shuts the door in the boy's face (C 108).

Tom is now 'other folk,' not quite human, possibly even an 'animal.' The boy has been ostracised, thrown back into the slums, and he internalises their prejudice against him: 'whenever his thoughts strayed near them they recoiled, as if from an area of pain, terror, and shame' (C 111). He knows that he will never be allowed to enter the ranks of the middle class; he is 'amidst what he wanted, and yet never be able to obtain it' (C 125). Suspended between a desire for self-improvement and the awareness that the doors of escape are shutting in his face, Tom is miserable and desperate. He begins hating himself and his slum background. When he is confronted by awkward visits from his slum friends and family, he tries to distance himself from this evidence of his low origins (C 132). He denies knowing his friends altogether, and the appearance of his parents and siblings drives him to hide in the garden where he strikes his fist against a tree, drawing blood (C 142, 175). When it is discovered that two of Tom's friends have stolen a woman's handbag, Tom is implicated in the crime as its 'master-mind,' and he flees the house and the police with Gillian's help, seeking escape (C 182, 183). The children hide in a hut, where Gillian realises Tom's predicament: 'It was impossible for him to stay with her family always, and it seemed to her no less impossible for him to return to Donaldson's court with his own family' (C 186). Tom belongs to neither class and neither world; he feels that he is nobody, worthless to the point where he can commit the ultimate act of self-abasement. When Gillian leaves the hut, Tom hangs himself from a rafter (C 188). The girl's attempts to save him are futile (C 188-89). Although Edwin Morgan sees Tom's suicide as 'rather forced, rather too didactic,' he acknowledges the boy's act as an expression of his frustration and despair.³¹ Perhaps the suicide ending could be viewed as melodramatic, but the salient point is that Tom kills himself to avoid returning to his slum

³¹ Edwin Morgan, 'The Novels of Robin Jenkins,' *Essays* (Cheadle: Carcanet, 1974) 243.

home and family, to notoriety and prejudice; he has performed an extreme, irreversible act of escape. The message is as clear as it is grim: Tom Curdie is a casualty of a society which values power, money and status more than humanity.

As I have shown throughout this examination of a selection of Glasgow novels published between 1935 and 1970, the shadow of No Mean City is at once problematic and dynamic. The novel introduced a challenge into the literary continuum of Glasgow fiction which has been tackled, again and again, ever since. McArthur and Long, as opposed to most other working-class writers of the time, represented working-class people – male *and* female – as complicit in their own and others' victimisation; they demonstrated that participation in class and gender ideology can lead to violence and crime. Major Operation was the first attempt to defeat no-mean-cityism, offering a more politically idealised portrait of the Glaswegian underclasses in an attempt to undermine the idea that the proletarian masses are capable of class discrimination. At the same time, Barke's focus on class overshadows the equally important question of gender, and hence fails to achieve the level of subversiveness attained by McArthur and Long's tale of hard men and hairies. Certainly, the influence of No Mean City is multi-faceted. Writers have picked up the literary gauntlet in various ways – some, such as McNeillie and Gaitens, agree with, and expand on, the original 'no mean city' hypothesis that oppressive class and gender ideologies can damage working-class identity, resulting in violence, crime and general inhumanity. With Jenkins, the social criticism is broadened to include an analysis of working- and middle-class subjectivity; The Changeling demonstrates that all members of society are equally capable of victimisation and prejudice, and that the inhumane social order that results from fierce adherence to class ideology can result in psychological and physical violence. Some novelists, as in the case of Gaitens, try to show how even

ordinary, law-abiding slum dwellers can become victimisers in their pursuit of escape from feelings of inferiority, vulnerability, fear and shame. Others, such as McNeillie and McGhee, harken back to McArthur and Long's original characters, settings and plots, but do so with an eye to reinterpretation of the root sources of problematic social relations. Like No Mean City, Glasgow Keelie targets class and gender ideology as the main culprits for the violence that pervades society; additional blame is placed on the shoulders of imported American popular culture. Cut and Run is a more problematic treatment of the gangster theme: this story is both about *and* by an alleged hard man, so that the text functions as apologia, memoir, analysis and sensational fiction. Underneath these shifting and intersecting definitions, however, is McGhee's thesis that fear, shame and a desire for self-improvement can lead to violence, crime and victimisation. The challenge put forth by No Mean City has survived the decades following its publication in 1935, kept alive in the narratives of Glasgow writers; McArthur and Long's book has become an influential and disturbing chapter in the story of Glasgow's literary tradition. Chapter Four will continue the scrutiny of the novel's turbulent legacy by examining fiction written in and about Glasgow throughout the 1970s, the era which can be seen as the beginnings of a second wave of the Scottish Literary Renaissance.

Chapter Four

Reverberations of *No Mean City* in Novels Written during the 1970s

Although some Glasgow writers in the 1970s continued to explore the artistic potential of working-class experience in their novels and short fiction, they did so by attempting to reinterpret the old paradigms in more subversive and problematising ways. George Friel, William McIlvanney and Alan Spence are notable examples of this habit-breaking shift in the representation of Glaswegian masculinity and femininity given such powerful expression and iconicity by No Mean City. They have intertwined the lingering traces of 'nomeancityism' with their own revisions of Glasgow fiction – re-writing the city with an eye to the past, present and future – so that the modern Scottish urban novel continues to evolve within as well as beyond the well-worn paths. Friel's Mr Alfred M.A. (1972), McIlvanney's Laidlaw (1977) and Spence's Its Colours They are Fine (1977) are examples of Glaswegian fiction of the 1970s that incorporate *and* reassess the impact of No Mean City, although in far more subtle ways than, say, John McNeillie's Glasgow Keelie (1940) or Bill McGhee's Cut and Run (1962). I have chosen to focus on Friel, McIlvanney and Spence for two interrelated reasons: firstly, because they are prominent and influential Glasgow writers who have contributed to the development of Glaswegian fiction in particular and Scottish urban fiction in general; and secondly, because even though they tend to be concerned with working-class Glasgow, these three writers do not fall completely within the *direct* shadow of influence cast by McArthur and Long's legacy. Mr Alfred M.A., Laidlaw and Its Colours They are Fine provide evidence that No Mean City was becoming at this time something less like a bogeyman to be either imitated or resisted, and more like an undercurrent to the wave of talent and innovation that characterised Glasgow fiction of the 1970s and beyond.

Although critics detect the stirrings of a so-called second Scottish literary renaissance during the 1960s, the 1970s are often viewed as a seminal decade for Scottish culture, and

the 1980s onwards as the full realisation of Glasgow's literary potential.¹ The involvement of the Glaswegian literati in the city's cultural output was a crucial turning point for the Glasgow novel. The formation of the 'Glasgow Group' by Philip Hobsbaum in the early 1970s, besides providing Glasgow writers with a place to meet one another, also heralded a flourishing of literary talent.² The 'Group' included amongst others Tom Leonard, James Kelman, Liz Lochhead and Alasdair Gray, writers who are still central figures in Glasgow literature; further, they have in their turn "discovered" and encouraged other gifted writers, such as Agnes Owens and Janice Galloway,' thereby feeding the Glaswegian literary canon with new talent.³ The Group was a catalyst, and although it was not long-lived (1970-75), some of the authors who emerged from this time continue to make Glasgow and Glaswegians a central focus for their literary creations. Even so, authors *not* involved with the Group can be just as Glasgow-oriented; Edwin Morgan, George Friel, Alan Spence, Frank Kuppner and William McIlvanney, for example, were not directly associated with Hobsbaum's literary core, and their literary styles differ in many ways. Despite the variety of plots, characters and approaches amongst Glasgow writers, there is a strong sense of unity in the diversity – a common denominator seems to be an abiding desire to understand, represent and explain Glasgow, to make sense of a city overshadowed by the legacy of No Mean City.

George Friel is considered first here because he was a contemporary of McArthur and Long, and because his fiction evolves during the vogue for the so-called gangland style of Glaswegian working-class fiction launched by No Mean City, culminating in his urban masterpiece Mr Alfred M.A. (1972). Friel emerged as a major but under-examined Glasgow writer at a time when working-class fiction was still a contentious literary form.

¹ Moira Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 215.

² Burgess, Imagine a City 232.

³ Burgess, Imagine a City 232.

To begin with, Friel's writing career seemed promising. His first short story – 'You Can See It For Yourself' – was published in 1935, and 1936 is now seen as Friel's 'annus mirabilis,' because seven of his stories appeared in that year.⁴ Friel's writing career spanned more than four decades, and despite the recent appreciation for his stories and novels, like McArthur he had trouble getting his work published. Friel's focus on working-class Glasgow is sometimes offered as a reason why he was a struggling author all his life: Friel took 'enormous risks...by using working-class Glasgow for his fictional setting and then telling it 'like it is''.⁵ Burgess also thinks that Friel's dedication to working-class realism may have contributed to the difficulties he faced in 'placing his work'.⁶ It is tempting to view his short-lived publishing success in 1936 as one effect of how No Mean City raised the level in working-class literature; on the other hand, it could have been a simple case of Friel's (and/or his publisher's) opportunism, or even just a coincidence. Ironically, the furore caused by McArthur and Long's book, besides having cracked the glass ceiling of the British literary elitism, may have also overshadowed the more low-key rebellions embedded in Friel's comparatively bland and measured prose. Indeed, the tug-of-war between various approaches to working-class writing throughout the 1930s may help to explain why Friel's angry and scathing – but ultimately punch-pulling – representations of Glasgow would have been overlooked. As I pointed out in the previous chapter, the strong push for an idealised proletarian working-class literature – represented by James Barke's Major Operation – had in part been a counteractive measure against No Mean City. The heavy-handedness of Barke's socialist propaganda (which was in keeping with the political climate of the 1930s), added to No Mean City's sensationalism and mass-appeal, meant that Friel, whose short stories shared McArthur

⁴ Burgess, Imagine a City 151.

⁵ Gordon Jarvie, Introduction, A Friend of Humanity: Selected Short Stories, George Friel (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992) 6.

⁶ Burgess, Imagine a City 152.

and Long's concern to be as realistic as possible but lacked a marketable shock-value, seems to have been lost in the scuffle.

The influence of No Mean City on Friel's writings cannot be traced in his stories of the 1930s. Friel did not write in *reaction* to McArthur and Long, but rather *alongside* them, his literary voice adding a sub-tone of quiet anger to McArthur and Long's stridency. Although his representations of the Glaswegian working- and middle-classes lean towards a similar kind of brutal naturalism to No Mean City, he was not riding McArthur and Long's wave of success but rather writing with less discernible impact from the same literary camp. As Gordon Jarvie points out, Friel presented a view of Glasgow which was 'true to the characters he created and to the world of working-class Glasgow'.⁷

Like McArthur and Long, who strove to depict the harsh realities of everyday working-class life, Friel's ambition was to create an unflinching literary photograph of Glasgow. He was essentially a social realist.⁸ As a character in The Bank of Time (1959) states, 'I've got the camera eye...I take pictures, artistic pictures' (BT 184). Friel's scrutiny of Glaswegian realities became sharper through the years, and he was stubborn in his dedication to the still unfashionable realistic mode of literary representation:

What am I going to do? Put my head in the sand and say that everything is lovely? Surely a novelist, even in Glasgow, if he is writing about contemporary life, must tell the truth as he sees it. If I could see a lot of sweetness and light in Glasgow I would be happy to write about it: this is life. If you say what is going on then something might get done. But if you play Mr Glasgow and pretend that it's a fine warm-hearted city then you are kidding yourself, kidding the public, and pledging the future to no reform.⁹

Friel's literary utilitarianism meshed with that of McArthur and Long; fiction should reflect reality as closely as possible, create the illusion of a seamless relationship between representation and fact, and aim to provoke social criticism and change.

In the decades following the Second World War, Friel's writing style moves from

⁷ Jarvie, A Friend of Humanity 5.

⁸ Jarvie, A Friend of Humanity 5-6.

⁹ George Friel, Interview, Guardian (24 March 1972) 16.

undifferentiated standard English towards a more self-conscious use of vernacular, and his characters, settings and plots become more recognisably Glaswegian. As Douglas Gifford points out, however, Friel habitually avoids defining a sense of place in his works, even in his Glasgow novels: 'It is as though the writer deliberately wants a general implication to arise from his agent's actions, together with a limbo-like flatness of atmosphere'.¹⁰ With Mr Alfred M.A., some of the characters do speak broad Glaswegian, and Glasgow is a central, inescapable presence throughout the text, a character in itself. Despite the local flavour of Mr Alfred M.A., however, Gifford's contention that Friel aims to make generalised comments about modern society is valid. Mr. Alfred's Glasgow is more than just a backdrop for the action – it is at once every city *and* Scotland's city, simultaneously universal and specific. Glasgow comes over as an archetypal modern urban experience.

Friel's novel proves to be an especially bitter chapter in the 'no mean city' tradition of Scottish fiction. Edwin Morgan's comment in 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' (1994) indicates one point of overlap between No Mean City and Friel's story: Mr Alfred M.A. 'took a hard look at the Glasgow environment and found it usefully inimical'.¹¹ The presence of gangs in the narrative of Mr Alfred M.A. is an obvious allusion to 'nomeancityism,' but Friel's take on the matter of Glasgow – like that of Robin Jenkins and Edward Gaitens – is a departure from 'gangland' in both style and complexity. McArthur and Long's examination of Glasgow through working-class characters is scathing and critical, but remains firmly in the realistic mode. Friel's scrutiny is equally ruthless, but its psychological analysis is more sophisticated.

Mr. Alfred is a middle-aged teacher in Glasgow whose sexual problems and psychological degeneration form the main plot of the narrative. He is a divided identity:

¹⁰ Douglas Gifford, 'Bleeding from All that's Best: The Fiction of Iain Crichton Smith,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 33.

¹¹ Edwin Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 87.

during the day he is old-fashioned and conservative; at night he does the stereotypically Scottish switch in personality, becoming a heavy drinker who goes on pub crawls until the early hours of the morning. As with Johnnie Stark in No Mean City, Alfred demonstrates that masculinity is a performance that men must execute perfectly. Glover and Kaplan suggest that the 'ideal of masculinity...requires intense effort: a man must struggle against himself'.¹² For Alfred, the act is too difficult to keep up. Hence his crush on his student Rose Weipers. Here is what Alfred sees as ideal femininity – virginal, clean and unthreatening, a 'graceful trinity' for a man riddled with feelings of inadequacy (MA 460). She becomes an object of love, a daughter and platonic lover all in one: 'She looked so young, so remote from the world's slow stain, so trim and brave, so lonely and devoted, coming back to him and him alone, he was soothed to tenderness, his vanity gratified' (MA 464). At the same time, he knows that a monster lurks beneath his paternal façade, and is troubled by 'his own bad mind' (MA 465). The old hard man skulks in the recesses of his civilised masculinity – he can imagine raping Rose just as he can imagine attacking someone with a knife, but would be horrified to carry out these 'damnable deed[s]' himself (MA 465-66). Alfred is several kinds of men in one: hard man, middle-class teacher, poet, sexual, impotent, violent, cruel, Glaswegian, anglicised, alcoholic, prude, romantic and mundane. Johnnie Stark is still alive and well in Mr. Alfred, but is redefined as one potential expression of Glaswegian masculine identity, not simply the *only* option.

Alfred struggles to extricate himself from his city by severing the Glasgow hard man from himself. His supercilious view of 'common' people and his working-class students is based on shame, and forges a false class difference: 'I like to mix with the common people sometimes. You know, go around incognito' (MA 403). He uses language as a weapon of class distinction: 'He felt he was a foreigner trying to get across to people who didn't speak his language' (MA 394). Alfred's professed inability to understand Glaswegian,

¹² David Glover and Cora Kaplan, Genders (London: Routledge, 2000) 60.

added to his use of obscure standard English words, is a pretence born of shame. Gordon Jarvie's introduction to Mr Alfred M.A. criticises this aspect of Friel's writing style: 'he seems to flaunt obscure words in a manner at once ponderous and irritating...it seems a pity to have to stop and look it up quite so frequently' (MA xiv). I think Jarvie misses the subtlety of Friel's point. Alfred is embarrassed by his origins, and the everyday language of his own people, and so uses impressive sounding diction to *overcome his shame*. At the same time, the *narrator* (who is not necessarily meant to represent the author) slips in similarly obscure words, as if in sardonic echo of his protagonist's artificial erudition. The use of elevated language by both Alfred and his narrator can also be viewed from the perspective of stylistic theory. If we agree with Richard Bradford's statement that 'stylistic register affects...meaning,' then Friel's insertions of difficult words can be seen as a comment on the classed nature of language use.¹³ Alfred uses big words to *impress*, and to create the impression that he is more educated – and hence more classy – than other people.

Indeed, Friel's exploration of language is a carefully crafted and sustained process of oppression and subversion. His novel is preoccupied with the effects of language style as a vehicle for class distinction:

The class watched his defeat with placid interest.
 He [Mr. Alfred] grabbed Gerald by the scruff and pushed him to the door.
 'You come and see the headmaster,' he said.
 'Take your hauns aff me,' said Gerald.
 His dialect vowels were themselves a form of insolence. Normally a boy spoke to his teacher in standard English.

(MA 429)

Alfred's supercilious demeanour has been pierced by a boy's use of Glaswegian vernacular. Friel seems to be setting up an opposition here between two contrasting forms of communication. Language is not a neutral medium of expression; it carries emotions, class distinctions and attitudes. So 'standard English' is the language of power, authority,

¹³ Richard Bradford, Stylistics (London: Routledge, 1997) 172.

coercion and conformity; Glaswegian vernacular, on the other hand, is 'insolent,' aggressive, disruptive, disrespectful, wounding and cheeky. Glasgow English undermines Mr. Alfred's smug sense of middle-class superiority because it somehow blurs the distinction between himself and his lower-class pupil. Glaswegian is held up as a leveller, a threat to the status quo.

In part two of Mr Alfred M.A., entitled 'The Writing on the Wall,' the focus on language becomes more intense. When he is transferred to another school, Alfred is upset by the graffiti he finds in schoolbooks, and tries to see patterns in the scribbles; he is searching for meaning, clarity and understanding in the anonymous cryptic messages (MA 526). So the recurrence of the word 'Hox' in textbooks, exercise books, desks, rulers, corridors and lavatories intrigues him until he finds out that it is the name of a local gang (MA 526-27). Alfred turns everything – including himself – into a text that can be read, deciphered, cross-referenced and made coherent. He reads newspaper stories about teenage violence, wishes he could 'go back over the script of his life and rewrite the dialogue,' and notices new gang names appearing on the walls and hoardings on his bus route to work (MA 528). Alfred interprets the graffiti as a sign of an approaching apocalypse, the erosion of civilisation; he perceives an ominous significance: 'He became obsessed with the unending defacement of the city' (MA 530). His terror of his students increases. He detects 'something uncivilised in their eyes, something rude in their smirk, something savage in their slouch. They were foreigners. They didn't speak his language. They were on a different channel and he couldn't switch over' (MA 531). A discussion amongst teachers about the use of the tawse (strap) in school brings out the snob in Alfred: 'It's like the language of a country,' he states, 'You've got to speak it to be understood' (MA 425). Language, like corporal punishment, is a weapon of oppression.

Language can also defame as well as deface. Gerald Provan's single mother slanders and libels Mr. Alfred, thereby undermining his credibility as a teacher and as a man. First, she lodges a formal complaint against Alfred for punishing her son (MA 406-9); she then flies to Gerald's defence by refusing to allow the school to discipline the boy, a stand-off between mother and school which leads to a media circus (MA 433-35). The negative publicity initiated by Mrs. Provan, when added to her exposure of Alfred's questionable relationship with Rose Weipers, eventually brings about the teacher's downfall. Mrs. Provan writes an anonymous letter accusing Alfred of 'giving money to girls in the school and using indecent practices with them, particularly one Rose Weipers' (MA 503). Significantly, Mrs. Provan adopts standard English, not working-class Glaswegian, to cast aspersions on Alfred's character and behaviour; the effects of using the official language of power are devastating for the maligned teacher. As a result of the scandal, Alfred is transferred to Waterholm Comprehensive, where his degeneration into insanity accelerates (MA 510, 523).

Instances of language being used to inscribe class difference are not confined to the characterisation of Mr. Alfred. Senga, Gerald's sister, uses the weapon of class discrimination in her battle with Gerald:

She criticised Gerald's clothes and the shoes he wore. She derided his haircut, even his walk. She mocked the way he spoke. His enunciation was poor. He swallowed half his words, he used a glottal stop, and he spoke so quickly that every sentence came over like one enormous agglutination of syllables. It pleased Senga to make him repeat what he said the few times he dared speak to her.

'Pardon. What did you say?'

(MA 512)

Senga's motive is vengeance, hence the use of politeness as a weapon; years of abuse from her mother and brother have made her cruel: 'She never missed a chance to be sarcastic. She had come to have a sharp tongue, and she used it to cut those who wounded her' (MA 511). Ironically, this also leads to Alfred's downfall, when she blurts out her defence of

his character: 'He's [Mr. Alfred] just as nice as anybody else,' said Senga. 'Nicer than some I could mention. Anyway, all the girls in my class like him' (MA 499).

In her attempt to insult her mother and brother, Senga ends up by implicating Mr.

Alfred as a possible child molester:

'Rose Weipers,' said Senga. 'He gives her money every week. Just for going to a shop for him.'
 'Oh yes?' said Mrs Provan.
 'He treats her like a father,' said Senga. 'Something I haven't got.'
 'That's enough,' said Mrs Provan.
 'If she had no father,' said Senga, 'he'd take her home he said.'
 'He'd what?' said Mrs Provan.
 'Adopt her,' said Senga. 'Of course you wouldn't understand. Somebody being fond of somebody. Him kissing her, you'd think he was just a sloppy old man. The idea of affection, of anyone showing affection I mean. It would never occur to you two.'

(MA 500)

Senga's indiscretion, born of her desire to fight back against her oppressors, leads to Alfred's removal from school. As Gerald exclaims, 'Haw, maw! Did you hear that? Big Alfy kissing the girls and giving them money. The dirty old man!' (MA 500).

Rose Weipers, the object of Mr. Alfred's dotting, also contributes to the teacher's undoing; she gossips and brags about Alfred's attentions, thereby showing once again that language in Friel's novel becomes a metaphorical weapon. By confiding in Senga about her relationship with Mr. Alfred, Rose sets in motion a seemingly unstoppable chain of events, leading to a thorough interrogation by the headmaster, and Alfred's complete vilification. The point of origin for this particular episode can be traced in the following passage:

She [Rose] didn't mean to be disloyal when she told Senga Mr Alfred had a habit of kissing her. She didn't mean anything. She was only talking. Perhaps she had an urge to boast she had an elderly admirer, perhaps it was the intimacy induced by a tête-à-tête in the toilet made her say too much.

(MA 498)

Rose enjoys bragging to Senga about Alfred making a favourite of her; in itself, this pride seems harmless enough, but added to Senga's own desire to attack her mother and brother,

Rose's unintentional slur against Alfred's character becomes the focus for the questioning session. Rose is intimidated by Mr. Briggs's questions about the money Alfred had given her, and the teacher's habit of kissing her. At first she tries to lie about what she had told Senga: 'I told her he kissed me...But I just made that up' (MA 506). Further probing from Mr. Briggs and Rose bursts into tears, unable to explain herself properly, blurting out 'At first he just held my hand!' (MA 506). Although Mr. Alfred is cleared of any suspicion of indecent practices with Rose, the damage to his reputation has been done (MA 508).

Friel's Mr Alfred M.A. involves a series of verbal razor fights – words wound, deface and defame, leave social and psychological scars, and inscribe class difference. The novel takes 'nomeancityism' to a new level; the gangsters carve their presence into the hard skin of the city; the working class wrestle with the anglicised authorities, swinging at will between standard and Glaswegian English; the school system controls the language style of students; the subject of gangsterism pervades the newspapers and hijacks the conversations of teachers. Language is a powerful weapon in an ideological battle; whether it is Mr Alfred correcting his students' grammar and vocabulary, or Gerald cutting his teacher down to size by speaking broad Glasgow slang, or gangsters scribbling cryptic messages on tenement walls and stealing the card catalogues from a local library, the war of words permeates the fabric of Glasgow, from the streets and slums to the textbooks and headmaster's office in a run-down comprehensive. The suggestion is that all language users in the book are complicit in the violence of class ideology; more significant, perhaps, is the idea that this war is being won by the lower orders. As the demonic character of Tod informs Alfred, language has been recruited as a weapon of cultural revolution: 'Deride, deface, destroy' (MA 565, 567). The hard men and hairies, as epitomised by Tod, control Glasgow as a place, and as a text: '[You're] all on the way out. All you literary bastards. It's the end of the printed word. Everything's a scribble now. The writing's on

the wall. I know. I got it put there' (MA 568). Tod's twist on an old cliché shows how gangland Glasgow has refined its techniques: 'The felt-pen is mightier than the sword' (MA 571).

Friel's view of working-class experience is ominous and threatening; his exploration of verbal, in addition to physical, violence can be seen as a continuation of, and elaboration on McArthur and Long's social pessimism. In startling contrast is Alan Spence's collection of short stories *Its Colours They are Fine* (1977). A less cynical representation of Glaswegian working-class experience, Spence's fiction does not argue that the shame of poverty, and class ideology in general, lead to the creation of hard men and hairies; rather, he looks at how the Glaswegian underclasses develop in reaction to either a negative or positive self-perception. There is a strong undercurrent of existentialism throughout *Its Colours They are Fine*, which draws attention to identity as a series of choices, rather than a simple, incontrovertible product of environment, gender, social standing or economics. Here we have a subtle and complex examination of a multi-dimensional Glasgow, which many critics acknowledge as a major advance in Glaswegian literature:

Its Colours They are Fine...stands as the finest short-story collection yet written about a range of Glasgow children and adults, a series of ambiguous epiphanies of simultaneous love for and anger at Glasgow character and poverty...¹⁴

Spence's writing style is naturalistic, which is in keeping with McArthur and Long and the realist streak in Glasgow literature. This is familiar enough territory. Spence's innovation, however, is in his use of epiphany, so that *Its Colours They are Fine* is not exclusively about Glasgow as *No Mean City*; as the collection progresses, the affirmative connotations embedded in McArthur and Long's ironic title become increasingly apparent in Spence's hands:

¹⁴ Douglas Gifford, 'Imagining Scotlands: The Return to Mythology in Modern Scottish Fiction,' *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, Susanne Hagemann, ed. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) 42.

My writing often has a harsh surface realism, but something else keeps breaking through. And it's that *something else* I want to celebrate. The moment, the glimpse, the insight. A sense of astonishment and wonder. *Here we are!*¹⁵

Whereas McArthur and Long attract attention to the Glaswegian working class through literary shock treatment, Spence's book is a *validation* of Glasgow in all of its manifestations – good and bad. There is a thread of pride and compassion throughout Its Colours They are Fine, combined with an unflinching look at the realities of everyday working-class experience, which is a departure from the sinister tone of Friel's Mr Alfred M.A. or the bitter and reformatory zeal of McArthur and Long's novel. I would not go so far as to say, as Ian Bell does in 'Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction' (1996), that Spence is part of a quest to completely transform Glasgow fiction out of all recognition, but like many of the writers discussed so far, he has revised the tradition to accommodate a more inclusive, and therefore multi-faceted, image of the city.¹⁶ His realism is offset by what has been called a 'poetic radiance' in his 'Joycean epiphanies of Glasgow street life,' lending Glasgow some of the symbolism Joyce gave his own city in Dubliners (1914). Spence infuses his narrative with a spiritual dimension that seems to be lacking in bare-bones naturalism. As the aspiring writer in 'Auld Lang Syne' emphasises,

[There's] other ways to look at it. Other patterns to make. And the great thing about the images is they're concrete. They're real. A bell. A bird. A fish. A tree. Things. And that's what you come back to after all the flyin about. Just the plain miraculousness of what is.

(C 211)

So Spence is not eschewing realism altogether, but is trying to expose the potential of realism to express more than one kind of Glaswegian reality. The poet of this particular

¹⁵ Alan Spence, Writers in Brief no 23: Alan Spence (Glasgow: National Book League, 1986) 4.

¹⁶ Ian A. Bell argues that Alan Spence – along with other recent novelists such as James Kelman, Agnes Owens, Jeff Torrington, Carl MacDougall, Brian MacCabe, Irvine Welsh, Iain Banks, William McIlvanney, A. L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway – has been 'revising the imagining of Scotland through the form of the novel to such an extent that both the subject and the vehicle of expression have by now virtually been reinvented.' 'Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present, ed. Susanne Hagemann (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996) 219-20.

story finds in Glasgow's concreteness a source of epiphanic majesty which he wants to convey in his 'long poem about Glasgow' (C 210). 'All ah have to do is write it!', he declares; it is up to him as the writer to articulate what he sees as the magic of the ordinary, to unravel the riddle of Glasgow to get to 'the Holy Grail, or the Jewel in the Lotus, or whatever' (C 211).

Spence uses his stories to reinterpret the literary traditions associated with Glasgow writing. His Foreword to Moira Burgess's Reading Glasgow (1996) confirms that he values multiplicity and inclusiveness in literary portraits of the city:

It's the juxtaposition of these disparate images as we move through the book, through the city and its past, that make the place come to life. Whatever Glasgow you're looking for – dear green place or no mean city, Unthank or Clydegrad, patter-merchant-city of culture, or city of the stare, this book can only add to its "imaginative existence".¹⁷

Revision, however, is not erasure; as Spence suggests, it all depends on the Glasgow 'you're looking for.' So the presence of No Mean City is detectable in Its Colours They are Fine; indeed, McArthur and Long's book becomes the dark counterpoint throughout the text, its presence the pressure against which Spence's re-thinks the relationship between Glasgow, poverty and working-class identity. The Glasgow that Spence wants us to see is a multi-coloured spectacle, terrible and dynamic, beautiful and ugly, grey shot through with colours hard to see from the outside, but up close gleaming with a vulnerable yet obstinate humanity: 'the work of Alan Spence in *Its Colours They Are Fine* [shows] that humanity and humour could be found in grimmest Glasgow'.¹⁸ Spence's publication is also an indication that the 1970s is the decade of Glasgow beginning to come to terms with itself as a predominantly working-class city. There is a discernable move in Spence's

¹⁷ Alan Spence, Foreword, Reading Glasgow: A Book Trust Scotland Literary Guide to authors and books associated with the city, Moira Burgess (Edinburgh: Book Trust Scotland, 1996) 1.

¹⁸ Douglas Gifford et al, eds., Scottish Literature in English and Scots (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 933.

work from 'bleakness and trauma to regeneration,' a shift in perspective from unqualified pessimism towards a 'qualified optimism'.¹⁹

Its Colours They are Fine provides an optimistic portrait of urban boyhood. Spence's definition of manhood, however, is often equated with violence (both physical and verbal), and focuses primarily on male urban experience and subjectivity. Although Edwin Morgan argues that Spence's work is untypical of the much-imitated Glasgow tradition of No Mean City, the textual construction of boys and men in Its Colours They are Fine retains ties to the macho image of the Glasgow hard man.²⁰

Burgess agrees that at the heart of Spence's collection of short stories is the 'no mean city' take on Glasgow, although the book is not exclusively about working-class crime. The character of Shuggie for instance is the hard man in the making, the boyhood companion of the gentler, more sensible protagonist, Aleck. The development of Shuggie from a 'wee tough guy' of ten or eleven years old into an unskilled shipyard worker who picks fights and enjoys the feel of a steel comb in his pocket 'is familiar enough in Glasgow fiction from *No Mean City* onwards'.²¹ Spence's treatment of the hard man seems at first glance to betray a more compassionate attitude than that shown by McArthur and Long in their handling of Johnnie Stark's degeneration. As Allan Massie points out, Spence 'has portrayed the development of the Hardman, without any secret thrill of identification, without glamour but with understanding and pity'.²² Spence's examination of the development of male working-class identity redresses a perceived imbalance in the modern Scottish urban novel. Spence's hard man takes a backseat to his lad o' pairs throughout the text, and the separate paths taken by Shuggie and Aleck – one towards failure and the other towards potential success – paint a more optimistic portrait of

¹⁹ Gifford et al, Scottish Literature 934, 935.

²⁰ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 89-90.

²¹ Burgess, Imagine a City 242-43.

²² Allan Massie, 'Sense and Sensibility,' Scotsman (27 August 1977) 15.

Glaswegian masculinity than that provided by No Mean City. Spence's innovation is to juxtapose elements from the 'No Mean City' tradition with an altogether more tolerant view of Glasgow working-class men; the result is a brighter, more confident vision of a city that acknowledges its dark side whilst celebrating its triumphs.

Its Colours They are Fine absorbs the influence of No Mean City without trying to deny its significance in Glasgow's sense of itself. Hard men and hairies are part of the city's colours. Burgess agrees. In The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition (1986), for instance, she states that the most 'telling' aspect of Spence's short stories 'are the early stories which, almost casually, trace the degeneration of a street-wise urchin into a "hard man"'.²³ The first section of the collection includes 'Tinsel,' 'Sheaves,' 'The Ferry,' 'Gypsy' and 'Silver in the Lamplight.' The central male characters of the sequence are Aleck, Joe and Shuggie; the choices they make throughout their childhoods determine what kind of men they become. In 'Tinsel,' for instance, a very young Aleck is waiting in the entrance of the local steamie for his mother. Tiny details indicate a boy whose eventual approach to life will be creative, rather than completely destructive. His reaction to dirt is to want to make it clean, to restore what has been tarnished to its true beauty:

When the doors had stopped swinging and settled back into place he noticed that the brass plate was covered with fingermarks. He wanted to see it smooth and shiny so he breathed up on it, clouding it with his breath, and rubbed it with his sleeve. But he only managed to smear the greasy marks across the plate leaving it streaky and there was still a cluster of prints near the top that he couldn't reach at all.

(C 11)

If we see the brass plate as Glasgow, and the fingermarks as evidence of human involvement and damage to the city, then Aleck's failed attempt to shine up the plate may seem to indicate the impossibility of renewal. The past cannot be erased. On the other hand, the boy *wanting* to bring out the brass's shine could be an indication that this may be one of the connecting threads throughout the text as a whole. Aleck is an idealist;

²³ Moira Burgess, The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition (Glasgow: Glasgow District Libraries, 1986) 97.

he does not accept the way things are, and always hopes for something better, something that cannot be tainted by experience and use. Hence the title of the story – ‘Tinsel’ – bought by his father as part of the family’s Christmas decorations. For Aleck, the cheap garland leads to a moment of Joycean transcendence:

‘What dis that say daddy?’ He pointed at the label.
 ‘It says UNTARNISHABLE TINSEL GARLAND.’
 ‘What dis that mean?’
 ‘Well that’s what it is. It’s a tinsel garland. Tinsel’s the silvery stuff it’s made a. An a garland’s jist a big long sorta decoration, for hangin up. An untarnishable means...well...how wid ye explain it hen?’
 ‘Well,’ said his mother, ‘it jist means it canny get wasted. It always steys nice an shiny.’

(C 19)

Aleck wants to hang on to perfection, but knows that nothing can transcend change. Gazing out the darkened window, he can see a reflection of the room, his parents, and the tinsel garland that would ‘never ever tarnish,’ and realises that both he and the world he lives in must succumb to influence, impermanence and possible damage (C 21). It is an early awakening for a young boy, but it is something that compels him to always seek to fix things, improve himself and his life.

When he is in the company of other Govan boys, however, Aleck bears a slight resemblance to the young Johnnie Stark. In ‘Sheaves,’ male comradeship involves football games, hyperactive behaviour, and acting out violent scenes from American films (C 26, 35). Aleck even aspires to the gangster image when he tears his knee while being chased from his football match in the street:

Aleck had torn his knee on some barbed wire and he’d worn an ostentatious bandage for a week. When anyone had asked what was wrong he’d tried to look sinister like a gangster and spat out his reply... ‘Ah goat it runnin fae the polis’...And he’d hoped it conjured up a picture of himself, gun-toting masked desperado in a running shoot-out across Govan. Wanted. Hunted.

(C 26)

And yet, further along in the collection, ‘Brilliant’ shows up the contrasts between Eddie and Shuggie on the one hand, and the conscientious (and now adolescent) Aleck on the

other. The differences that are becoming evident between two forms of masculinity expose the limiting effects of adhering to the hard man image of Glasgow. Even though Eddie views Aleck as an antithetical Glasgow man – sneering at Aleck’s flute and general academic appearance, calling him a ‘poofin wee cunt’ – it’s Shuggie who points out ‘Ach well...E’ll come oot wi a good joab an that. Nae fuckin overtime fur him’ (C 100-01).

Shuggie chooses to take the other path in the journey towards Glaswegian manhood. In ‘Gypsy,’ he has all of the tell-tale signs of the hooligan: prejudiced, sectarian, foul-mouthed, aggressive and violent. The narrator exerts patience and sympathy, however, by attempting to trace the origins of Shuggie’s badness to his environment:

He was bigger and stronger than Aleck or Joe and he tended to boss them. He’d been too much for his mother, ever since his father had been killed. That was about a year ago, and it had made quite an impression on all of them.

(C 65)

Shuggie’s unruliness is not all to be blamed on hardship. His father’s death, the result of a hit-and-run driver, has afforded the family with a small measure of fame:

There had even been a bit about it in the paper and they’d all experienced that strange realization that somehow their lives, and the places and people they knew, had a being and a relevance in the bigger world, the world of newspapers. And in Shuggie’s reaction, in spite of his distress, there had been pride in this simple recognition of their existence. He’d cut out the newspaper paragraph telling of the accident and kept it flat between the pages of his Scottish Football Book. Aleck remembered him cutting it out and saying, ‘Jist imagine, Aleck, hunners and hunners a people reading that.’ And he’d looked pleased at the thought.

(C 65-6)

Here are echoes of Johnnie Stark’s pride in his city-wide notoriety, which fed his ambition to be special, lifted out of the anonymous common ruck. Spence’s approach is at once similar to and different from that of No Mean City: certainly, the pleasure Shuggie takes in being noticed through the death of his father has ominous overtones; at the same time, the narrator contrasts the boy’s pride with his grief, thereby providing a more kindly interpretation of the hard man’s psyche than McArthur and Long’s narrator does for Johnnie Stark.

Since Its Colours They are Fine focuses primarily on the development of working-class men, female characters seem at first glance to be of secondary importance. They float around as a backdrop to the main drama of male development. Mary Jacobus's argument that patriarchal discourse renders femininity into 'absence, silence or incoherence' is particularly applicable to our understanding of how women and girls are often depicted throughout the narrative.²⁴ In Spence's Glasgow, male competition, obscene language, and the exclusion of girls and women permeate the representations of male relationships. Spence's collection tends to devote much of its attention to the male urban experience, and to view women's lives and characters from a 'masculine' perspective that emphasises various fragments of stereotypical femininity: as sexual, domestic, slatternly, or maternal in nature. Aleck's mother in 'Tinsel,' for instance, is the hard-working mother figure, earning the family's income as a baker, turbaned and pushing a pram full of washing from the local steamie, devoted to her husband and son, making Christmas happen – a clean, supportive, uncomplaining vision of working-class femininity (C 13, 15, 19-20). In 'Sheaves,' she continues to be the perfect no-nonsense Glaswegian mother, cutting up vegetables for the soup bubbling away on the stove, ordering her son to wash and dress for Sunday school (C 23-4, 25). The hairy is another female type, although she is retained as an unattractive and strident example of undesirable femininity. In 'Silver in the Lamplight,' there is Mrs. Gallacher, 'bleached hair in curlers. Puffy-eyed and hungover... Fat tits bulging under a dirty cardigan' who yells from her tenement window at Aleck for the disturbance he is making in her 'back' (C 63). Another adult female type is the school teacher, stern and dedicated, kind and vindictive, supportive and repressive. The symbolically named Mrs. Stone functions

²⁴ Mary Jacobus, 'The Difference of View,' Women Writing about Women, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Croom Helm, 1979) 12.

simultaneously as both the educator and the oppressor of growing boys. Like Mr. Alfred, she corrects her students' pronunciation:

'How did you get yourself so dirty Hugh?' she asked Shuggie. He had dusted himself down, but he still looked far from clean. Somehow he had managed to smear a lopsided moustache across his upper lip.

'There wis a lot of dust 'n tap a the boax, miss.' He said.

'On TOP of the BOX,' she said. 'Not on tap of the boax! Some of these days I'll manage to teach you children some English!'

(C 50)

At the same time, although she does end up by banning inter-school football games because of the boys' unruly behaviour, Mrs. Stone makes the arrangements for this pastime for the schoolboys in the area in the first place (C 50). Her type of femininity is authoritative and nurturing, edifying and punitive. The strong, maternal female character as the professional educator.

Another female type in Its Colours They are Fine is the little girl. One appears in 'Tinsel,' the silent and unwilling audience to Aleck's antics, the victim of his face-pulling (C 13). Another shows up in 'Gypsy,' blonde-haired Valerie, yet another unenthusiastic recipient of a boy's aggressive attentions (C 52-3, 60). Girls are the spectators at a local football match in the same story, their presence an occasion for more male posturing: 'Aleck pranced up and down like a male model and Shuggie threw the ball after him, both performing for the girls watching as well as for each other' (C 53). When Shuggie starts fighting with Valerie's brother Les during the game, the girls in the audience shriek 'with delighted horror' (C 55). The teacher, Mrs. Stone, is informed by 'the girls' about the fight and swearing that had gone on during the match (C 55).

Even when the narrative focuses on a woman's inner life, or subjectivity – as it does in 'The Rain Dance' – the emphasis is firmly placed on the importance of women's physicality, sexuality and reproductive function:

Mother Mary working in the kitchen, on the other side of the thin wall. And once Kathleen had been no more than a stirring inside her, had been one with her, curled

and safe in the warmth of her womb. She slid back down into the water again, lapped in the warmth surrounding. She brought her knees up to her chest then stretched again, looking down at her body, pale through the soapy water, the curve of breast and belly breaking the surface, the black seaweed tangle of hair, flattened out by the water, felt below it the soft depth of hole, open, the dark emptiness her being centred around. Blessed art thou among women. Blessed is the fruit of thy womb.

(C 121)

Compared to McArthur and Long's representations of working-class femininity, Spence's portrait of Kathleen seems to validate and ennoble the female body and its functions; however, Spence affirms femininity in terms of sexual desirability, motherhood, emptiness and religion, whereas McArthur and Long offer a more balanced, realistic and honest view of working-class women.

The men and boys of Its Colours They are Fine – despite their predilection for stereotypically macho behaviour – do not come close to the pathological violence of Johnnie Stark. Indeed, the work ends with an affirmation of male sensitivity, introspection and intellect. In 'Auld Lang Syne' and 'Blue,' for instance, the first-person narrator explores with gentle satire the materialism, sentimentality, poverty and poignancy of the Glasgow urban experience, raising Glasgow (and Glaswegians with it) to a more all-inclusive, rather than predominantly male-focused, level: 'And it suddenly seems funny, this madness. I imagine us all dancing to that music, linking in a conga-line, weaving through the check-outs' (C 205). Both men and women are shown participating in a traditionally feminine activity, shopping for food. The narrator also draws attention to, and attempts to include, the often marginalised Glaswegian population – Japanese, Irish and Pakistani characters are given an uncondescending space in his Glasgow panorama. The narrator examines a statue of Buddha in the Art Galleries: 'And here it was in Glasgow, smiling at me' (C 193-4); he exchanges a smile and a 'Hare Krishna' with a harassed orange-robed devotee moving through the Hogmanay crowds (C 205); he stops outside a Chinese shop to inspect the oriental

wares in the window, and contemplates the Chinese characters stencilled on the wooden crate he carries home with him (C 205); he recalls the grief of an Irish neighbour whose young brother was killed in Belfast (C 208); he watches an Indian woman pass by in a red raincoat and a gold-embroidered sari (C 198). Our glimpses of these atypical Glaswegians are fleeting, but serve to remind the reader that Glasgow is not the homogeneous, white, Christian culture it seems at first glance.

Its Colours They are Fine represents a shift in attitude towards the subject of working-class Glasgow that is at once tolerant, inclusive, realistic and lyrical. With McArthur and Long, the realities of Glaswegian experience are intended as a catalyst for social reform; with Spence, realism serves as a celebration of working-class subjectivity. For Spence, writing about Glasgow is a personal commitment to a sense of place and self: 'I had grown up in Glasgow, in Govan, in fact, which wasn't the most beautiful part of the planet...I thought...this is what you've got to write about: you know, the tenements and the middens and the wine drinkers and scabby duggs and the housing schemes'.²⁵ Its Colours They are Fine is an assertion of Glasgow's legitimacy as a subject worthy of literary attention. Its relationship with No Mean City's legacy is to declare kinship with the grim realities of working-class experience, whilst aiming to expose the positive aspects of blue-collar Glasgow.

As opposed to Spence's emphasis on the Glasgow aesthetic, which tends towards the apolitical, William McIlvanney achieves a balance between fine writing and cutting social criticism in his crime fiction. In "'No fairies. No monsters. Just people.'" Resituating the Work of William McIlvanney' (1996), Keith Dixon sees McIlvanney's Laidlaw (1977) as a deconstruction of the 'gangland myths' supposedly perpetuated by No Mean City.²⁶ One

²⁵ Fiona Norris, Writers in Scotland (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1994) 1.

²⁶ Keith Dixon, "'No fairies. No monsters. Just people.'" Resituating the Work of William McIlvanney,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present, Susanne Hagemann, ed. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) 188.

striking similarity between William McIlvanney's crime fiction and *No Mean City* *qua* gangland novel, however, is in how some critics have undervalued both in terms of genre. As Dixon points out, 'McIlvanney's contribution so far to Scottish literature, and his place within a modern Scottish philosophical tradition have perhaps been underrated'.²⁷ Edwin Morgan notes that the tendency amongst the literary establishment to view genre fiction as simplistic is common:

William McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* (1977) may have been underestimated because it is a detective thriller, a murder mystery, and that category may make it seem less serious than his mainstream novels like *Docherty*.²⁸

As Morgan argues, set as it is in Glasgow, *Laidlaw* has 'much interest' in terms of its realism, descriptions of the city, and exploration of Glaswegian masculinity.²⁹ I do not agree, however, with his analysis of Jack Laidlaw's character, or with his tentative treatment of the other male characters. Morgan views *Laidlaw* as a combination of 'Glasgow hardness and a Glasgow empathy brought together'; the murderer is a 'sexually confused young man' who has 'tried, with desperate and tragic results, to love the girl he eventually killed'.³⁰ This analysis of McIlvanney's characterisation techniques obscures the full force of the novel's social criticism. McIlvanney's look at Glaswegian working-class identity is more complex and scathing than Morgan's interpretation suggests.³¹ *Laidlaw*'s Glasgow is a city ruled by hard men – both within and without the confines of the legal system – whose primary victims are women.

McIlvanney's crime fiction is both symptomatic of and a departure from the 'no mean city school' of Glaswegian fiction, and is more in keeping with the international popularity of crime fiction in general. As Douglas Gifford puts it, 'crime is used as metaphor for

²⁷ Dixon, "No fairies. No monsters. Just people" 197.

²⁸ Morgan, "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel" 91.

²⁹ Morgan, "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel" 91.

³⁰ Morgan, "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel" 92.

³¹ Morgan, "Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel" 92.

modern society'.³² The strong existential thrust of his writing invests his depictions of Glaswegian working-class men and women with an uncompromising sense of freedom and responsibility, recalling and reinforcing McArthur and Long's argument for the agency of the lower classes. Alan MacGillivray sees *Laidlaw* and its ambivalent eponymous hero as a commentary on Glasgow in particular, and modern urban Scotland in general:

Just as *Docherty* is a statement about Tam Docherty and his world, so *Laidlaw* and its successor, *The Papers of Tony Veitch* are statements about Jack Laidlaw (who is more than a Detective-Inspector in the Scottish Crime Squad) and his world, which is the City of Glasgow (and by extension urban Scotland). The change of location from Graithnock to Glasgow is significant only up to a point. In Graithnock, the town was fictional and symbolic but the streets and places were authentic; in Laidlaw's Glasgow, there is a mixture of the authentic and the invented within the symbolic assembly of 'mean streets', the Naked City, the Megalopolis of the detective story genre. Whether it is Drumchapel, or Dennistoun, or Pollokshields, or Hillhead, or Bearsden, the aura of corruption and crime infects and equalises.³³

Through McIlvanney we still see a Glasgow saturated with the criminality that McArthur and Long emphasised in *No Mean City*, but this is a Glasgow contextualised within the detective genre. McIlvanney's style is edgy, blunt and masculine, and targets men as the chief agents of oppression. McIlvanney's focus on men could be interpreted as politically incorrect, as some critics have noted.³⁴ For McIlvanney, however, gender rather than class is the most damaging ideology at work in modern urban society, and masculinity – not femininity – is the most destructive gender construction. Hence his view of men as victimisers and women as victims – he is being *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. Most of the characters are working-class people, and despite some moments of description of Drumchapel, burnt-out tenements and John Rhodes's territory and pub, McIlvanney's main concern is to show how and why men victimise women. Jeremy Idle suggests that McIlvanney's emphasis on hard men is problematic: there is a tension at work throughout

³² Gifford et al, *Scottish Literature* 977.

³³ Alan MacGillivray, 'Natural Loyalties: The Work of William McIlvanney,' <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Laverock-McIlvanney-1.html>, *Laverock* (1: 1995).

³⁴ Susanne Hagemann, Introduction, *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*, Susanne Hagemann, ed. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) 12.

the fiction between denouncements of male violence *and* 'an exaggerated respect for [men's] physical prowess'.³⁵ I agree that there is a tension in McIlvanney's depictions of men and masculinity, although I would not argue – as Christopher Whyte does in his Introduction to Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature (1995) – that his male characters are simply 'nostalgic paeans to a heroic masculinity'.³⁶ McIlvanney's men are more complex than this, and his representations of divided masculinity ultimately succeed in dismantling the myth of Glaswegian manhood; Laidlaw is an exposé of masculinity as a destructive cultural construction in general, and of *Glaswegian* masculinity in particular as an especially dysfunctional and damaging expression of maleness. The view of men is an ambivalent one. McIlvanney does not just celebrate manhood – he also interrogates it.

The plot of Laidlaw is based on the quest motif involving a difficult search for 'identity and integrity'.³⁷ A teenaged girl from Drumchapel is found raped and strangled in a public park in Glasgow. Her killer is sought by various groups of men: the police force, the girl's father and his friends, and a gang led by John Rhodes. The narrative begins from the perspective of Tommy Bryson, the rapist/murderer. Tension increases as the men race to get to Bryson's hideout first. Laidlaw is concerned with offering the murderer humane treatment in defiance of the prevailing view of criminals throughout the novel that defines them as monsters or a species apart; indeed, at times Laidlaw sympathises, even empathises with the murderer, which can be seen as both a scathing interpretation of masculinity, and an acknowledgement of the complexity of human identity. As Beth Dickson remarks, Jack Laidlaw is fashioned from seemingly irreconcilable qualities:

In some ways, Laidlaw seems an unlikely hero. Whose side is he on? Sometimes he seems more on the side of the criminals than the police. He tries to sympathise with

³⁵ Jeremy Idle, 'McIlvanney, Masculinity and Scottish Literature,' Scottish Affairs (Winter 1993: 2) 54, 57.

³⁶ Christopher Whyte, Introduction, Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) xi.

³⁷ Gifford et al, Scottish Literature 728.

Bud Lawson when Bud reports his daughter's failure to return home. He ends the book by almost assaulting his colleague, Detective Inspector Ernie Milligan because Laidlaw feels he is not treating the murderer with due respect.³⁸

Laidlaw is a fictionalised compromise, a transitional character that retains some of the old hard man stereotypes whilst introducing a sense of humanity and social acceptability into the mix: unlike Johnnie Stark, who chooses to be a hard man *outside* of the law, Jack Laidlaw by contrast decides to be a hard man on a mission to bring other hard men to justice. Even though both men stand at opposite poles of the legal system, they share a desire to be the top hard men of their respective 'gangs' – Johnnie Stark as the Razor King of the Gorbals on the one hand, and Jack Laidlaw as the most successful detective in the Glasgow Metropolitan Police Force on the other. Both men want to rule Glasgow.

Laidlaw is thus more than a tough-talking maverick detective; his character is an exploration of Glaswegian masculinity, a reinvention of the old hard man stereotype. Dickson draws attention to McIlvanney's characterisation of Jack Laidlaw as a vehicle for 'commentary'.³⁹ His character articulates one of the themes of the novel: 'Laidlaw's ambivalent feelings towards criminals and the police highlight one of the most important questions the novel raises which is not 'Whose side is Laidlaw on?' but 'Who are the criminals?'"⁴⁰ So the quest is not just for the discovery, capture or destruction of a rapist/murderer; the characters are also seeking to define themselves as men in reaction to one particular kind of man – Tommy Bryson.

Jack Laidlaw is obsessed with fighting crime, which damages his relationship with his wife Ena. When called to help with the investigation of Jennifer's murder, he puts his moral and ethical commitments as a policeman before his family. Ena protests: 'Do you know what this kind of thing does to me? To the whole family? I mean, how often does

³⁸ Beth Dickson, 'William McIlvanney's Laidlaw Novels,' <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Laverock-McIlvanney-2.html>, *Laverock* (2: 1996).

³⁹ Beth Dickson, 'Class and Being in the Novels of William McIlvanney,' *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 57.

⁴⁰ Dickson, 'William McIlvanney's Laidlaw Novels.'

this happen? What's happening to us is a crime, too. But then you know' (L 31). Laidlaw loses his temper and starts swearing. When Ena tells him to stop, he attacks: 'Fuck-off! Swear-words they'll survive. What they might not survive is your indifference to everybody else but them' (L 31). The kisses he gives his children are described as 'bruises'; his body is 'tight as a fist' (L 31). Hard words are used to describe a hard man.

The ambivalence of Laidlaw's perspective throughout the novel shows him to be a walking dilemma, an agent of the law who torn between his role as detective and his awareness that he is on the inside a Glasgow hard man with deviant tendencies. Jack's acknowledgement of his potential for violence contributes to his skill as a detective; he understands the motivations of criminals. The result is a policeman who can get under the skin of his prey because of his insider's knowledge of masculine deviance; a secondary effect of Jack's dualism, however, is an abiding sense of frustration, a feeling of being torn apart by two opposing forces: 'Laidlaw sat at his desk, feeling a bleakness that wasn't unfamiliar to him. Intermittently, he found himself doing penance for being him' (L 5). The war between irreconcilable tendencies manifests itself in various ambiguous images that encapsulate Laidlaw's (and, by extension, men's) struggle to balance hardened masculinity with humanity and morality. So Laidlaw 'felt his nature anew as a wrack of paradox,' a policeman who respects con-men like 'The Undertaker' and John Rhodes *and* helps to capture and punish criminals:

He was potentially a violent man who hated violence, a believer in fidelity who was unfaithful, an active man who longed for understanding. He was tempted to unlock the drawer in his desk where he kept Kierkegaard, Camus and Unamuno, like caches of alcohol. Instead, he breathed out loudly and tidied the papers on his desk. He knew nothing to do but inhabit the paradoxes.

(L 6-7)

Laidlaw cannot understand the divisions in his identity, but can only wonder at the incongruity of the 'hardness and firmness of [his] voice' with the disconcerting awareness of himself as a person 'crouched' behind a façade of manliness, a 'talking foetus' (L 7).

As Alan MacGillivray argues, Jack Laidlaw is neither the typical hard man nor the cliché detective:

So why the title, *Laidlaw*, for the first of the novels? Our gaze as readers is turned by this towards Jack Laidlaw, and we expect to see more than a dedicated investigator. The convention in the detective genre ever since Sherlock Holmes has been that there is as much interest in the detective (whether policeman or private eye) as in the process of detection of crime. Laidlaw fits into the convention — he is not an Identikit policeman. He has the intellectual streak of P.D. James's Adam Dalgliesh or Michael Innes's Appleby; the disaffection and insubordination of Kojak or many another TV cop; the anger against corruption and the injustice of Furillo: Policeman as an intellectual and epigrammatist; Policeman as rebel and outsider; Policeman as moralist and humanitarian; but also Policeman as hard drinker and adulterer; Policeman as aggressive sentimentalist. What Laidlaw is not is Policeman as cliché Glasgow boor, like Taggart, the unsubtle melodramatic travesty that found his way on to the small screen in default of a Laidlaw film or TV series.⁴¹

Instead of drinking to drown his sorrows, for example, as most other Glasgow hard men are expected to do, Laidlaw consoles himself with existentialist philosophy, locked in a desk drawer like 'caches of alcohol' (L 7). As Gifford points out, McIlvanney's thinking is 'rooted in existentialist philosophy,' and so Laidlaw's angst is based on the anxiety he feels when faced with the prospect of individual choice.⁴²

McIlvanney emphasises the importance of agency in determining the behaviour and personalities of his characters; decisions to be either law-abiding or criminal are made freely. This makes for a morally uncompromising tone which allows no excuses for working-class crime, except to say that the atrocities committed by men in particular result from their conscious decision to commit them. The interchange between Jack Laidlaw and his new partner D.C. Brian Harkness points up the novel's focus on the issue of moral choice in relation to male identity:

'Hell,' Harkness said. 'It's hopeless. How are we supposed to connect with something like this? How do we begin to relate to *him*?'

'Because he relates to us.'

'Speak for yourself.'

⁴¹ Alan MacGillivray, 'Natural Loyalties: The Work of William McIlvanney,' <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Laverock-McIlvanney-1.html>. *Laverock*. 1: 1995

⁴² Gifford et al, *Scottish Literature* 865.

'What do you mean?' Laidlaw said. 'You resign from the species?'

'No. He did.'

'Not as easy as that.'

'It is for me.'

'Then you're a mug. You'll be telling me next you believe in monsters. I've got a wee boy of six with the same problem.'

(L 84)

Laidlaw defines the policeman's role in the criminal process of urban life: 'Other people can afford to write "monster" across this and consign it to limbo... They've got to pretend that things like this aren't really done by people. We can't afford to do that. We're the shitty urban machine humanised. That's policemen' (L 84). In another scene, Harkness realises that the difference between a Glasgow hard man and a Glaswegian detective is based on one of moral choice, not differences in nature:

Laidlaw and John Rhodes sat looking at each other, assessing. Two things occurred to Harkness: how big the gulf between them was, and that the bridge that made it possible for them to cross it was a kind of respect. Inhabiting opposed moralities, they could still appreciate each other. They were two different qualities of force, but evenly matched.

(L 117-18)

The respect that Laidlaw and Rhodes have for one another is a combination of wariness and understanding; they may occupy opposite ends of a spectrum of masculinity, but the spectrum they occupy unites them. The two men are different in degree, not in kind.

Despite Harkness's protestations against Laidlaw's assault on his sense of occupying higher moral ground than a criminal, he is plagued by an awareness of contradictions between various aspects of his own character. He thinks of himself as a sensitive young man on the brink of life: 'He wasn't ready to be defined' (L 80). Harkness resists the Glasgow hard man within him, but cannot completely let it go. Even his perceptions of nature are violent: looking at some trees growing alongside St. Andrew's Parish Church, Harkness 'could see the first buds of spring, small fists of green' (L 79). During a visit to his girlfriend's parents, Harkness finds it 'hard to focus on who he was. He found it impossible to connect himself as he was with Mary's mother offering him 'a wee cup of

tea' and home-made ginger biscuits' (L 71). Harkness's resistance of ordinary family life is expressed in an exploration of his ambivalent relationship with Glasgow:

He felt bruised with contradictions. Where he had been was being mocked by where he was. Yet both were Glasgow. He had always liked the place, but he had never been more aware of it than tonight. Its force came to him in contradictions. Glasgow was home-made ginger biscuits and Jennifer Lawson dead in the park. It was the sententious niceness of the Commander and the threatened abrasiveness of Laidlaw. It was Milligan, insensitive as a mobile slab of cement, and Mrs Lawson, witless with hurt. It was the right hand knocking you down and the left hand picking you up, while the mouth alternated apology and threat.

(L 72)

Glasgow is a manly city made of bricks and concrete, glass and steel; men are its representatives. Women, on the other hand, are the victims of both the city and its men – Jennifer raped and murdered in the park, her shattered mother bullied by her husband Bud Lawson, Ena sworn at and accused of indifference because she protests against Laidlaw's neglect. Furthermore, as the newspaper report of Jennifer's murder indicates, *all* Glaswegian women are the victims of male terrorism: 'Detective Inspector Milligan warned people in the area that it was unsafe for women to be out alone after dark while the murderer was still at large' (L 87). Glasgow is not a woman-friendly place. Like Laidlaw putting his career before his wife, Harkness makes plans to add to the list of female casualties: 'He wasn't sure, as he had thought he was, that he and Mary would be getting engaged. The things which were happening outside, and which he didn't know about, seemed more real to him than this room' (L 72). Harkness's desire for freedom from Mary is based on misogyny; as Gill Plain points out, crime fiction is riddled with men who think that they can find themselves by running away from women.⁴³ Even Jennifer's death is translated into a key event in his own development. When the Commander teams Harkness up with Laidlaw in the investigation, Harkness is elated, 'until it occurred to him bizarrely that somebody's murder was his opportunity. He stopped smiling' (L 55).

⁴³ Gill Plain, *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001) 71.

John Rhodes realises the injustice of his society towards women, that misogyny has become institutionalised and systemic, sanctioned and unpunished:

He read the article about Jennifer Lawson again. He hated that kind of thing. He hated the people who did it. He thought they should be put down, like rabid dogs. But that wouldn't happen if they caught him. He would get some years in prison or some other place. Steal enough money and they would put you away for thirty years. Kill a girl and they would try to understand. He hated the dishonesty of it. Money bought everything, even the luxury of being able to pretend that everybody really meant well and evil was an accident. He knew different.

(L 121)

Rhodes is a hard man who is honest with himself. As opposed to most men in McIlvanney's novel, he eschews the show of goodness whilst the nastiness lurks beneath: 'what he hated most were pretences, the lies that people get away with – the lie of being a hard man when you weren't, the lie of being honest when you weren't, the lie of believing in the goodness of other people when you didn't have to face them at their worst. Now he saw the way the courts would handle this case as another kind of pretence' (L 122).

Jack Laidlaw is a different kind of monster from Rhodes. Laidlaw's acknowledgement of the humanity of Tommy Bryson reinforces the inhumanity of what has been done to Jennifer Lawson. At the end of the novel, Laidlaw brings the rapist/murderer a cup of tea in his cell, calling him 'son,' a tender and Glaswegian acknowledgement of kinship:

The boy didn't move, didn't look up. He sat huddled into himself, trembling slightly, like a rabbit caught in the glare of a lamp. The trousers they had given him were beltless and too big for him. If he stood up, they would fall to his feet.

(L 280)

Even the killer himself is shocked by Laidlaw's show of compassion. Disconcerted, he asks the detective 'Why?' (L 280). The response, which is also the last sentence of the narrative, is an acceptance by Laidlaw of the boy back into the folds of humanity as it were, an affirmation of the validity of a man who has destroyed a young woman's life: 'You've got a mouth, haven't you?' (L 280). The melodrama and injustice of this ending casts Laidlaw in a decidedly ambiguous light; he treats a criminal with pity, which could

be seen as either a sign of the policeman's high level of morality, or as an indication of where his loyalties as a man really lie. If Laidlaw is an existentialist, then by his own chosen philosophy, human nature is defined by choices; in deciding to forge a link between himself and a rapist/killer, is Laidlaw legitimising the boy's actions as acceptably human? If so, then the message of Laidlaw is a bleak one from a female perspective. Laidlaw stops Bud Lawson from exacting an eye-for-an-eye form of justice by accusing the dead Jennifer of hating her father, and blaming the father himself of having a part in her rape and murder: 'She lied to you, she hid from you. She didn't trust you because you gave her none. You wouldn't let her be herself. You helped to make what happened to her happen' (L 268). Both father and daughter are defined by Laidlaw as instrumental in a crime which was committed by one man only – Tommy Bryson – thereby taking the focus away from the monstrosity of the rape and murder, and preventing Lawson from exacting his own barbaric form of vengeance (L 268). Laidlaw's internal sense of moral conflict comes to the fore: 'I'm sure I'd be in the Bud Lawson stakes if it happened to one of my girls. But that wouldn't make it right' (L 273). This is where McIlvanney's analysis of Glaswegian masculinity is at its keenest and its subtlest; Laidlaw's decision to side with a rapist/murderer as opposed to a raped and murdered girl and her vengeance-driven father, though it can perhaps be rationalised in legal terms, is simultaneously unjust and disturbing. Laidlaw's form of masculinity takes the high moral ground, and yet is at its heart shattering in its lack of humanity. The hard man streak in Glasgow fiction is not dead.

What are we to make of Laidlaw's decision to intervene and prevent Bud Lawson from killing Bryson? As Laidlaw remarks to Harkness, 'I'm never very clear exactly what the law's for. But that's one thing it can do – it can protect the relatives of the victim from atavism. It can pull the knot on all those primitive impulses by taking over responsibility

for them. Until we get them into balance again' (L 273-74). So the legal system is not only a way to bring criminals to justice; it is more importantly the means by which the survivors of a crime are prevented from becoming criminals themselves in their search for retribution. Laidlaw, as a representative of the legal system, is a sanctioned criminal. Further to this, he has become the criminal justice system personified; merely one cog in a process which turns murder victims like Jennifer Lawson into 'the raw materials of justice, corpses that are precipitates of strange experience, alloys of fear and hate and anger and love and viciousness and bewilderment, that the Court will take and refine into comprehension' (L 39-40). So Jennifer is rendered into a memory by the end of the novel; her death is translated into a tool for capturing criminals and preventing further crime: 'The Court will keep only what matters, the way in which the person became an event' (L 40). Laidlaw is 'sickened' by the process, but is nonetheless an instrumental part of it (L 40).

The main thrust of McIlvanney's social analysis, then, targets Glasgow men as victimisers who often see themselves as justified in their actions – Laidlaw by the legal system; Bud Lawson by his role as Jennifer's father; Tommy Bryson by the prejudice he has received for being homosexual; John Rhodes by his anger against systemic injustice. Women are the collateral damage for the main actions of Glaswegian men – Jennifer lying dead in the park; Mrs. Lawson cowering before her husband's rage, or huddled in grief; Ena left alone with the children on a Sunday; Mary viewed as unsuitable and unreal by Harkness. Laidlaw is the most scathing study of gender inequality in Glasgow fiction examined so far, because men are shown up to be varying types of monsters, creating diverse species of hell. Laidlaw has adopted an ambivalent moral stance by siding with Bryson and yet bringing him to justice at the same time. His character demonstrates the validity of Nietzsche's famous saying: 'He who fights with monsters should look to it that

he himself does not become a monster. And when you gaze long into an abyss the abyss also gazes into you'.⁴⁴ Indeed, as Roderick Watson says of McIlvanney's fiction in general, the vision of working-class society is bleak because no one emerges unscathed. All the characters (from Laidlaw to Jennifer to Bryson) are dehumanised – 'lessened' or 'turned to stone,' both literally and figuratively.⁴⁵

For Friel, Spence and McIlvanney, the 1970s were a time for revision of existing Glaswegian literary traditions. Friel's anger – similar to that of McArthur and Long – is the driving force for Mr Alfred MA, and reiterates many of No Mean City's original arguments in favour of viewing the working class as responsible for their own and others' victimisation. His focus on language and styles of speaking as a vehicle for oppression of all kinds – not just gender and class – is an often overlooked innovation in the development of the Glasgow novel. Spence, on the other hand, attempts a more tolerant view of Glaswegian working-class experience and identity; the result is a work that affirms the legitimacy of Glasgow as *both* no mean city *and* a source of beauty and joy. His collection of short stories diverges from McArthur and Long's appeal for social and political reform, asking instead that the city be viewed in more aesthetic terms. McIlvanney's Laidlaw is a strongly realistic novel which reinforces and expands on No Mean City's critical undertones. His characterisation of men in particular is a scathing scrutiny of gender ideology as the source of social injustice; men, more than women, are targeted as the true criminals of society, in varying degrees the victimisers of women.

With the advent of the 1980s, a shift can be discerned in the approach to the production of Glaswegian novels and short stories. The output of Glasgow fiction

⁴⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin, 1990) 102.

⁴⁵ Roderick Watson, '... To Get Leave to Live.' Patterns of Identity, Freedom and Defeat in the Fiction of Nan Shepherd, Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century, Joachim Schwend and Horst W. Drescher, eds. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1990) 207.

increases, as well as the range of possible modes of expression of Scottish urban experience. Women's involvement in the fictional scene escalates, which adds momentum and controversy to the ongoing debates about class and gender in relation to fictional constructions of Glaswegian working-class identity. Women's contributions, however, are considered separately, in Chapter Six, but Chapter Five focuses on some of the more prominent male writers of the 1980s and 90s to demonstrate that No Mean City's shadow has not lessened in its effects during the last two decades. As I will show, several key writers on the city's literary scene have continued to engage with McArthur and Long's characterisation techniques, both within the limits of the Glaswegian canon and without. Chapter Five will reveal how No Mean City's complex literary legacy, notwithstanding its many detractors, is still one of the driving forces behind Glasgow's search for cultural legitimacy in literary forms.

Chapter Five:

The Politics of Culture: Echoes of *No Mean City* in Scottish Urban Novels Written throughout the 1980s and 1990s

Christopher Harvie, in *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes* (1981), paints a rather gloomy picture of late twentieth-century Scotland. Much of the negativity centres on the usual: a decline of traditional industries, the shifting of capital away from Scotland, a rise in unemployment and drop in investment.¹ Another problematic dimension of modern Scotland has to do with its apparent political apathy; the discovery of North Sea oil spurred the S.N.P. to emphasise the need for an independent Scotland, whilst a tug-of-war between nationalist and unionist impulses not only polarised political debates about national identity issues, but also contributed to an impasse that made the failure of the 1979 devolution referendum seem, in retrospect, almost inevitable.² The impact of this failure to achieve national independence led to yet more negativity about Scottish identity: 'Scots were portrayed as drunken, common and vulgar with special proclivities towards football hooliganism'.³ In essence, Scotland's inability to achieve political and economic agency on a national level was attributed to its working-class population; as Richard J. Finlay notes, the 'thrusting, ambitious, heard (sic) headed, middle-class 'Unspeakable Scot' of the nineteenth century was replaced in the late twentieth century by the working-class 'inarticulate Scot' in popular stereotypes'.⁴ So not only was Scotland divided along political lines between devolutionary nationalism and unionism, but the old schism between socialism and conservatism reared its head once again, and along with it working-

¹ Christopher Harvie, *No Gods and Precious Few Heroes: Twentieth-Century Scotland* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000) 169.

² Richard J. Finlay, 'National Identity: From British Empire to European Union,' *Modern Scottish History 1707 to the Present. Volume 2: The Modernisation of Scotland, 1850 to the Present*, eds. Anthony Cooke, Ian Donnachie, Ann MacSween and Christopher A. Whatley (East Lothian: Tuckwell Press, 1998) 42. Also, see *Scotland: History of a Nation*, by David Ross (New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2002): in 1979 'Devolution referendum fails to gain the necessary support of 40 per cent of the electorate (1,230,937 in favour: 32.85 per cent; 1,153,503 against: 30.78 per cent. 36.37 per cent abstain' (358).

³ Finlay, 'National Identity' 42.

⁴ Finlay, 'National Identity' 42.

and middle-class tensions. As Finlay points out, '[given] such negative views of their national identity, it is hardly surprising that the middle class set itself against devolution...the prospect of a Scottish parliament was accompanied by the residual fear that it would be dominated by the socialist central belt'.⁵ Nearly twenty years were to pass before Scotland could again attempt to break its ties with London; the 1997 devolution referendum finally earned the country its own parliament.⁶

The intervening years between the two referenda witnessed a concurrent surge in cultural explorations, expressions, reconfigurations and debates on the issue of Scottish identity. As Cairns Craig suggests,

Instead of political defeat leading to quiescence, it led directly into an explosion of cultural creativity, a creativity coming to terms with the origins of the political defeat and redefining the nation's conception of itself. The eighties have been one of the most significant decades of Scottish cultural self-definition in the past two centuries.⁷

The connections between politics and culture cannot be underestimated, especially in late twentieth-century Scotland. In 'Culture and Identity' (1998) Christopher Harvie emphasises the link between politics, culture and the individual: 'because Scottish culture is so political, it imposes distinctive stresses on the individual'.⁸ If the individual in question is a writer, then we can examine his or her literary texts as the sites wherein art intersects with politics. I agree with Harvie's insistence on viewing Scottish cultural expression as 'an extension of politics by other means,' although I would not argue that art – Scottish or otherwise – is *just* about politics;⁹ at the same time, the failure to achieve national independence in 1979, added to subsequent attempts to boost the nation's collective confidence and international image during the 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival

⁵ Finlay, 'National Identity' 42.

⁶ David Ross, Scotland: History of a Nation (New Lanark: Geddes & Grosset, 2002) 362.

⁷ Cairns Craig, 'Scotland ten years on,' Radical Scotland (February/March) 9.

⁸ Christopher Harvie, 'Culture and Identity,' Modern Scottish History 1707 to the Present. Volume 2: The Modernisation of Scotland, 1850 to the Present (East Lothian: Tuckwell, 1998) 277.

⁹ Harvie, 'Culture and Identity' 277.

and the 1990 acclamation of Glasgow as the European City of Culture, have been paralleled by an unprecedented literary boom, within Glasgow and without. Since the early 1980s, Glasgow literature has grown in quantity and confidence. Pluralism rules: from Gray to Kelman, from increased contributions from female writers such as Agnes Owens, Meg Henderson, A.L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway, to a reinvestment in old genres such as the gangland school in particular and working-class realism in general, the place of Glaswegian urban literatures within the larger cultural vision of Scotland would seem to be as firmly ensconced as it is dynamic and influential. Some Glasgow authors have become the stimulus for advances in urban writing elsewhere, especially within the genre of the detective novel, which as Chapter Four demonstrated, carries with it traces of influence from the gangland school: McIlvanney's crime fiction, for instance, has set the stage for the appearance of prominent non-Glaswegian crime writers, including Val McDermid and Ian Rankin. Indeed, Rankin's work is, if anything, more influential than McIlvanney's, and his command of the Scottish corner of the international crime fiction arena remains uncontested. Irvine Welsh, an Edinburgh writer with an indisputable presence in international literary and popular culture, represents his city and its inhabitants in the harsh, uncompromising manner that is so often seen in literary depictions of working-class Glasgow. Welsh's Edinburgh is raw and dirty, riddled with crime and human deprivation; he exposes the dangerous rot lurking behind the genteel, tourist-friendly façade of Scotland's capital city.

Class tensions in the political arena, and the slurs against Scotland's blue-collar population, have been responded to with a renewed concentration on working-class subjectivity in Glasgow fiction during the 1980s and 1990s. Works from these decades include, amongst others, Alex Cathcart's The Comeback (1986), Ian McGinness's Inner City (1987), Frank Kuppner's A Very Quiet Street (1989) and Jeff Torrington's Swing

Hammer Swing! (1992). Most of the Glasgow working-class novels to appear during the last twenty years betray varying levels of No Mean City's influence on the representation of gender and class. There are even outright imitators, such as Ron McKay's Mean City (1995), in which, as Burgess points out, the derivativeness is unmistakable: '[The] first 1930s character we meet is none other than Peter Stark, the quiet brother from *No Mean City*, and the central figure whose career we follow is Peter's son John, named after his uncle Johnnie, the Razor King'.¹⁰ Though consciousness of No Mean City is seldom signalled so blatantly, there is no shortage of material to demonstrate the lasting influence of McArthur and Long's legacy.

Before tackling recent developments in Scottish realistic literature, however, the contributions of Alasdair Gray need to be addressed; not only is Gray the exception to most rules and generalisations that can be made about Glaswegian and Scottish literature, but he is also one of the most interesting, innovative and experimental writers working in Scotland today. His Lanark: A Life in 4 Books (1981) raises the level of Glaswegian fiction in many ways. Moira Burgess, in The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition (1986), discusses the complexity of this ground-breaking novel:

It is tempting, though probably wrong, to see *Lanark* as two novels distinct in style but unified by a shifting pattern of reference and allusion. The substantially realistic life-story of Duncan Thaw, Glasgow art student in the 1950s, is surrounded and as it were exploded by the first and last sections, in which Lanark, a dreamlike approximation to Thaw, moves through a surreal world where a nightmare future Glasgow may be glimpsed or imagined. In any interpretation *Lanark* is unique in Glasgow fiction for its originality and breadth of vision.¹¹

While Burgess is correct to say that Lanark is 'unique' in its originality and breadth of vision, the work is not a complete departure from the 'no mean city' school; realistic portrayals of working-class Glaswegians jostle with his post-modern renderings, producing a work that evades categorisation as either purely naturalistic or surrealistic.

¹⁰ Moira Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 170.

¹¹ Moira Burgess, The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition (Glasgow: Glasgow District Libraries, 1986) 92.

Glasgow is an all-pervasive and inescapable presence in both the Thaw narrative (Books I and II), and in the Lanark narrative (Books III and IV). The Glasgow of the Thaw narrative is represented 'realistically,' following the literary tradition of what Beat Witschi, in Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism (1991), calls the 'Glasgow School of Crisis,' a tradition that paints Glasgow in its gloomiest colours as an industrialised city with all of its attendant characteristics of disease, smothering bureaucracy, unemployment, alcoholism, class divisions, and despair.¹² Witschi sees Lanark as a post-modern denunciation of realism: 'Gray's art seems to suggest that he, as an author, is too much aware of the postmodern way of "registering reality" to confine himself to the limited, and by now also outdated, artistic possibilities of the traditional realism (sic) novel'.¹³ Witschi's celebration of Gray's use of post-modern techniques downplays his employment of realism. Lanark is, after all, written in both literary modes – not just the one.

The themes underlying Lanark are firmly within the boundaries of the 'no mean city' school popularised by McArthur and Long. The representation of the working class, for instance, echoes some of No Mean City's anger and desire for social analysis. As Douglas Gifford points out, Gray engages with the perennial Glaswegian question of who is to blame for the oppression of the working class:

While McIlvanney and Spence certainly found more of epiphany and justification in their presentations of struggle and failure, Kelman remains true, like Alasdair Gray, to this tradition of enigmatic treatment of the nature/nurture controversy. That is to say Kelman and Gray, very different in so many ways, leave unanswered the questions as to whether their protagonists are victims of a Scottish, deprived post-war and grey environment and upbringing, or whether the faults lie essentially in themselves.¹⁴

Along with McArthur and Long (and McIlvanney, Spence, Kelman and others), Alasdair Gray uses his fiction to tackle the combined issues of gender and class ideology. In a

¹² Beat Witschi, Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism: A Study of Alasdair Gray's Fiction (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991) 9, 60.

¹³ Witschi, Glasgow Urban Writing and Postmodernism 58-9.

¹⁴ Douglas Gifford, 'Discovering Lost Voices,' Books in Scotland 38, 1991, 1-6, 5.

conversation between Duncan Thaw and his friend Coulter, for instance, Coulter discusses his self-perception as a blue-collar man:

'At first the novelty made it not too bad. It was different from school, and you were being paid, and you felt a *man*; you know, getting up and intae your clothes at seven, pulling at the day's first fag while your mother fried your breakfast, then down the road to the tram with your wee packet of sandwiches and sitting in your overalls with the other workers, crowding in at the gate and clocking on and then intae the machine shop...and then the thumping and banging and feeling of danger...
(L 215)

Then he begins *complaining* about being a blue-collar man:

Aye. Well, anyway, this business of being a *man* keeps you happy for mibby a week, then on your second Monday it hits you. To be honest the thought's been growing on you all through Sunday, but it really hits you on Monday: I've tae go on doing this, getting up at this hour, sitting in this tram in these overalls dragging on this fag, clocking on in this queue at the gate....and back intae the machine shop. You realize you'll be spending more of your life in this place than anywhere, excepting mibbe bed.
(L 215-16)

Gray's analysis of working-class masculinity, however, does not stop at exposing Coulter's experiences of hardship; he has Coulter implicate himself in his own feelings of oppression: 'But engineering isnae compulsory. I chose it. And I'm a man now. I have tae take it seriously, I *have* tae keep shoving my face against this grindstone' (L 216). Coulter is partially guilty of contributing to his own victimisation – through his own acquiescence to the lot of the working-class man.

The male protagonist – Duncan Thaw/Lanark – is the main focus for the narrative as a whole. On one level of meaning, Lanark is an urban, working-class *bildungsroman* that hearkens back to Joyce's Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1914-15) in its analysis of a boy's development into an artist trying to come to terms with his own background. A more recent parallel can be drawn with Joyce Cary's The Horse's Mouth (1944), with its painter-protagonist. In Gray's version, Glasgow rather than Dublin is the urban environment against which Duncan Thaw's self-actualisation as a man and a painter develops; narrative shifts between realistic Glasgow and surrealist Unthank/Provan serve

to expose Gray's social analysis of class and gender in relation to the creative and actual journey of Duncan Thaw/Lanark.

Ian A. Bell calls Lanark 'that great sprawling manifesto for a new Scottish fiction,' a novel which calls for a revision in Scottish literature.¹⁵ More to the point, Lanark is a Glasgow novel, and Gray's search for cultural rebirth in Scotland is situated in *Glasgow* – the setting for the narrative indicates the centrality of the city in Gray's hopes and fears for Scotland's future. So although some critics see Lanark as the 'Scottish Book,' I would argue that it also aims to be the 'Glasgow Book'.¹⁶ In one sense, perhaps, Scotland is conflated with Glasgow, or maybe Glasgow is seen as what is wrong with Scotland. Duncan Thaw's ambivalent feelings for Glasgow, like Gray's, are based on what he perceives as a lack in Glaswegian culture:

What is Glasgow to most of us? A house, the place we work, a football park or golf course, some pubs and connecting streets. That's all. No, I'm wrong, there's also the cinema and library. And when our imagination needs exercise we use these to visit London, Paris, Rome under the Caesars, the American West at the turn of the century, anywhere but here and now. Imaginatively Glasgow exists as a music-hall song and a few bad novels. That's all we've given to the world outside. It's all we've given to ourselves.

(L 243)

Thaw's allusion to a 'few bad novels' might be a veiled reference to the 'baddest' novel of all – No Mean City. Further, his dismissal of the music-hall tradition could be a rejection of what was a decidedly working-class form of entertainment. Thaw's disappointment with his city's history is therefore laced with shame about its working-class roots. The 'realities' of Glaswegian culture somehow undermine Thaw's artistic confidence. Thaw feels trapped by Glasgow's cultural legacy, which seems to him empty of any inherent value to art. The panorama of the city as beheld from the Necropolis becomes for him a symbol – not of death – but of non-existence. As Christopher Whyte states, 'Glasgow

¹⁵ Ian A. Bell, 'Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present, Susanne Hagemann, ed. (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996) 217.

¹⁶ Douglas Gifford et al, Scottish Literature in English and Scots, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 587.

lacks, in cultural terms, context and collocation. To this extent it is nowhere'.¹⁷ Thaw sees Glasgow as inferior to the traditional centres of high culture – Florence, Paris, London, New York. As I have demonstrated throughout the course of this dissertation, both Whyte and Thaw are wrong about the value of Glasgow; at the same time, this negative perception of the city's culture is perhaps indicative of an abiding inferiorisation of, and sense of inferiority about Glasgow's working-class character. It would be more fitting, and less clichéd, to compare Glasgow to non-capital cities like Chicago and Marseilles.

There is a keen edge to Gray's characterisation of Duncan Thaw. The jaded cynicism is a pose. The artist's anger is not directed at Glasgow *per se*, but more specifically at Glasgow's vulnerability to external economic forces. Glaswegian working-class identity is dependent upon jobs provided by industry, which is, in turn, at the mercy of the global marketplace:

"Oh, yes, we were once the world's foremost makers of several useful things. When this century began we had the best organized labour force in the United States of Britain...if [Glasgow] vanished tomorrow our output of ships and carpets and lavatory pans would be replaced in months by grateful men working overtimes in England, Germany and Japan. Of course our industries still keep nearly half of Scotland living around here."

(L 244)

Half of Scotland benefits from the world's demand for useful things, but the world does not need Glasgow.

For Thaw, Glaswegian social and political history is evidence for the city's failure to take charge of itself:

During the general strike a red flag flew on the city chambers over there, a crowd derailed a tramcar, the army sent tanks into George Square; but nobody was hurt much. Nobody was killed, except by bad pay, bad housing, bad feeding...So in the thirties, with a quarter of the male workforce unemployed here, the only violent men were Protestant and Catholic gangs who slashed each other with razors. Well, it is easier to fight your neighbours than fight a bad government. And it gave excitement

¹⁷ Christopher Whyte, 'Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel,' Studies in Scottish Fiction: Twentieth Century, eds. Joachim Schwend and Horst W. Drescher (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990) 318.

to hopeless lives, before World War Two started. So Glasgow never got into the history books, except as a statistic...

(L 244)

Duncan Thaw sees Glasgow as defined by the 1930's razor-gang image of No Mean City, and is ashamed of what he thinks of as his city's cowardice and complacency. Glasgow divides and conquers itself, lending Thaw a sense of personal inferiority which fuels his creativity: 'I paint because I feel cheap and purposeless when I don't' (L 244). As a cultural representative of Glasgow, Thaw uses art to make amends for himself and for his city. He seeks self-respect and redefinition.

Thaw feels defeated because he is Glaswegian. When searching for a face to use as a model for his painting of Jesus, he cannot find one in Glasgow. A trip to Edinburgh's National Gallery yields better results. Whereas Glaswegian faces had 'tight mouths,' and were etched with 'bitterness or blame,' the one he finds in Edinburgh is serene: 'This was the face of his Christ, and he knew he could never paint it. Nobody can paint an expression that is not potentially their own, and this face was beyond him' (L 246). In Edinburgh he gazed on the face of God; in Glasgow he finds an image of humanity shaped by finances. His quest for a Glaswegian Christ brings an unwelcome epiphany:

Folk near the river were usually gaunter, half a head shorter and had cheaper clothes than folk in the suburbs. He had not seen the connection between physical work, poverty and bad feeding before.

(L 245)

Gray's characterisation of Duncan Thaw as an artist railing against Glasgow's history and literary tradition reveals the unavoidable reality of economic necessity. Glasgow is tied to themes such as industrialisation and de-industrialisation, work and unemployment, which reflect the city's strongly working-class character. Whyte points out that realism is the mode of narrative most often employed by Glasgow novelists: 'Glasgow life is felt as a raw, untapped material, an unleavened mass, and the urge is first and foremost to

transcribe, to denounce'.¹⁸ Glaswegian realism carries a sting: it 'hinders transcendence...and cannot treat the making or operation of art within the novel'.¹⁹

Glasgow tells unkind stories about itself.

Books I and II of Lanark explore Thaw's self-pity, despair and self-destruction, and his development from a working-class boy into an artist. At first glance, Thaw resists what he sees as a 'system' of restriction and bureaucracy. Duncan rebels against bureaucracy by upholding art against the dictates of the art school:

Mr. Watt, I realize that schools need examination, and admit that many students wouldn't work at all if they weren't rewarded with paper rolls printed by the government. And, Mr. Peel, I've been thrilled to hear you defending contracts and promises, because if these weren't defended we'd have mere anarchy. I cannot deny your truths, I can only oppose them with mine. This exam is endangering an important painting. It would be blasphemy to waste my talent making frivolous decorations for a non-existent liner. But I see your difficulty. You must uphold the art school, while I am upholding art.

(L 323)

It would seem that Thaw represents the revolutionary artist, defiant of rules, government, monetary gain, and the opinions of others. But Thaw's nonconformity is undercut in his sexist attitudes towards women throughout the novel. As Thaw *and* as Lanark, he is a victimiser.

Thaw reveals himself to be as oppressive as the system he professes to hate. This aspect of his character can be seen in his pursuit of Marjory. When Marjory continues to resist Thaw's amorous attentions, he invokes the aid of the male Christian God and so reinscribes the imbalance of power between men and women:

Instead of learning to be adult by teaching me to be adult she (Marjory) basks idly at home. Oh, God, if you exist, *hurt* her, *hurt* her, God, let her find no comfort but in me, make life afflict her as it afflicts me. Oh, Aitken! Aitken! How *dare* she be happy without me?

(L 275)

¹⁸ Whyte, 'Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel' 319.

¹⁹ Whyte, 'Imagining the City: The Glasgow Novel' 319.

Thaw subscribes to the politics of sexuality in his view of Marjory within a philosophy of pursuit, conquest and colonisation. He is arrogant and desires power over a woman, even if it means going against her will. In his sleep, Thaw dreams of conquering Marjory by possessing her sexually:

Thaw dreamed he was fornicating awkwardly with Marjory, who stood naked and erect like a caryatid. He rode astride her hips, holding himself off the ground by gripping her sides with knees and arms. The cold rigid body stayed inert at first, then gradually began to vibrate. He had a thin, lonely sensation of triumph.

(L 276)

Marjory's body becomes the landscape of Thaw's desire for power. He uses her for his own pleasure, and feels a sensation of 'triumph' when she appears to succumb to his sexual prowess. Like Jock McLeish in Gray's 1982 Janine (1984), Thaw exploits the female object of his lust, if only in his imagination.

The noble and despairing artist who rebels against oppressive societal forces, then, is himself guilty of victimisation. Thaw does not succeed in his pursuit of Marjory. She never succumbs to him, and this unspoken assertion of female independence is ultimately undermined by Duncan Thaw. Frustrated by his failure to conquer Marjory in real life, Thaw displaces his anger onto women in general in an ultimate, and presumably fantasy act of appropriation when he imagines murdering a Glaswegian prostitute. In his mind, Thaw tears open the prostitute's throat with his teeth, and obliterates women's freedom in one figurative bloody act. Marjory's and the prostitute's identities as independent and free entities are erased as a result of Thaw's fantasised appropriation of their bodies for his own use. Gray undermines the romantic and idealised portrait of an artist's desire for freedom from the restricting power of society by revealing Thaw to be, on the inside, a willing participant in the oppression of women – he exploits women's bodies in his dreams, and achieves ultimate power over them in the process:

She smiled and took his arm and he was competent. He grinned to see himself shift his arm to her waist as they walked and how his remarks made her giggle... They

climbed a narrow road between staring crowds. Sometimes he recognized a face to the left or right, but he had to keep his whole attention on Marjory, feeding her with the talk which made her smile and being careful not to laugh. She did not notice that the hand holding hers was as senseless as granite and prevented by an effort from crushing her finger bones. They crossed the rocking planks of the canal bridge, passed some warehouses and climbed a grassy slope. Thaw went first, pulling her behind. She was laughing when he forced her down and rubbed her body and neck with his stone hands. She struggled.

(L 348)

Thaw finishes his imaginary assault by severing the woman's jugular vein with his teeth: 'He moved his stone mouth across her throat into the angle of the jaw near the ear and cut her off quick' (L 348). Thaw's imagination allows him to be rapacious and bestial, the most disturbing exploration of Glaswegian masculinity examined so far, including Johnnie Stark. Indeed, Gray's use of stone imagery in relation to his male protagonist draws attention to Thaw's transformation into a literal hard man – cruel and inhuman. That this metamorphosis occurs in his mind, rather than in 'reality,' does not undermine the fact that he would like to do these things to women. On the surface, Thaw is a far cry from Stark, but underneath the civilised façade, the repressed violence takes on monstrous proportions.

In Book III, at the Elite Café in the dystopian city of Unthank, Sludden's treatment of his girlfriend Gay is another illustrative example of Gray's criticism of gender relations. When Gay arrives late at the café, Sludden scolds her, declaring 'You kept me waiting.' He goes on to interrupt her stammering apology with the words 'Get me cigarettes' (L 6). In this interchange, Sludden adopts the role of a commander, ordering Gay – his female subordinate – to perform a servile task for him. For Sludden, Gay is a servant as well as a lover. Like a slave, Gay waits upon Sludden 'anxiously,' and returns to his side from her errand 'meekly' (L 6, 7). Her inferiorised position in relation to Sludden is indicated by her failure to either realise her oppressed status, or to resist her role as his slave. Gay's acquiescence to Sludden exposes the double legacy of oppression suffered by women in

Glasgow: they are victims of unequal gender roles, and at the same time seem relatively unaware of their acquiescence to their own oppression.

Gray's analysis of men as victimisers of women goes even further. Sludden's definition of women as sexual articles of trade between men exposes the full power of gender ideology:

I'm tired of seeing her [Nan] weep in the corner whenever you touch my knee. Let's give her to Lanark. No. I've a better idea. I'll take Nan and Lanark can have you...No. We'll give him Rima.

(L 7)

Within the parameters of Sludden's philosophy of human relationships, women are objects of exchange between men. Sludden, although in a joking manner, trades women with Lanark. Lanark's equally joking response to Sludden's offer of Rima serves to implicate Lanark himself in the commodification of women: 'You're very kind' (L 7). Women are reified sexual resources. Luce Irigaray's argument concerning the patriarchal, capitalist ideology underlying sexual relations between men and women comes into play at this point in the Lanark narrative:

For woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity. As such, she remains the guardian of material substance, whose price will be established, in terms of the standard of their work and of their need/desire, by "subjects": workers, merchants, consumers...Woman is never anything but the locus of a more or less competitive exchange between two men.²⁰

Moreover, Gay is complicit in her own subjugation by men when she does not protest Sludden's, or Lanark's, reification of women. She accepts her role as an object of sexual transaction (L 7). Alasdair Gray's characterisation of Glaswegians exposes women's complicity in their own oppression; women can participate in their own victimisation.

Randall Stevenson examines the roles of men and women throughout Lanark in terms of the issue of Scottish national identity. He points out that Gray uses the metaphor of

²⁰ Luce Irigaray, 'This Sex Which Is Not One,' Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism, Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl, eds. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 355.

birth in order to envision a new, hopeful nationalism for Scotland.²¹ I think that if we view women's reproductive processes as a metaphor for the production of nationalism, we are in danger of relegating the role of femininity in the search for national identity to the traditional, and limiting, realm of the maternal. Stevenson emphasises the importance of the 'Intercalendrical Zone' sequence in *Lanark*, declaring that its 'vagueness' provides 'some relief' from the capitalist worlds of Unthank, Provan, and the Institute,' and is the 'place where Rima discovers herself absorbed in one natural cycle of time, pregnancy'.²² He sees Rima's pregnancy as a signal of hope for Unthank's future: woman and child are used as a combined symbol of a future free from the power of the imperialist Creature, whose control over humanity appears incontrovertible. Stevenson's analysis of the relationship between Rima and Lanark, however, is limited to Lanark's reaction to Rima's pregnancy: '[Lanark] felt a burden lifted from him, a burden he had carried all his life without noticing' (L 386).

Gray's exploration of Rima's reaction to the news that she is pregnant, however, reveals her view of the matter to be one of horror. She is angered by Lanark's expression of joy, and is concerned (in a way that Lanark is not) for her own safety:

How you must hate me...grinning when I'm going to have horrible pains and will split open and maybe die...beside a fucking motorway without a fucking doctor in fucking sight.

(L 386)

Rima's language is strikingly unfeminine in a traditional sense; indeed, her attitude towards the maternal is also rebellious. She resists Lanark's 'decree' that because births 'are natural things, usually,' Rima has no reason to worry (L 386). When he compares her situation to Nan's (who has a child by Sludden), Rima counters him with the words 'Stop comparing me with other women' (L 387). So Stevenson's interpretation of the pregnancy

²¹ Randall Stevenson, 'Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern,' *The Arts of Alasdair Gray*, Robert Crawford and Thom Nairn, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991) 52.

²² Stevenson, 'Alasdair Gray and the Postmodern' 52.

as a sign of hope for both Lanark and the world of Unthank does not mesh with Rima's point of view as the source of national renewal: 'She knelt on the grass, covered her face and wept hysterically' (L 386).

Despite her resistance to her role as mother of the nation, Rima's maternal abilities become the overriding factor in her relationship with Lanark, and come to signify her principal function throughout the remainder of the novel. Lanark starts asking after the baby's well-being, not hers, which irks Rima: 'You'll never let me forget that, will you?' she asks angrily (L 390). After giving birth to a baby boy Rima leaves Lanark for Sludden because Lanark makes her feel 'lonely,' insignificant and trapped (L 457-58). She moves from one man to another, a combined sex object and baby-maker, never escaping this eternal loop of traditional femininity. Rima eventually becomes pregnant by a second man – Horace – and her first son Alexander has fathered a daughter of his own (L 556). The cycle of birth does in fact become emblematic of Unthank's (and, by extension, Glasgow's) future. Women and children are made to embody Unthank's hope for independence from the creature, but in a manner that continually reinscribes women as lovers and mothers.

Gray's focus on women as the physical source of future generations and hope for Unthank/Glasgow and Scotland, when viewed metaphorically, seems to empower women. The use of the birth metaphor can be interpreted as a legitimization of women's roles. As Janice Galloway argues in 'Reading Alasdair,' Gray's writing 'is informed by a democratic urge that does not sell women short'.²³ Defining women's power and identity as solely sexual and maternal, however, is also limiting. Edwin Morgan, in 'Gray and Glasgow,' quotes Alasdair Gray as saying of his ending to the novel that 'There is a chance of new life for the children'.²⁴ Although women are granted a positive role as

²³ Janice Galloway, 'Reading Alasdair,' *Context: A Forum for Literary Arts and Culture*, <http://www.centerforbookculture.org/context/no7/galloway.html>.

²⁴ Edwin Morgan, 'Gray and Glasgow' 75.

mothers, this is seen as their only contribution, a view of Glaswegian femininity which is on the surface empowering, but ultimately regressive.

Despite Gray's experiments with traditional notions of working-class masculinity and femininity, then, the outcome is one that reinforces unequal gender relationships, rather than reinvents them; as such, the novel analyses the problematic nature of Glaswegian class and gender ideologies, but seems to offer little hope of fundamental change. Revolution, the narrative suggests, is a long, slow process of passive resistance to victimisation, which is a decidedly realistic assessment of the world within a novel that is so often applauded for being surrealistic in approach. As Lanark's son points out to his father, 'The world is only improved by people who do ordinary jobs and refuse to be bullied' (L 554). In other words, social change comes about when people (men *and* women) refuse to join in the double-sided victimisation game. This message echoes No Mean City's explorations of victimisation, and reinforces its earlier call for social activism.

Alongside Gray's surrealistic dominance of the Glaswegian literary scene, the more traditional school of working-class realism continues to evolve in reaction to the material conditions of class and gender ideology. James Kelman, for instance, is to naturalistic fiction what Gray is to postmodernism. Kelman's representations of the Glaswegian working class challenge stereotypes and his use of the Glasgow vernacular reinforces the validity of its place within the products of high culture. The blatant working-class subject matter of his novels and short stories, added to his deliberate subversion of literary conventions, are considered to be both controversial and innovative. Much has been made, for instance, of his unorthodox use of punctuation. Here is one interviewer challenging Kelman about his use of commas instead of semicolons: 'Let's talk about the opening sentence of *Hines* – in particular about its punctuation. You know what I'm

talking about – the fact that it's two sentences separated by a comma'.²⁵ Kelman defends his decision to use a comma instead of a colon or a semi-colon: 'It's got to begin in a really unemphatic way; even a semi-colon makes it emphatic, you know. It's got to be something that's so everyday'.²⁶ Kelman's literary rebellion, however, goes beyond breaking a few rules of English grammar. As Cairns Craig argues in The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination (1999), the publication of The Busconductor Hines (1984) in particular was a 'radical renewal...of the potentialities of both working-class fiction and the dialect novel'.²⁷ Douglas Gifford, in 'Decline and Revival: Modern Scottish Literature' (2002), sees Kelman's writing – both fictional and non-fictional – as part of a 'war' that he is waging on 'cultural imperialism and 'Eng Lit''.²⁸ Moira Burgess views him as one of the key figures of Glasgow fiction throughout the 1980s – 'He is of course an exceptionally painstaking writer, a craftsman'.²⁹ One critic is not so sure about the quality of Kelman's writing. About A Disaffection (1989) Macdonald Daly says the following:

Ye huv a quick look, there, and yer no sure about it. Hell but, gie it a chance. So ye take it hame and ye read it over the next three days and ye finish it. And ye realise its (sic) complete absolute unadulterated fuckin shite.³⁰

Maurice Fleming is also less than enamoured by Kelman's harsh brand of urban realism:

The image of Scotland presented in the majority of current novels, short stories and plays seems to be that of a nation of drunks, drug addicts and drop-outs. James Kelman is the leader of the pack with his dreary depiction of life at the bottom end of the social scale in darkest Glasgow.³¹

²⁵ Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed,' Edinburgh Review (71: November 1985) 77.

²⁶ McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed' 80.

²⁷ Cairns Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 99.

²⁸ Douglas Gifford, 'Decline and Revival: Modern Scottish Literature,' Scottish Literature (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 732.

²⁹ Burgess, Imagine a City 272.

³⁰ Macdonald Daly, 'Your average working Kelman,' Cenecastus (Autumn 1993: 46) 14-16. Quoted in Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 309.

³¹ Maurice Fleming, 'Scotland the depraved?', Scots Magazine (December 1994: vol. 141, no. 6) 616-18. Quoted in Burgess, Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 309.

Such criticisms view Kelman's work very much as No Mean City was (and continues to be) viewed. Even if Kelman's own attitude to his writing is different, Fleming's remarks show how easy it can be for some critics to view Kelman's treatment of working-class life as replaying issues highlighted half a century earlier in the furore surrounding McArthur and Long's notorious book. Despite his detractors, Kelman has undoubtedly helped to keep working-class fiction alive and evolving in Scotland. His explorations of working-class identity, culture and language are in keeping with the long-lived 'No mean city' tradition; as I will explain, however, Kelman's attempt to provide a seemingly unmediated picture of working-class subjectivity is more radical than No Mean City (or any novel examined so far). As we shall see later on, only Irvine Welsh surpasses Kelman in this respect.

Throughout his writing career, Kelman has tried in essence to create a purified literary genre – the true Glaswegian working-class urban novel. His reinterpretation of many literary conventions – such as when he merges dialogue with narration – is one of the keys to understanding Kelman's fiction as a pioneering move towards a new, supposedly less bourgeois conceptualisation of working-class literature. Kelman's views on the role of the literary artist in society betray leftist leanings. In his essay 'Elitism and English Literature, Speaking as a Writer' (2002), for instance, he defines the relationship between literary critics and writers as a clash between oppressive academic authorities and rebellious artists and students:

I had strong ideas about art: honesty, truth, integrity, justice, humanity; these were the marks of the artist. I use the term 'artist' here in its general sense; an artist can be a poet, a novelist, a sculptor, a dancer, a song-writer, a painter and so on. I felt uneasy when a writer I didn't think deserved to be called an artist was being described as 'good', and often 'major', by the academics. Even the fact that you were given such writers at university meant they were *assumed* to be 'good'. The lecturers and university authorities hold the power: they can say something is good

without having to prove it. If you, as a student, want to deny that something is good then *you* are forced to prove 'it'. And proving anything is never easy.³²

Kelman does not recognise the authority of literary critics in terms of what is and is not good literature. As Burgess points out, Kelman's 'community...is not represented in "English Literature"'.³³ His *modus operandi* is to undermine the hegemony of English Literature by contesting the conventional representations of regional characters and disrupting some of the rules of narrative:

One of the things that goes on in say English Literature is the wee dialogue going on between author and reader about character. All the wee signals and codes...a wee game going on between writer and reader and the wee game is "Reader and writer are the same and they speak in the same voice as the narrative, and they're unlike these fucking natives who do the dialogue in phonetics..."³⁴

His criteria for good art, as he points out, include honesty, truth, integrity, justice and humanity. Fuzzy as these ideas are, they at least indicate Kelman's approach to himself as a writer – he sometimes presents his slant on literary representation as an attempt at unmediated realism, which is odd because his fiction is highly stylised and self-conscious. He argues that '[getting] rid of that standard third party narrative voice is getting rid of a whole value system...Let's just go for the factual reality here,' but we are left with the fact that fiction – with or without a third-person narrator – cannot evade its representational status.³⁵ Despite Kelman's insistence that he tries to avoid the narrative voice in his fiction, his texts retain their ties to convention; his books have narrators.

Kelman acknowledges little if any Scottish influence on his work: 'There were no literary models I could look to from my own culture. There was nothing whatsoever. I am not saying that these novels did not exist. But if they did then I could not find them; because of this dearth of home-grown literary models I had to look elsewhere'.³⁶ He

³² James Kelman, 'Elitism and English Literature, Speaking as a Writer,' *"And the Judges Said...essays"* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002) 62.

³³ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 274.

³⁴ Duncan McLean, 'James Kelman Interviewed,' *Edinburgh Review* (71: November 1985) 64-80.

³⁵ Kirsty McNeill, 'Interview with James Kelman,' *Chapman* (57: Summer 1989) 4.

³⁶ Kelman, 'Elitism and English Literature, Speaking as a Writer' 64.

claims that he had to turn to other countries for inspiration and ideas: 'I continued reading...it was mainly American literature. Stories about pioneering communities, gamblers and rounders; boys who liked horses and wanted to be jockeys or newspapermen; tramps, cowboys, gangsters; small towns and big cities. All were rooted in a life that was recognisable, more or less, the lived-in, the everyday'.³⁷

Despite his early lack of awareness about Glaswegian (or even Scottish) literary traditions, Kelman can be situated firmly within the tradition of which he claims to have had little prior knowledge before he began writing in his early twenties. He is – like Alexander McArthur – a working-class writer in several senses: (1) he has a working-class background; (2) the subject of his fiction is strongly working-class in nature; (3) he writes for and about the working class. Kelman maintains some reservations about the quality and influence of No Mean City, of which he appears rather uneasily aware. As he points out, 'I just question its influence. I read it twice. I read it when I was young, you know. The earlier writers maybe were influenced by it, so these are eh there are writers who are kind of influenced by No Mean City, so I don't think that's wrong'.³⁸ His opinions about No Mean City, its literary influence, and its role in the development of Glaswegian working-class fiction seem to reflect the consensus and contradictions of most literary critics – No Mean City is badly written, its influence is limited and detrimental, and it is not literary enough:

JK: And again writers who were influenced by No Mean City aren't good writers...they aren't kind of eh they're not writers for whom writing is 100% about...they're writers who write not literature....

SB: You think that writers who are influenced by No Mean City are too commercial, you mean?

³⁷ James Kelman, 'And the judges said...', *"And the Judges Said...essays"* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2002) 37.

³⁸ Sylvia Bryce, 'Hard to Say: James Kelman and the Art of Telling it Like it is' (unpublished paper based on interview: 10 October 2002, University of Glasgow) 9.

JK: Not necessarily commercial...usually they're just shit, you know. Being a journalist you canny...you write something for quick money in a different way. So they have a different intent in publishing from what a real writer has. It's not elitist that, you know, you just see them producing works and works and they're not the ones that stand the test of time. The thing about No Mean City that is... that it is quite unusual in that sense, because it has stood the test of time. And maybe your thesis is right, people have got to look more seriously at it.³⁹

Elsewhere, Kelman admires how McArthur and Long deal with sexuality: 'What I may have said in the past is that I saw a strength in the work in relation to how it deals with sex.

I can't remember what, where or when I said it and don't recollect that I ever did say anything in an interview. I'm sure it could only have been in passing, in conversation'.⁴⁰

There are inconsistencies in Kelman's opinions about No Mean City. In some correspondence with me, he said the following: 'I have no views on the novel's influence on the work of other writers. It has no influence at all on my own work, neither positive nor negative'.⁴¹ Then, during an interview, Kelman reveals that he does indeed have some strong views about No Mean City :

JK: I was into my 20s when I started to write. By that time, I was writing when I was 22, so I was writing before I read No Mean City. But when I read No Mean City I was really annoyed with it.

SB: What's your opinion about it?

JK: I didn't like it.

SB: You didn't like it...

JK: No...I was asked, vaguely, to write a screenplay for it. And I said no, but I thought I would read it. I thought I would go and re-read it, and one of the things that I liked about it was the sex, I thought it was quite strong. How hard it was for the working class, you know, working-class parents, and for the males and all that, especially the males, you know trying to kind of not be abusers...do you know what I mean? So that was the kind of thing that I thought was handled really well. That was the part that I thought was the strongest.⁴²

³⁹ Bryce, 'Hard to Say: James Kelman and the Art of Telling it Like it is' 11.

⁴⁰ James Kelman, 're: request for an interview' (email correspondence with the present writer: 2 July 2002).

⁴¹ Kelman, 're: request for an interview'.

⁴² Bryce, 'Hard to Say: James Kelman and the Art of Telling it Like it is' 9.

So Kelman sees value in how McArthur and Long dealt with sex, gender (especially masculinity) and the hardships of the working class. This attitude is in keeping with his own fiction; Kelman does what McArthur did, which is to tell it like it is for the so-called lower orders, and to do so in order to effect social change, or at least to raise the consciousness about the legitimacy of using working-class themes in literary forms. The difference between No Mean City and Kelman's fiction is in *how* representations of working-class people are carried out; unlike McArthur and Long, who followed the 'bourgeois' conventions of novel writing, Kelman tries to subvert literary rules at the same time as he tackles the combined issues of class and gender. His writing is at once similar to and a step away from classic no-mean-cityism. It should be noted, however, that despite Kelman's protestations against some literary conventions, his work is, like all works of realism, as much a construction as the most experimental piece of literature. Although he *claims* to want his writing to be free from literary convention, and indeed attempts to reconfigure the novel, this is an impossible goal; the representations of reality in his novels are not real, no matter how many rules of grammar and dialogue he breaks to create the illusion that they are.

The Busconductor Hines (1984), for instance, avoids some narrative conventions such as speech marks. The voices of characters are almost indistinguishable from that of the narrator, so that the reader is presented with a seemingly direct insight into the subjectivity of the individuals that make up the action of the novel – the author behind the characters and narrator is invisible. This is, of course, hardly a new literary trick. As Richard Bradford points out in Stylistics (1997), the absence of inverted commas in James Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1914-15) can have the effect of blurring the divisions between the narrator and the characters.⁴³ Kelman's employment of the technique has a similar purpose: as with Portrait, and indeed as with Lewis Grassie Gibbon

⁴³ Richard Bradford, Stylistics (London: Routledge, 1997) 70-1.

or Samuel Beckett, we are never sure about 'the exact position of the narrative focus: is it inside or outside the mind of [the protagonist]'.⁴⁴ Literary sleight-of-hand creates the impression of raw naturalism:

Ho; that is a good yin. 10 sharp! You! ya cowardly cunt ye...Hines closed his eyelids.

I must be off my head coming back off the panel to this.

You've never been on your fucking head.

Get the tin out, I've no fags left.

Fuck off. He took out the tin and tossed it to him. Roll it yourself – if you've got the ability...He picked a soiled newspaper sheet from the floor and glanced at it.

(H 39)

This interchange between Hines and his driver Reilly is presented without speech marks or helpful narrative cues such as 'he said' or 'he retorted.' Any intrusion made by the narrator exists merely to relate the actions of the characters. Ellipses between dialogue and reportage blend narratorial indicators of action with the characters' words themselves – the text appears seamless, fluid, natural and real. The text of Busconductor Hines is made up of the voices of the characters, with the narrator acting as the toneless articulation of the characters' actions and thoughts. The reader's perspective seems to flow from one mind to another as a result of Kelman's artful artlessness.

Kelman's employment of this Joycean technique is a major move away from the traditional style of narration as used by McArthur and Long in No Mean City, and indeed all of the novels examined so far, including Lanark. Gone is the commenting, translating, interpreting buffer between text and reader – Kelman's narrator *is* the consciousness of his characters. The narrative voice seems to emerge from the words, thoughts and actions of the working-class people of the text. He/She is not a separate entity at all, but rather inextricably bound up with their immediate subjectivity.

As for the representation of Glaswegian working-class masculinity and femininity, Kelman's novel digs deep. The relationships between men form the major focus of the

⁴⁴ Bradford, Stylistics 71.

text. Kelman's men are blatantly Glaswegian, palpably working-class. Hence the use of dialect words, references to Celtic and Rangers rivalries, and the obsession with obscenity. No help is provided in translating anything uttered by the characters, which makes for a challenging read:

Listen ya cunt, said Hines twisting to sit upright: I saw you sitting tailing that bus on Paisley Road West. You cant fucking deny it now come on I mean what in the name of god were you playing at? How come you never dived right in and stole his punters? ya miserable imbecilic looking bastard ye, eh? Tell me that?

Cause he was fucking due to be in front ya clown ye that's fucking how. We were 10 fucking sharp as it was ya fucking idiot ye. Anyhow, that red-headed fucking Inspector's always creeping about there at this time of the fucking night as well ye fucking know, so don't give us any of your patter. I was taking a big enough chance as it was.

(H 38)

The flow of Glaswegian moves from Hines to Reilly and back again. Hines calls Reilly a 'cunt' and an 'imbecilic looking bastard'; Reilly responds by calling Hines a 'fucking idiot.' If we were unaware of Reilly and Hines's closeness, it would seem that the men were trying to undermine the intelligence and masculinity of the other. The word 'fuck' seems to be an expression of aggression and anger; at the same time, the word functions as a form of punctuation, giving the argument between the two men a staccato rhythm, simultaneously breaking up and adding momentum to the flow of abuse and insult, lacing words like 'idiot,' 'Inspector' and 'night' with apparent vitriol and contempt. The interchanges between Reilly and Hines, although they seem on the surface to be a kind of verbal razor fight, can be interpreted best as a cover for their close friendship. As Douglas Gifford argues, quoting James Hogg, 'nipping and scarting is Scots folks wooing'.⁴⁵ Glaswegian often emerges as an angry, argumentative and cutting form of English, even in moments of affectionate interchange.

⁴⁵ Douglas Gifford, 'Report on PhD Thesis by Sylvia Bryce' (6 January 2005) 3.

Kelman is hardly alone in his utilisation of swearing to create the impression of raw realism; nor is English literature devoid of working-class experiments. As Tony Harrison's poem V (1985) demonstrates, working-class dialect is not inimical to poetry:

'Listen cunt!' I said, 'Before you start your jeering
The reason why I want this in a book
's to give ungrateful cunts like you a hearing!
A book, yer stupid cunts not worth a fuck.

This particular interchange is between the poet and an imaginary skinhead. As Bradford argues, the 'specific, locative resonance' of the poem is dependant upon the Northern, working-class dialect and diction being used; each 'regional idiomatic flourish is confidently, almost elegantly, reconciled to the demands of the iambic pentameter and the quatrain'.⁴⁶ What Harrison does with working-class vernacular is matched, in Scotland, by Tom Leonard in poetry and by Kelman in fiction. Like Harrison, Kelman exploits the literary potential of a regional dialect, for both stylistic *and* socio-political reasons. The poetic qualities of the Glaswegian vernacular are highlighted at the same time as the dialect itself is lifted out of the streets and validated as being worthy of literature. As Tod from Mr Alfred M.A. would argue, 'It is from such vulgar eloquence that a great vernacular poetry arises' (MA 565).

Kelman's representations of Glaswegian working-class people, then, achieve two kinds of rebellion – one against literary convention, and the other against class ideology. First, he defines his characters in their own words, using the Glaswegian vernacular. Second, by allowing working-class people to speak for themselves using their own vernacular and without any apparent censoring of bad language, Kelman simultaneously confirms and undercuts preconceived notions about the so-called lower orders of British society. This is *in keeping* with McArthur and Long's endeavour; both No Mean City and Busconductor

⁴⁶ Bradford, Stylistics 30.

Hines aim for an honest portrayal of working-class individuals which is at once scathing and sensitive:

Heh what d'you think! last night, point for discussion, prostitute gets on my bus. I'm stopped at the lights up the top of St. Vincent Street and I opens the door – thought she was just wanting to ask me the time or some fucking thing but naw, on she gets. Yoker she says but I've got no money. Aw aw I thinks. None at all she says. Know what she does? now I'm no kidding you man she must've been near 50 years of age: at least, at fucking least. Know what she does? hooks up the kilt. hooks up the kilt man I'm no kidding you; I've no money she says. What I says get to fuck, big smelly fanny like that you kidding, and anyhow I says it's a staffbus, staff only.

(H 84)

Here is Kelman's achievement: he reveals the sordid realities of the underclasses.

Prostitution exists. At the same time, however, he draws attention to Reilly's disgust at being propositioned. This passage is significant for understanding Kelman's revision of working-class culture – Reilly rejects the whore's offer and takes her to the police station instead (H 84). As McArthur and Long emphasised in their novel about hard men and hairies, the working class is not an undifferentiated mass, but rather pluralistic and internally stratified. This too is what emerges from Kelman's explorations of working-class subjectivity – various sets of values and principles, codes of behaviour, notions of right and wrong, individualism, perspective, multiplicity. His working-class characters are human, not stereotypes. As such they may be rewardingly seen alongside, rather than merely in opposition to the working-class characters of No Mean City.

The aforementioned passage from Hines also serves to draw attention to the novel's brand of wittiness, which is harsh, crude and cutting. Kelman's dialogues employ a distinctively Glaswegian sense of humour which seems to emerge from the characters' feelings of dissatisfaction, boredom, inferiority and anger. As with the city's vernacular, humour heightens the local flavour of the novel; at the same time, however, it functions on another, more subversive level of narration. Cliff Hanley analyses some of the qualities of Glasgow humour:

Humour is the product of hard times, and Glasgow humour, if such a thing can be isolated, is hard stuff...most of the time, for most of the people, life has been hard and often hopeless and the humour is made to match...[it] is a commentary on the brute reality of life and a clue to the city's character. But, more than that, in a grim situation the joke is a survival kit'.⁴⁷

Kelman's employment of Glaswegian humour seems to fit Hanley's definition; the comedy of working-class life arises from discontent, poverty and feelings of powerlessness. At the same time, as J.C. Bittenbender points out in 'Silence, Censorship, and the Voices of *Skaz* in the Fiction of James Kelman' (2000), Kelman's 'fictions are rather devoid of laughter'.⁴⁸ The aim of Kelman's humour is not to entertain, but rather to criticise. That being so, Kelman's texts are pervaded by anarchic dialogues and monologues in which rage jockeys for position with a disconcertingly desperate sense of humour:

Hines had got off the seat and was marching to the front as the bus moved away from the kerb. Stop again man I'm jacking it. Pull into the side. High fucking time I mean it's getting to the ridiculous stage. Come on for Christ sake Willie stop the bus when I'm telling you.

Reilly's frown.

Christ sake man hurry up, I want to jack the bastarn thing, right now.

Fine ya cunt.

It's no fine at all; come on, pull into the fucking side.

Reilly glancing at him.

I want to jack it I'm telling you come on.

Right then you can jack it, I don't have to stop the bus but.

Aye you do, I need to jack it; I want to have jacked it.

Well you've jacked it.

How can I have fucking jacked it if I'm standing here in the scabby bastarn transport green with machine and cashbag for Christ sake!

(H 65)

Hines is not trying to be funny, and his mood is far from light-hearted, but he expresses his discontent with both job and life in an absurdly grand gesture – quitting in the middle of a shift, striding down the aisle holding forth to Reilly and passengers, offering money in exchange for a non-regulation pair of 'brecks' (H 65-6). Hines's rebellion is short-lived,

⁴⁷ Cliff Hanley, 'A drop of the hard stuff in humour,' *The Times* (18 May 1973), in *Glasgow Observed*, eds. Simon Berry and Hamish Whyte (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1987) 262, 264.

⁴⁸ J.C. Bittenbender, 'Silence, Censorship, and the Voices of *Skaz* in the Fiction of James Kelman,' *Bakhtin and the Nation*, eds. San Diego Bakhtin Circle (London: Associated University Presses, 2000) 151.

however, and he fails to get off the bus at the next stop. He calls Reilly a 'stabintheback cunt' and is sent upstairs for a cigarette break (H 66).

The humour resides not in Hines's situation – which is actually quite depressing – but rather in his words, in his verbal representations of his own unhappiness. The humour underlying Kelman's depictions of working-class Glaswegians is completely lacking in those of McArthur and Long; Kelman adds a note of irony and perspective to his style that No Mean City eschews in favour of grimness. McArthur and Long's 'mission' is to have the problems faced by the working class taken seriously, and their narrative tone reflects this underlying motivation. Kelman, although he in no sense makes light of Hines's predicaments, nonetheless adopts an ironic stance towards his character, which on one level enhances our perception of both Hines's difficulties, as well as his wry awareness of the absurdity of the position he is in. Once again, however, it is the use of the Glaswegian vernacular that helps to render the raw material of Hines's experiences into farce. As Bittenbender remarks, the 'Glaswegian spoken by Kelman's characters, much like the poetic voices of Tom Leonard, provides a carnivalization of standard English'.⁴⁹ But Kelman does more with Glaswegian than just undercut the conventions of so-called proper English. True, in keeping with Bakhtinian theory, the characters do 'create a linguistic laughter through their use of profanity and Glaswegian dialect that challenges notions of "proper" English'.⁵⁰ Further to his linguistic disobedience, however, is Kelman's realisation that the Glaswegian agent of mutiny – in this instance, Hines – is himself a self-aware *object* of derision. He is simultaneously the active subject of anarchic humour and its victim, painfully aware of the absurdity of his position as a member of the lower orders: 'Hines dislikes being a laughing-stock. The people he works beside are laughing-stocks. He is a laughing-stock. They are all laughing-stocks. Occasionally this being a laughing-

⁴⁹ Bittenbender, 'Silence, Censorship, and the Voices of *Skaz* in the Fiction of James Kelman' 151.

⁵⁰ Bittenbender, 'Silence, Censorship, and the Voices of *Skaz* in the Fiction of James Kelman' 151.

stock is something not to be borne' (H 168-69). So in Kelman's fiction, Glaswegian humour cuts its wielder. Not taking oneself seriously may alleviate frustration, but it can also undermine the seriousness with which one is taken. The last part of Busconductor Hines, which chronicles Hines's hyperbolic resignation from his job – complete with the involvement of his union and refusal to go to Head Office out-of-hours – leads to nothing. Hines returns to work. The last image of the unhappy busconductor is of a bored man rolling yet another cigarette and staring bleakly out the back window of a bus (H 237). He has come full circle; his moment of verbal and physical rebellion over, Hines returns to the conditions which sparked him to revolt in the first place. The status quo is preserved, even perpetuated, by Hines's verbose attack on authority. The mountain has become a molehill once again. As Bakhtin would argue, Hines's existence revolves around the 'axis of the present'.⁵¹ The seemingly resistant humour of the Glaswegian working class, like the safety valve on a pressure cooker, is a coping device which allows for the maintenance of existing ideologies of class inequality. So in spite of Kelman's anarchic humour, in the end his fiction confirms rather than challenges the underlying sense of frustration of No Mean City; in both cases, the prevailing sense of working-class culture is one of hopelessness and helplessness.

Kelman does not limit his analysis to class; he also tackles the complexities of gender by highlighting the differences between the relationships between men and men, and between men and women – ultimately, his constructions of masculinity and femininity succeed at breaking with the working-class stereotypes of the hard man and the hairy. For example, the interchanges between Hines and Sandra draw attention to the complexity of heterosexual relations:

Her hand gripped and squeezed his arm. He made to say more but a movement

⁵¹ Hwa Yol Jung, 'Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich,' in The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy, ed. Robert Audi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 71.

from her and he said nothing. He sighed, and he kissed her forehead again. She moved closer in to him. He kissed her on the mouth, then broke away.

What's up.

Nothing. Hh; naw, I've went hard.

She raised herself to kiss him, moving her left leg between his. Don't be daft, she said.

He turned in to her, bringing both arms round her, and they continued kissing until he broke away again. Honest I mean...it's okay Sandra, if you don't fancy it I mean I...

Ssh.

(H 20)

Gone is the rapacious Glasgow hard man; in his place is a vulnerable human being whose foul language and aggression in the world of men give way to shyness, uncertainty, vulnerability and need when alone with his woman. Sex is tender and intimate – Sandra's way of comforting her troubled man; making love is a process of healing and consolation. Hines turns 'in to her' and wraps his arms around her body, seeking her permission, exposing his need for her. The contrast between this scene and the next – where Hines is late for work, given a hard time by the Deskclerk, and faces the prospect of a day in a bus without heat – is striking. With Sandra, all is soft, gentle, cosy; with other men, life is angular, harsh, cruel, competitive and confrontational:

Christ sake I missed the staffbus. I had to run the whole way here.

What's that got to do with it?

Hines looked at him. The boy, he said eventually, he's got the flu. I was up half the night cause of it.

What d'you think I'm stupid or something? You slept in the other morning as well and got away with it I mean what the hell d'you think it is at all! D'you think we're just here for your beck and call?

Hines sniffed.

(H 22)

The world of men seems to be a series accusations, lies, attacks, defences, sparring and sharp edges. In essence this world represents a continuation of the world of No Mean City. Yet back at home with Sandra and his son, there is food, warmth, humour and more consolation (H 23). Sandra listens to Hines's complaints about his work while washing and peeling potatoes, and suggests taking on full-time work to supplement his wages and

save money to buy a better house (H 24, 25). Hines is a bit annoyed at this, perhaps because he feels that her suggestions are a criticism of him as a male wage-earner: 'Naw, he said, that's a good idea I mean...He sniffed and reached for the tobacco tin' (H 25).

Kelman's constructions of Glaswegian masculinity and femininity tend to show men as self-pitying and vulnerable, and women as patient and a bit long-suffering. Hines moans his way through the novel, complaining about his job, dreaming about becoming a driver but never doing the necessary work required to be one; Sandra takes care of Hines and her son, works and earns money, cooks and cleans, makes love to her man, cajoles him into good humour, asks him to stop swearing in front of the boy, and tries to improve their lives in practical terms. Hines's velleity is shown up by his wife's goal-driven behaviour. Like William McIlvanney, Kelman interrogates masculinity and finds it wanting. Femininity, on the other hand, is viewed through an admiring lens. Sandra is Hines's driver and conductor at the same time; Hines often seems to think and behave as if he was merely along for the ride.

Despite Kelman's revisions of Glaswegian masculinity, which amount to downplaying the hard man and emphasising the boy-like qualities of men, his treatment of working-class femininity is to a certain extent rather traditional. Sandra isn't Lizzie Stark, but she *does* invoke the same strong Glasgow woman stereotype which pervades much of the city's literature. Sandra's strength of character – like that of Lizzie – is maternal and wifely, not feminist, and therefore limited in its exploration of unconventional expressions of womanhood. Sandra and Lizzie patronise men, which does not actually improve things for women; deference does not lead to difference. Chapter Six will demonstrate how more subversive explorations of Glaswegian femininity can be found most readily in literature by women.

Up to this point in the dissertation, I have been concentrating on No Mean City's influence on *Glasgow* fiction in particular. The impact of McArthur and Long's novel on *Scottish* fiction in general, however, demonstrates that the book's iconicity is not a localised phenomenon. Non-Glaswegian writers betray the influence of No Mean City and its inheritors, including – amongst others – the crime fiction of Ian Rankin, and Alan Warner's explorations of the 'new youth underclass of 'rave' and 'chemical' culture' in Morvern Callar (1995).⁵² Irvine Welsh – with his graphic novels about the underbelly of working-class life in Edinburgh – is the most obvious candidate for analysis within the framework of influence that I have constructed. The publication of Trainspotting in 1993 marked as major a shift in modern Scottish urban fiction as the one inaugurated by No Mean City in 1935. Welsh's graphic tale of modern-day drug addicts is to Edinburgh what McArthur and Long's story of hard men and hairies was and is to Glasgow:

Charting the hell of Scotland's industrial squalor has been a fundamental requirement of the modern Scottish novel. It is not simply the hell of an impoverished working class living in city slums or in squalid housing estates – however fascinating those depths have been to novelists and publishers, from MacArthur (sic) and Long's *No Mean City* (1957) (sic), about the slum world of Glasgow, to Irvine Welsh's depictions of drug-addicted Edinburgh in the 1990s – it is the hell of a world of endless repetition, of endless endurance; the hell of a narrative without end, without purpose.⁵³

On one level of interpretation, Trainspotting can be seen as a new No Mean City. One major difference between the two works is that Trainspotting has received more national and international attention than the older novel, mainly because Welsh's book has been made into a movie, which has facilitated dissemination on a larger, more accessible scale than the novel alone could have achieved. The popularity and validity of Trainspotting are also ensured by a more liberal attitude towards working-class themes than existed in the 1930s. The main concerns of the No Mean City school of Glasgow fiction – such as the

⁵² Ian Haywood, Working-class Fiction from Chartism to *Trainspotting* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997) 151.

⁵³ Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel 131.

negative impact of class ideology – are embedded in the text of Trainspotting, which is, of course, about far more than just working-class problems. Welsh's explorations of the lives of Edinburgh's criminal underclass, while tackling such problematic issues as Scotland's self-defeating sense of national identity, nonetheless project a distinctively *Glaswegian* image of modern urban working-class Scotland.

Ian Haywood heralds Trainspotting as part of a renaissance of Scottish proletarian and vernacular novelists that includes McIlvanney, Kelman, Agnes Owens and Jeff Torrington.⁵⁴ Edinburgh and Glasgow lead the pack in fictional representations of Scottish urban working-class life, but Glasgow's contributions – besides being more significant in numerical terms – are to a certain extent obscured by the success of Welsh's appropriations of Glaswegian working-class themes, character types and treatments of class and gender ideologies. For instance, I would argue that the graphic quality of Welsh's descriptions of male and female physicality in Trainspotting could be derivative of Alasdair Gray's earlier explorations of male sexual fantasies in 1982, Janine (1984). As we have seen, the use of the vernacular also has its Glaswegian precursors, including the novels and short stories of James Kelman. Welsh's fiction, however, commands Scotland's corner of the international literary stage in a way that overshadows the works of his contemporaries, as McArthur and Long's did to a lesser extent during the 1930s, and so the nation's urban image continues to be tied to crime, poverty, antisocial personalities and squalor. With Trainspotting, the less than respectable 'gangland' novel is fused with the more artistically and ideologically developed fiction of Kelman, with the result that a new form of Scottish urban fiction at once as sensationalist as No Mean City and as attuned to vernacular working-class life as Kelman's work, is formed. This hybrid genre combines mass appeal with a certain critical allure.

⁵⁴ Haywood, Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting 151.

Trainspotting, as Craig argues, is about people caught up in the double bind of victim and victimiser, or as he calls it, 'the fearful and the fearless'.⁵⁵ This mutually abusive paradigm of relations amongst the working classes reflects the one explored by McArthur and Long in No Mean City, as well as many Glasgow novels and short stories published since the 1930s. Welsh brings the theme of the hard man up to date with the relationship between Francis Begbie and Renton in Trainspotting. Like Johnnie Stark, Begbie uses fear to intimidate his gang of drug addicts:

Tae get ma attention, Begbie smashes an elbow into ma ribs with such ferocity that it would be construed as an assault, were it not between two companions. He then starts telling us about some gratuitously violent video he's been watching. Beggar insists on acting the whole fuckin thing oot, demonstrating karate blows, throttlings, stabbings, etc., on me.

(T 77)

Renton is a variation on the Peter Stark character; he is an educated working-class boy who has fallen into the vicious cycle of poverty, despair and crime. Craig calls Renton a 'failed intellectual' who is 'incapable of any freedom in his relation with Begbie, the terrorising 'hard man' of their group'.⁵⁶ Even though Welsh has his protagonist escape Begbie's drug-addicted gang at the end of Trainspotting, Renton's physical and moral future remains uncertain. As Craig argues,

Renton has escaped the mutually destructive embrace of the fearful and the fearless only by ensuring its continued existence in the place to which he can never return. In that socially mutilating personal freedom, Welsh constructs a narrative which is not simply a response to the problems of the 'chemical generation' but is the recapitulation of the confrontations of the fearful that have been a defining characteristic of the modern Scottish imagination.⁵⁷

Renton has purchased his freedom through betrayal and self-imposed exile. Welsh does not offer a viable solution to the problems of modern urban Scotland – unless a general exodus is a feasible alternative – and so we are left with an ambivalent message.

Renton abandons his degraded urban culture completely, cutting himself off from

⁵⁵ Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel 55.

⁵⁶ Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel 55.

⁵⁷ Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel 56.

Edinburgh and Scotland altogether. Is this the only way a working-class individual can achieve freedom? Craig sees Trainspotting as a *criticism* of individualism and capitalism, arguing that Welsh's 'addicts and pushers and users are the mirror image of the free market capitalism which they believe themselves to have refused: rather than its antithesis, they simply perform at its most extreme both the inability to become a Person...and the lack of responsibility for others that means the one with the drugs is the one with power'.⁵⁸ There is no doubt that Trainspotting sees the working class as a part of society – as noted earlier in this dissertation, No Mean City did this as well. Welsh's critique, however, goes further than Craig suggests. Renton's emigration from Edinburgh and Scotland could be viewed as Trainspotting's ultimate criticism of Scottish culture – Renton's defection suggests that the situation is hopeless: 'Scotland the brave, ma arse; Scotland the shitein cunt. We'd throttle the life oot ay each other fir the privilege ay rimmin some English aristocrat's piles' (T 228). Individualism, not socialism, is both the cause of and solution to Scotland's long-standing urban malaise. This is Welsh's answer to McArthur and Long's seventy-year-old plea for social reform at the end of No Mean City: no single person can or will change the way things are for the working class, so it is wiser for the working-class individual to better him or herself by leaving Scotland to its own devices. The choice is stark: stay in Scotland and inherit the no mean city heritage of substance abuse, poverty and crime; leave Scotland for a more uncertain, but also more hopeful future elsewhere (although in Porno (2002), the sequel to Trainspotting, the characters' futures are revealed and they return to Scotland).

Begbie and Renton – as the reformulated Johnnie and Peter Stark – represent two constructions of Scottish urban masculinity. Renton reflects on how his parents often hold up Begbie (the 'total fuckin crazy psycho Beggars') as the 'archetypal model of manhood Ecosse' (T 198). Begbie – the psychotic hard man – is an anachronism, an historical loop.

⁵⁸ Craig, The Modern Scottish Novel 97.

The meeting with his wino father in a derelict train station in Edinburgh exposes this male continuity of failure and futility:

An auld drunkard, whom Begbie had been looking at, lurched up tae us, wine boatil in his hand. Loads ay them used this place tae bevy and crash in.

- What yis up tae lads? Trainspottin, eh? He sais, laughing uncontrollably at his ain fuckin wit.

- Aye. That's right, Begbie sais. Then under his breath: - Fuckin auld cunt..

- Ah well, ah'll leave yis tae it. Keep up the trainspottin mind!

(T 309)

The old man could be seen as part of an older generation of criminals – more in line with Johnnie Stark – and Begbie as the new hard man. The self-destructive tradition of pointlessness – trying to spot trains that no longer run – has been passed from father to son. The Scottish urban working class, the novel seems to say, is too damaged as a community to recover and move into the future. There are no trains running into Leith Station or out of it; the lines of communication between urban Scotland and the wider world have broken down. Working-class Leith has been severed from the rest of the modern world, leaving it behind to rot from within.

There are many similarities between No Mean City and Trainspotting. First there is the anger: both novels rage against society, presenting the often shocking details of working-class life to a mixed-class readership in an effort to attract attention and concern. As Sally Vincent points out in 'Everybody's Doing It' (2002),

[Welsh] understands that middle-class people find it difficult to deal with working-class anger. They have no way of understanding how ordinary it is, how banal, to be able to see another world out there that is impossible for them to access. The working classes see they are denied the educational and social tools to get out of their poverty trap. There's not even any point setting themselves goals because they already know they are going to be frustrated. That's their normality. Anger and frustration. That's their lot.⁵⁹

Another significant similarity between Trainspotting and No Mean City rests on the intersections between class and gender – the representations of working-class men and

⁵⁹ Sally Vincent, 'Everybody's Doing It,'

<http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,771213,00.html>.

women fall firmly within the hard man and hairy stereotypes of McArthur and Long's text. Welsh's approach to the working class, however, is far more caustic than that of the older novel. Welsh's narrative attitude towards humanity borders on misanthropy; the brutal depictions of men and women recall Dickens's caricatures at best, and Swift's Yahoos at worst. Men's attitudes towards women are especially dehumanising. Renton describes a woman he meets at his dealer's flat as a 'gross bitch with a broken leg' (T 19). He then goes on to describe her physical appearance in unkind detail, his eyes roving over the 'repulsive swell of white flesh between the dirty plaster and her peach coloured shorts. Her tits sit on top of an oversized Guinness pot, and her brown vesty top struggles tae constrain her white flab. Her greasy, peroxide locks have an inch of insipid grey-brown at their roots. She makes no attempt tae acknowledge ma presence but lets oot a horrendous and embarrassing donkey-like laugh' (T 19).

Attractive women are treated with sneaky obscenity by animalistic men. The adolescent Nina suffers the lechery of her Uncle Kenny, 'who looked at her as if he was a dog, his eyes bloody and his tongue darting slyly over his lips' (T 36). Sick Boy ogles the 'visible panty lines' on a 'chicky' in front of him (T 27). He then marvels at the fact that there is 'fanny of every race, colour, creed and nationality present' (T 28-9). One woman he fancies is described as a 'fucking wee pump-up-the-knickers n aw' (T 29). Sick Boy sees himself as raging with male hormones – he's a 'dynamic young man, upwardly mobile and thrusting, thrusting, thrusting...' – but when he makes arrangements to meet up with two girls for a drink he affects indifference: 'ah'll just have to amuse both chickies...if ah decide to show up. Ah'm a busy man' (T 30). Sick Boy is convinced of his own virility: 'The Chinky chickies, Marianne, Andrea, Ali...which lucky ride will ah stick it intae the night? Who's the best fuck? Why me, of course. I might even find something at the club' (T 30-1). Welsh, like McIlvanney, interrogates Scottish urban

masculinity and finds it seriously wanting. Sick Boy may indeed be successful in the sexual arena, in that he has a lot of sex, but he also falls short of full manhood, since his potent sense of maleness is undercut by the dehumanising attitude he directs towards women and himself. He is physically virile, but spiritually impotent. Indeed, even the nickname 'Sick Boy' draws attention to the fundamental immaturity and unhealthiness of this particular expression of Scottish working-class masculinity.

Throughout Trainspotting, Welsh's focus on damaged forms of working-class masculinity meshes with his concern about the negative effects of consumerism on the development of identity and morality:

Nowadays, younger working-class people grow up in a society where the main institutions of socialization, where kids learn morality--the family, the community, the trade unions and the churches--have been emasculated by the promotion of consumerism and the market economy.⁶⁰

Welsh sees capitalism as part of the lowering of moral standards, which implies of course that socialism could have the opposite effect. In Trainspotting, however, there is no appeal to socialist politics; rather, the emphasis is on how the characters rebel against society as a whole, but cannot seem to escape the consequences of their antisocial subversiveness. With his use of the word 'emasculate,' however, the heart of the matter is laid bare – Trainspotting is about *male* impotence – physical, sexual, mental and moral. As we saw in McIlvanney's Laidlaw, and indeed in No Mean City itself, women are generally construed as the collateral damage in men's search for self-empowerment, the victims of working-class men's inability to achieve self-actualisation except through antisocial means. The theme of male impotence is all-pervasive in Trainspotting: for instance, Renton notices how two urinating men 'shake oot their cocks in the passage and stuff them intae their flies wi as much care as ye'd take putting a dirty hanky intae yir poakit' (T 24). The penis – the traditional symbol of male power – appears ineffectual.

⁶⁰ Irvine Welsh, <http://www.fortunecity.com/tinpan/jarrett/581/welsh/welsh.html>.

The effect of this lowering of virility is disastrous. The men in Welsh's novel view sex and women as degraded, debasing and not worth the bother in comparison with other sources of stimulation. Renton, for example, notices a young girl sitting across from him on the bus: 'Is she good looking? Whae fuckin cares,' his maleness pushed to one side in favour of his addiction to heroin (T 17). Drugs have become Renton's lover: 'Take yir best orgasm, multiply the feeling by twenty, and you're still fuckin miles off the pace. Ma dry, cracking bones are soothed and liquefied by ma beautiful heroine's tender caresses. The earth moved, and it's still moving' (T 11). Real women are a source of anxiety and even disgust. He recoils from the thought of having sex with a woman who has just had an abortion, fearing it to be a potentially polluting experience: 'If ah went and saw her, ah'd be too squeamish tae fuck her, assuming that she'd want us tae. Surely though, there would still be something there, gunge, bit ay the thing, or even a sortay rawness?...Alison wis right. Ah didnae really know much aboot women' (T 13). Renton tries very hard to be 'anti-sexist,' but often realises that his liberal attitudes towards women are 'overlayed with sexist self-interest' (T 141). When Renton *does* have sex with a girl he meets in a club, he ends up feeling used, dismissed and self-conscious: 'Dianne took the opportunity, and rode herself into a climax, Renton lying there like a dildo on a large skateboard' (T 141). He tries to regain a sense of male self-respect – or 'stud credibility' – by taking pride in the fact that there had been a near simultaneous climax (even though his role in Dianne's orgasm has been limited). He then becomes a bit more honest: 'Men are pathetic cunts, he thought to himself' (T 141). When Dianne says that Renton should leave, he is devastated by feelings of rejection: 'Her intention to banish him had already shattered his fragile sexual ego, turning him from cool stud back into trembling inadequate in a depressingly short time' (T 142). The tables have been turned in the sexual arena – the woman, not the man, is in charge of sex and her own pleasure. The fact that Dianne is

both seriously underage *and* sexually mature only serves to underline this imbalance in power – she makes Renton look and feel like a prepubescent boy. Dianne is self-possessed, aggressive and frightening – she transforms Renton into a ‘ride,’ turning his penis into a sex toy. She depletes him of his manhood and humanity at the same time. Dianne is an embodiment of men’s anxieties about the power of female sexuality.

Women are portrayed variously in Trainspotting, but always with the undercurrent of sexuality and anxiety. This approach to femininity can also be seen in Welsh’s other fiction, including Marabou Stork Nightmares (1996), The Acid House (1995), Filth (1998), and of course his Trainspotting sequel, Porno (2002). Most of Welsh’s fiction is preoccupied with the issue of gender and class, and his presentation of criticisms of masculinity is, in general, scathing. With his characterisation of Nina in Trainspotting, for instance, Welsh describes her disappointment in boys and men: ‘Nina had not been with anyone yet, had not done it. Almost everyone she knew said it was crap. Boys were too stupid, too morose and dull, or too excitable’ (T 36). Uncle Kenny, older and supposedly more experienced in matters of sex, is most likely not much better, despite the slavering attention he lavishes on his niece: ‘She had a strange feeling that Uncle Kenny, despite his years, would be a bit like the inept boys that Shona and the rest had been with’ (T 36). As far as Nina is concerned, then, men are useless. Men’s sexual desire is aggressive and ultimately unsatisfying. When her cousin Geoff arrives, for example, she is frightened by what she takes to be his hostility: ‘He looked at Nina with something she felt was akin to hate. It was unnerving and strange’ (T 37). She gradually realises that he fancies her, and that his aggressive look ‘was not one of hate, but of lust,’ brought out by drinking (T 38). The lowering of his inhibitions is based on a loss of reason through alcohol; masculinity is shown to be a myth.

Sex in the world of Trainspotting lacks the sense of love and tenderness which, say, Kelman's Busconductor Hines emphasises. Welsh's narrative, in keeping with No Mean City, drags human sexuality down into the gutter. Sex and the human body are viewed as dirty, ugly and shameful – a strangely nervous and prudish attitude. When Renton has sex with his dead brother's wife, for instance, lavatorial humour predominates the scene:

She has a powerful ivy smell. Then again, ma cock also smells pretty foul and flecks of knob cheese are visible oan the helmet. Ah've never really been too much intae personal hygiene; probably the soapdodger in us, or the junky.

Ah concur wi Sharon's wishes n fuck her in the fanny. It's a wee bit like throwin the proverbial sausage up a close, but ah find ma stroke n she tightens up. Ah think about how close she is tae poppin and how far up ah am, an ah can see masel stickin it in the foetus's mooth. Some concept, a shag and a blow-job simultaneously. It torments us.

(T 219)

Scatological in the extreme, Renton's approach to human sexuality is as immature as it is belittling, of both masculinity *and* femininity. The suggestion is that men are seriously insecure about their own maleness, heterosexual relations in general, and women in particular. There is no affection, and certainly no sensuality; sex has been reduced to a repulsive bodily function, perverted into a sniggering joke. The taking of drugs, on the other hand, has become the new way for men and women to interact sexually. Renton describes the image of Sick Boy giving Ali a fix:

He pierces her flesh and injects a wee bit slowly, before sucking blood back intae the chamber. Her lips are quivering as she gazes pleadingly at him for a second or two. Sick Boy's face looks ugly, leering and reptilian, before he slams the cocktail towards her brain.

She pulls back her heid, shuts her eyes and opens her mooth, givin oot an orgasmic groan.

(.....)

- That beats any meat injection...that beats any fuckin cock in the world...Ali gasps, completely serious. It unnerves us tae the extent that ah feel ma ain genitals through ma troosers tae see if they're still thair. Touchin masel like that makes us feel queasy though.

(T 9)

It is difficult to decide if Welsh means to suggest that a lack of interest in and perverted view of sex leads to drugs, or if drugs diminish one's interest in sex, or at least twist one's

perception of the act. Either way, the syringe symbolises Renton's loss of manhood; he feels castrated by Ali's preference for a shot of heroin, and yet nauseated when he touches his own penis. A needle full of heroin, unlike a penis, is always hard; the contrast Welsh draws between the syringe and the male sex organ is harsh, and Renton feels inadequate in comparison. His disgust at his own maleness begins to make sense. Welsh's hard-hitting portraits of working-class masculinity tie in with the idea of the 'grotesque body' as conceptualised in Bakhtinian theory. Within this framework, the male body is seen as 'uncontrolled, appetitive, vulgar, dirty and inconvenient, a body that smells and bleeds and laughs and screams'.⁶¹ The prevalence of ugly physicality in *Trainspotting* does seem to be tapping into Rabelais's 'grotesque realism,' which brands Welsh – with his literary degradation of the human body – as a realist of the most extreme and satirical kind.⁶²

The ending of *Trainspotting* can be seen to reaffirm the pessimism of *No Mean City*. When Renton leaves the drug gang for Amsterdam, he is doing what Peter Stark tried and failed to do – escape his past. Whereas Peter had kept a metaphorical train running between the Gorbals and his new life outside of the slum, however, Renton feels that the only way to climb the social ladder is to buy a one-way ticket out of Scotland: 'There, he could not be anything other than he was. Now, free from them all, for good, he could be what he wanted to be. He'd stand or fall alone. This thought both terrified and excited him' (T 344). His freedom is purchased at the expense of his class and nationality; as Welsh points out in an interview, 'To get on, if you're working-class, involves betrayal of some sort'.⁶³ He emphasises, 'the politics have been ripped out of things now. The traditional politics that working-class people had is gone now. People fight back in a negative way—taking drugs, theft, and stuff like that. There's not a political thing through

⁶¹ David Glover and Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) 64.

⁶² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Helen Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968) 20.

⁶³ Irvine Welsh, 'Irvine Welsh,' by Tasha Robinson, http://www.theonionavclub.com/avclub3842/bonusfeature1_3842.html.

unions and organization. It's more of a buzz-and-thieving sort of vibe'.⁶⁴ The theme of damaged working-class identity has come of age in Welsh's fiction; as Vincent argues, 'Welsh explores what happens inside a framework where exasperation and self-assertion collide and become the natural order of things, which is what chaos means'.⁶⁵ Like McArthur and Long, Welsh shows how the damaging effects of class and gender on an individual's sense of self-worth can lead to social breakdown. Underneath 'all the violence and visceral happenings and details, Welsh contrives to make us see that they all hate themselves, what they've become'.⁶⁶

It is as if Welsh is picking at the cultural scab left by *No Mean City*, but with his sights trained on Edinburgh and elsewhere, rather than Glasgow, the traditional bad city of modern Scotland. It is difficult to decide how to take this shift in focus – is he just capitalising on Glasgow's notoriety by turning himself into the hard man writer of Edinburgh's literary scene? Certainly, Ron McKay thinks that something along these lines might be the case: 'In keeping with someone whose dumpy, featureless appearance stands in bemusing contrast to his supercool stature, Welsh's early life story is a series of elusive, unsubstantiated rumours. A cynic might suspect that he had mythologised his life in order to conceal how embarrassingly straight he really was'.⁶⁷ Or is Welsh genuinely interested, as he claims, in speaking for the underclass of Edinburgh? He criticises his city as suffering from an 'overbearing domineering middle-class culture' that is alienating its working classes: 'I'd like to see Edinburgh have a bit more respect for its own people'.⁶⁸ He certainly presents himself as a spokesman for his city's oppressed working class, as McArthur did before him to a lesser degree. As Tim Adams notes in 'Just Say No' (1996),

⁶⁴ Irvine Welsh, 'Irvine Welsh,' by Tasha Robinson.

⁶⁵ Vincent, 'Everybody's Doing It,' <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/generalfiction/story/0,6000,771213,00.html>.

⁶⁶ Gifford et al, *Scottish Literature* 885.

⁶⁷ Ron McKay, 'Would the real Irvine Welsh shoot up?,' <http://www.observer.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,772792,00.html>.

⁶⁸ Irvine Welsh, in 'Irvine Welsh attacks 'middle class' Edinburgh Culture,' http://www.orange-today.co.uk/entertainment/story/sm_656955.html?menu=entertainment.edinburgh2002.

Welsh 'has taken to referring to himself as a 'cultural activist' rather than as a writer. He is, we are reliably informed, the 'Poet Laureate of the chemical generation'.⁶⁹

Trainspotting can be viewed as a harsh satire on working-class criminality and depravity – not an affirmation of it – which would mean that like McArthur and Long before him, Welsh is using literature to effect social change, not necessarily to reinforce the status quo. Yet in the fiction itself it is hard to find a clear moral centre. What is certain is that more so than most other writers examined in this dissertation – including the leading Glaswegian working-class writer James Kelman – Welsh has carved out a niche for himself as a literary hard man. He is like a late twentieth-century Jonathan Swift – at once disgusted with and deeply concerned about humanity; his misanthropy is shot through with unhappy laughter. Unlike Swift, however, who at least had some residual faith in the redemptive power of Houyhnhnm-like reason, Welsh offers no hope for reform. His satire is therefore more despairing in its cynicism. Indeed, critics see his condemnation of the negative aspects of modern urban Scotland as unforgiving and scathing: 'This is the strongest of indictments of a blighted urban Scotland, and our herd behaviour, our peer group pressures, and the society we have created'.⁷⁰

With the fiction of Alasdair Gray, James Kelman and Irvine Welsh, it has been demonstrated that the influence of No Mean City has been absorbed both within Glasgow and without. The explorations of class and gender in the work of these three representative writers variously reflect and develop the old hard man and hairy paradigm made so famous and culturally pervasive by McArthur and Long. The next chapter will add another dimension to my analysis, however, by examining the contributions of women writers; I will show how they, even more so than male authors, have succeeded in not merely growing within the narrative parameters of nomeancityism, but more significantly

⁶⁹ Tim Adams, 'Just Say No,' <http://www.observer.co.uk/review/story/0,6903,772793,00.html>.

⁷⁰ Gifford et al, Scottish Literature 886.

perhaps, *outside* of these limits, thereby expanding and deepening the potential for cultural expression in Scottish urban literature.

Chapter Six:

Scottish Women Writers and the Future of Scottish Urban Working-Class Fiction

So far, I have been viewing urban Scotland and urban Scots – male and female, working-class and middle-class – through fiction written by men. Similarly with the influence of No Mean City on Scottish urban literature – my consideration of the shadow and significance of McArthur and Long's impact on the representation of working-class people has been limited to male-authored novels and short stories. The story of twentieth-century Scottish urban literature that I have constructed therefore seems artificially gendered. This last chapter, however, is devoted exclusively to urban writings by Scottish women. I have segregated their work in order to draw explicit attention to their contributions as *women* authors; I do not want to obscure the significance of their gender in understanding their representations of urban Scotland. Further, the works of Scottish women writers seem, on the whole, to betray the most subtle traces of influence from the shadow of No Mean City, a phenomenon which suggests that modern Scottish urban literatures can be viewed as divided along gendered lines. Thirdly, women writers, more often than most male writers (with the exceptions of Gray and Kelman), have successfully subverted the logocentric rigidity of the old binarisms that tend to permeate so much of modern Scottish urban fiction, such as hard men/hairies, working-class/middle-class, internal/external experience, and realism/surrealism. Many leading female writers in Glasgow – such as A.L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway – lean towards a gendered view of urban experience which appears at first glance to eschew issues of class altogether, although through their explorations of femininity, the question of 'good' vs. 'bad' women may perhaps indicate a radical reworking of class consciousness. Meg Henderson, on the other hand, is a working-class writer who focuses on both class and gender, and indicates a possible breakthrough for a feminised approach to working-class literature within the shadow of influence cast by No Mean City.

Women have tended to steer clear of the overtly masculine genres of gangland. Furthermore, they have infused the nation's literature with a pluralism of vision, keeping alive the bourgeois aspects of Scottish urban fictions and contributing to the development of specific genres, such as crime fiction; as Edwin Morgan notes, 'Women writers have helped to extend this range [of styles], straightforwardly with Agnes Owens, experimentally with Janice Galloway'.¹ Stepping back a bit further in time, however, we can discern an even longer history of women's writing in Glasgow which tackled urban experience in terms of class and gender ideology: Sarah Tytler's St Mungo's City (1885) is one of the earliest examples of bourgeois Glasgow fiction by a woman; this was followed, most notably, by O. Douglas's light-hearted look at middle-class Glasgow in The Setons (1917) and Eliza for Common (1928). Then there were Mary Cleland's examinations of class stratification in Glasgow, in The Two Windows (1922) and The Sure Traveller (1923). Dot Allan is perhaps one of the better known female novelists of the 1920s and 1930s – although not as celebrated an author as Catherine Carswell – producing strongly realistic, class-conscious novels such as The Syrens (1921), Makeshift (1928), The Deans (1929), Deepening River (1932) and Hunger March (1934). Carswell, famous for Open the Door! (1920) and The Camomile (1922), creates an overtly *feminised* awareness of Glasgow, class and urban experience, albeit once again from a middle-class perspective.

The history of Scottish literature by women is a rich one, as evidenced by such publications as Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan's A History of Scottish Women's Writing (1997), and Cairns Craig's four-volume A History of Scottish Literature (1987-88). As Gifford points out, many contemporary Scottish female writers are involved in the 'questioning of gender roles, of personal, familial, and social obligation,' as well as

¹ Edwin Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994) 90.

contributing 'to the development of new ways of defining new women'.² At the same time, however, women's efforts have sometimes been overlooked or dismissed outright as unimportant. Here is Robert Elliot, for instance, pointing out in 'Women, Glasgow, and the novel' (1982) that

[women] novelists have approached the city half-heartedly, with their eyes averted and their minds on other things; they have retreated into a shell of personal relationships, leaving to their male contemporaries not only the grimmer side of the city, but the major themes of industrial life.³

Although Moira Burgess very rightly takes issue with Elliot's insinuation that 'Glasgow novels ought not to deal with personal relationships,' and even though she points out that committed and prolific women novelists *did* and *do* exist in Glasgow, Elliot is nevertheless correct in his assessment of Glasgow the grim as having been largely the literary territory of male, not female writers.⁴ Christopher Whyte has also noted, correctly, that canonical Scottish texts are 'almost exclusively by male authors'.⁵

As the 1980s and 1990s progress, however, the writing careers of women such as Janice Galloway, Agnes Owens, A.L. Kennedy and Meg Henderson – in no sense recoiling from tackling the harsher aspects of Glaswegian experience – show up, retrospectively, the sexism in Elliot's misrepresentation of female authors as lax, timid and ignorant of the supposedly important (read male-centred) themes of the city. Indeed, these four women novelists have pushed back the boundaries of female identity in ways that often surpass the experimentalism of most Scottish urban male authors. Their involvement on the fictional (and, in the case of Henderson, on the autobiographical novel) scene over the past two decades or so has added momentum and controversy to the ongoing debates about class and gender in relation to fictional constructions of Glaswegian

² Douglas Gifford, 'Contemporary Fiction I: Tradition and Community,' *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, Douglas Gifford and Dorothy McMillan, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997) 589.

³ Robert Elliot, 'Women, Glasgow, and the novel,' *Chapman* (33, Autumn 1982) 1.

⁴ Moira Burgess, *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 293.

⁵ Christopher Whyte, Introduction, *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) x.

working-class identity. The focus on women's subjectivity from female points of view expands on and transforms many of the old stereotypes, including the No Mean City 'hairy' paradigm and the other perennial favourite of many male authors (from Alan Spence to Alasdair Gray) – the strong Glasgow mother. Agnes Owens and Meg Henderson, in particular, have rewritten working-class experience from female perspectives that challenge the male domination of the modern Scottish urban novel, and undercut the patriarchal hairy/ma binarism. Owens's A Working Mother (1994), for example, focuses on the strong, independent Glasgow woman who is (like Lizzie Stark) a simultaneous mother, wife and hairy, as well as a rounded human character. Owens takes a step towards a fuller expression of working-class femininity by investing her heroine with supposedly unfeminine qualities, such as business acumen, ruthlessness and calculating ambition. Henderson's Finding Peggy: A Glasgow Childhood (1994) examines with candour and compassion the interconnected lives of various working-class women from the author's past; the mother figures are still there, of course, but their personalities have been fleshed out, and the characterisation of women in general is not limited to the development of male characters. Kennedy and Galloway are even more subversive in their representations of Glasgow women. The female characters in their works are at times disturbing portraits of damaged femininity. Kennedy's So I am Glad (1995), with its sadistic and emotionally crippled heroine, reinterprets the hairy stereotype and reconsiders the issue of women's freedom and responsibility in a male-dominated world. Galloway's The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989) is about a broken woman desperately trying to maintain a persona of normality in the face of a nervous breakdown that has resulted from emotional dependency and self-victimisation. Kennedy and Galloway's explorations of the relatively unmapped territories of female psychology are, as we shall see later, as illuminating as they are potentially dangerous.

In many ways, Agnes Owens is a precursor to Kennedy and Galloway's psychological portraits of working-class womanhood. Some of her female characters undermine conventional expectations of what women are or ought to be. Her innovativeness, however, has often been overlooked in favour of more overtly experimental writers, such as Alasdair Gray, and more commercially successful authors, such as William McIlvanney. Indeed, Owens has been described as part of a 'pack' of writers riding on Gray's literary coat-tails.⁶ Certainly, the inclusion of nine of her short stories alongside those of Kelman and Gray in *Lean Tales* (1985) places her firmly in the company of two leading Glaswegian writers. It would be unfair – not to mention belittling – to define her writing as dependent upon the fame of Gray, or of anyone else. The ironic realism of her fiction, as well as her subversive representations of working-class women in particular, warrants a less hasty categorisation. Owens is a major, independent but relatively underexamined female Glasgow novelist and short-story writer whose revisions of the two traditional expressions of working-class femininity – the tart and the mother – are as subversive as they are relatively unacknowledged. As with many female writers (Glaswegian or otherwise), her contributions to the evolution of the genre tend to be overlooked or underestimated in favour of the works of male counterparts:

In order to fully appreciate the success of *Lanark*, one need only compare a lesser work of the last few years – Agnes Owens' *Gentlemen of the West*. The cover for this novel, drawn also by Gray, features the similar constituents to *Lanark*, the Necropolis, a city centre pub, random characters – albeit in a more naturalistic form – yet the fiction itself is profoundly unsatisfactory and unconvincing. For it is Glasgow – supposedly a real, harsh Glasgow of dossers and drunks – presented literally as a village, almost in the form of a kailyard community. This is city life described by the unknowing – with no depth of perception of the fragmentation of real city life, which is precisely the effect gained by Gray's judicious use of metaphorical communities.⁷

I think Spring is wrong about the quality of Owens's fiction. Her work is profoundly insightful, especially with regards to the subjective experiences of Glasgow women.

⁶ Ian Spring, *Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990) 39.

⁷ Spring, *Phantom Village* 102.

Indeed, her female characters are more fully developed than the reluctant mother figures of Alasdair Gray's Lanark or the masturbatory fantasy projections of his 1982, Janine – not for Owens the relegation of Glaswegian femininity to either the restrictive realm of motherhood, or the equally limiting arena of male sexual fulfilment. Another reason why her writing has been given less than its fair share of critical attention is probably because she writes in the naturalistic mode, the artfulness of which is often underestimated. As Burgess notes, '[her] short stories and novels, at first glance, fit well enough into one accepted image of Glasgow fiction: realistic, clear-eyed, plain-spoken'.⁸ At the same time, however, Burgess points out that the undercurrent of anarchic humour in Owens's writings subverts the realistic mode: 'there's a dimension of surreal black humour to some of her work'.⁹ Owens is seen as part of a 'myth-rejecting camp'; she is a 'tough realist' whose dedication to a 'hard sense of social realism' is evident in Gentlemen of the West (1984), Like Birds in the Wilderness (1987) and, of course, A Working Mother (1994).¹⁰

Owens's naturalism is as harsh as that of No Mean City, especially in Gentlemen of the West, where the central character is a hard-nosed working-class man. With the advent of the 1990s, however, she shifts her focus to the exploration of lower-class reality from a woman's point of view; A Working Mother is one of the most honest and scathing portraits of working-class femininity that Glasgow has produced. As Kelman does in Busconductor Hines, Owens adopts a wry attitude towards the combined issues of class, gender and Glasgow. Irony pervades her representations of working-class men and women. The realism that Spring complains about is balanced by an attention to the absurdities of reality, which makes her writing in one sense similar to that of Muriel Spark. Owens, like Spark, is a cruel writer – her examination of the characters, behaviour

⁸ Burgess, Imagine a City 271.

⁹ Burgess, Imagine a City 271.

¹⁰ Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray, eds. Scottish Literature in English and Scots (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 732.

and treatment of women is especially dark: '[two] bleak little novels show her vision of contemporary Lowland Scotland. *A Working Mother* (1994), and the deliberately crudely entitled *For the Love of Willie* (1998) turn her exposure of blighted character towards women'.¹¹ The grittiness and honesty of her fiction recall McArthur and Long's depictions of Gorbals hairies; her unsentimental exposure of women's capacity for badness resembles Spark's representations of women in, for instance, *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* (1961) and *The Abbess of Crewe* (1974).

I preface my examination of *A Working Mother* with an analysis of Owens's short story 'Getting Sent For,' which appears in *Lean Tales*, because it is here that she draws attention to her interest in the intersections between class and gender. 'Getting Sent For' examines the clash between working- and middle-class femininity in an undefined Scottish urban setting. Mrs Sharp, the mother of a young troublemaker named George, is hauled up in front of Miss McHare, the headmistress of his school. George has been disrupting lessons and lying. Mrs Sharp is intimidated by the door marked 'Headmistress,' and knocks 'timidly' (121). Her body language betrays feelings of inferiority: 'She shuffled in, slightly hunched, clutching a black plastic shopping bag and stood waiting for the headmistress to raise her eyes from the notebook she was engrossed in' (121). The narrator's description of George's mother is hauntingly familiar – the perpetual cower of the downbeaten Mrs Stark from *No Mean City* comes to mind. McHare's demeanour, in contrast, is a study in confidence and authority. She tells Mrs Sharp to sit down only when the other woman coughs 'apologetically,' and follows up by interrupting her (121). The diction of the narrative is violent: words like 'impact,' 'tightened,' 'frosty,' 'blinding,' and 'twisted' characterise Miss McHare's dealings with Mrs Sharp (121, 122, 123). At the same time, words associated with Mrs Sharp include 'nervously,' 'sagged,' 'slumped,'

¹¹ Gifford et al, *Scottish Literature* 883.

'hunched,' 'weak,' and 'startled' (121, 122, 123, 124, 125). The power-play between the two women is based on class difference. Mrs Sharp rebels:

"You know what I think – I think this is a case of persecution. I mean the way you carried on about George fighting just proves it. And all this guff about him distracting the class – well if that flibbery gibbery miss is an example of a teacher then no wonder the class is easily distracted. Furthermore...I'll be writing to the authorities to let them know how my son is treated." (126)

Miss McHare is shocked by the other woman's verbal defence of her son, exclaiming 'How dare you talk to me like that' (126). She attempts to put Mrs Sharp in her place again. When George's mother says 'I suppose if you had your way he'd be off to a remand home,' the headmistress replies with quiet acidity: 'No doubt he'll get there of his own accord' (127). Mrs Sharp, however, launches 'into a tirade of reprisal for all injustices perpetrated against working-class children and her George in particular' (127). She finishes with a direct attack on Miss McHare's femininity:

"So if I was you I'd hand in my notice...Anyway you're getting too old for the job. It stands to reason your nerves are all shook up. It's a well-known fact that spinster teachers usually end cracking up and being carted off." (127)

The headmistress is enraged and orders Mrs Sharp out of her office; when the other woman leaves, she slumps at her desk with head in hands (127). The battle is over. Mrs Sharp leaves the school and lights a cigarette, remarking to her friend that George is 'a proper devil. Wait till I get him home and I'll beat the daylight out of him. I'll teach him to get me sent for' (128).

One of the messages of this little story is that women can and do compete for power using the tools of class and gender ideology. Miss McHare's authority derives from her headmistress role and title; Mrs Sharp uses socialism, law, sexism and motherhood. Underneath, however, the women are essentially the same – each is as ruthless and self-interested as the other. The victim/victimiser relationship is reversible; at the start of the narrative, Miss McHare has the advantage, and pummels the other woman with apparent

evidence of her inferiority and powerlessness. The roles then switch when Mrs Sharp attacks the headmistress's vulnerabilities (age, mental abilities, womanhood). The apparent victim status of Mrs Sharp, then, is deceptive. She is as ruthless as her social superior; her promise at the end to beat her son for causing her trouble is evidence of this.

Edwin Morgan argues that Owens, amongst other women writers, has helped to extend the range of angles from which Glasgow is presented in fiction – her style, he says, is 'straightforward'.¹² Owens's realism is not in doubt, and I have shown that at least one of her short stories betrays an interest in perpetuating Glasgow realism's concern with the potentially subversive issues of class and gender. I think that Morgan, in common with some other critics, tends to underestimate the social criticism of Owens's fiction – for him, Gentlemen of the West (1984) is a 'lightweight, episodic, well-observed, very readable book,' remarkable for the fact that it is a narrative about a male bricklayer written by a 'middle-aged woman'.¹³ Drawing attention to Owens's sex and age as an occasion for surprise at her ability to create a male character is bizarre. As Morgan rightly points out, however, her hero is – unlike Eddy in Gaitens's Dance of the Apprentices – more ambivalent about his identity and ambitions, less certain about what he wants out of life and how to go about it.¹⁴ Of course, he yearns for escape from poverty and the modern slum of the 1980's housing-scheme. This desire for transcendence recalls the longings of McArthur and Long's hard men and hairies, but Morgan does not notice this similarity: 'this restless dissatisfaction and uncertainty, understandable in the 1980s, would have seemed strange to the novelists of the 1930s and 1940s'.¹⁵ As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, 'dissatisfaction' and 'uncertainty' pervade fictional representations of the Glaswegian working class from No Mean City onwards; indeed, I

¹² Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 90.

¹³ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 90.

¹⁴ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 90.

¹⁵ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 90.

have shown that working-class misery, shame and fear have been one of the driving forces behind the evolution of Glasgow's modern urban fiction tradition.

Not all critics are unanimous about the issue of Owens's literary value. Christopher Harvie, for instance, recognises Owens as a significant working-class writer. In 'Gnawing the Mammoth: History, Class and Politics' (1993), he draws attention to the desperation of her characters and the 'greater sense of the energies of human decency' that they disclose, a positive move away from Kelman's 'thoughtful but self-pitying fall guys'.¹⁶ Certainly, Owens has injected the modern urban Scottish novel tradition with a more brutal No Mean City-like flavour of analysis of working- and middle-class motives, behaviour and characteristics than, say, Spence's sensitive portraits of Glaswegian masculinity, or Kelman's revelations of male vulnerability and need when confronted by strong, sexy, independent women. As Ian Haywood notes in Working-class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting (1997), Owens is not only part of the feminisation of working-class fiction in the 1980s and 1990s, she is also directly involved in the 'renaissance of Scottish proletarian and vernacular novelists,' simultaneously portraying working-class women 'in a dehistoricized context' and sharing in the general move towards exposing 'the decline of traditional industrial society, and the particular impact this process has on gender roles, the formation of subjectivity, and class-consciousness'.¹⁷ Nowhere is this more evident than in Owens's 1994 novel A Working Mother, the story of a working-class woman who finds self-definition and agency through the deliberate manipulation of the people around her.

Betty is a 1950's working-class wife and mother who decides to get a job. Married to an alcoholic man named Adam, she gradually becomes a vicious drunk herself. Betty lands a job as a typist with a legal firm, Chalmers and Stroud, and embarks on a campaign

¹⁶ Christopher Harvie, 'Gnawing the Mammoth: History, Class and Politics,' eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 202.

¹⁷ Ian Haywood, Working-class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1997) 151.

to improve her finances through lies, manipulation and semi-prostitution. The title of the novel takes on less reputable overtones as the narrative progresses. She cheats on her husband with his best friend, Brendan. She then allows her employer – Mr Robson – to use her as the focus for his masturbatory sessions, in return for money. When her office friend Mai becomes suspicious, Betty gets her sacked. She convinces Robson to hire Brendan as a gardener, and then takes her lover's earnings to spend on drink. Adam eventually tires of Betty and leaves her, taking their son and daughter with him. Betty descends completely into an alcoholic stupor, but the real shock comes when Brendan murders Mr Robson. Betty discovers that Adam and Mai are making marriage plans, and embarks on a drinking bout that ends with her being hospitalised.

This is a story similar in many ways to earlier Glasgow novels, stretching back to No Mean City, with one difference being its overt focus on feminine subjectivity, reinforced by the use of first-person narrative. Betty is a revised Lizzie Stark – alcoholic, thieving, manipulative, ruthless, unfaithful and self-centred. There is a twist, however, which becomes apparent near the end of A Working Mother, when we discover that Betty is telling her story to another alcoholic inmate named Lady Lipton, who keeps dozing off during the narration. We are further warned of the potential unreliability of the narrator when she says casually, 'It's not true anyway' (WM 165). She asks Lady Lipton, 'Supposing I told you I made the whole thing up?' (WM 181). Betty then 'admits' that she has been embellishing the truth – 'Only some of it's true,' she declares:

I am married to a man called Adam, who had a pal Brendan. He happened to kiss me one day when Adam was out of the room, nothing more than that. I didn't fancy him, he was so awful. But he died a long time ago in very dull circumstances.
(WM 182)

With the words 'very dull circumstances,' the entire narrative up to this point begins to unravel. Betty has frequently claimed to be bored and depressed throughout the novel, feeling little spurts of happiness only with the prospect of a drink. Perhaps she been

driven to alcoholism simply out of ennui. At any rate, she admits to adding touches of scandal to rather mundane episodes in her life:

‘Was there no Mr Robson?’

‘Oh, yes, but’ – I shrugged – ‘he was a dotary old lawyer who I typed for now and again. That was all. And while I’m at it, Mrs Rossi did not tell fortunes. In fact I don’t think the woman who ran the agency was called Mrs Rossi; something like Smith or Brown.’

(WM 182)

Betty has inflated her sense of self-importance by making her life seem more exciting than it really was. At the same time, however, Owens (in keeping with most of the novelists examined in this dissertation) shows the lower classes to be responsible for their own behaviour. Betty has chosen to respond to the tedium and poverty of her life by becoming an alcoholic; in the process, she loses her husband and children, and winds up institutionalised, prevaricating on the circumstances that have made her the way she is.

A Working Mother takes a highly cynical view of the urban working class. Owens is harshly critical of what she sees as a woman’s refusal to take responsibility for herself and her family. Perhaps some of her severity derives from her own experiences of hardship:

I suppose you could say my life was a struggle, as it is with most men and women of the working class even in years of good employment. I always worked when possible at anything I could find, i.e., in shop, office and factory... Work was money and security and if I was not exactly happy with my lot I could relax with a drink at the weekend while watching the telly. Any disagreement which arose under the influence was forgotten when facing work on Monday. Yet I suppose there was always a hankering to do something better.¹⁸

There is an autobiographical undertone to A Working Mother. Like her heroine, Owens was poor, burdened with children and an unemployed husband, and not entirely satisfied with her life. Unlike Betty, however, Owens tried for something better – she took creative writing lessons and became a professional author. The message of A Working Mother is

¹⁸ Agnes Owens, ‘Marching to the Highlands and into the Unknown,’ People Like That (London: Bloomsbury, 1996) 175.

apparent where personal, real-life experience and fiction intersect: poverty can lead to discontent, but work and purpose can inject a hard life with hope, direction and sanity. Agnes Owens is a struggling author who has had to clean houses and rely on grants from the Scottish Arts Council to supplement the income from her writing career.¹⁹ She takes pride in both her poverty and her accomplishments: 'I am thankful to be still in the business of writing. At least I can tell my grandchildren (if they are interested) that not only did I publish a few books in my time but I once was 'irresponsible' enough to set off with my first husband and child into the unknown wilds of the Scottish Highlands where we wandered about with scarcely a penny in our pockets'.²⁰ Like Alexander McArthur before her, then, Agnes Owens has turned her life experiences into the raw material for a scathing form of working-class fiction.

Ian Haywood is disappointed with A Working Mother, saying that the narrator is 'so laconic as to be almost disembodied'.²¹ This criticism is valid in that Betty seems emotionally distanced from the subject of her own life. The ending of the narrative, however, puts her coldness in perspective: she is, after all, an alcoholic whose transformation from a wife and mother into a drunk has been a form of psychological escape from the boredom and deprivation of her life. Haywood takes Betty's version of the truth literally, seeing the failure of her attempts to be a financially and socially independent woman in post-war Britain as a 'malign Nemesis,' whereas if we see the tale of her degeneration as little better than embellished truth, she has been her own worst enemy.²² The text of A Working Mother is elusive and ambiguous, so that it is difficult to decide which interpretation to go with: if Betty has been, as Haywood argues, a female victim of the 'cruelty of history' against working-class women, then her only failure has

¹⁹ Owens, 'Marching to the Highlands and into the Unknown' 175.

²⁰ Owens, 'Marching to the Highlands and into the Unknown' 176.

²¹ Haywood, Working-class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting 157.

²² Haywood, Working-class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting 157.

been an inability to 'engage with the historical context of her rebellion'; on the other hand, if we see Betty as a more modern Lizzie Stark – a drunken, irresponsible hairy – then her failure has more to do with flaws in her own character than with being a victim of her class and gender.²³ Certainly, Burgess sees Betty as the subverted version of the traditional 'strong woman' in the Glasgow novel tradition.²⁴ She 'lies as readily as she breathes, telling everyone what best serves the purpose of the moment'.²⁵ I concur with Burgess's conclusions about what we are to make of Betty's tenuous relationship with the truth:

So it's possible that she has in fact burst out of a humdrum and rather miserable marriage with a neurotic husband to carry on this hilariously amoral life; it's equally possible, though, that the bleakness of the marriage has driven her to fantasise it all. Drink is the constant factor, and what's certain by the end is that she is detached from a reality which (whatever it was) has proved too much to bear.²⁶

Indeed, the unreliability of Betty's narration(s) – besides injecting the naturalism with a post-modern sense of undecidability – is a technique which many Glasgow women writers have employed increasingly over the past twenty years. *A Working Mother* marks a strange turn of events for the representation of Glaswegian femininity, but – as Burgess points out – it also brings the Glasgow woman 'into the full light of the Glasgow novel'.²⁷

I think that this trend in women's writing is a double-edged sword – on the one hand, exposing damage done to the feminine psyche can encourage a more nuanced understanding of women's subjectivity; on the other hand, and herein lies the trap of essentialism, depicting women as psychologically impaired can promote a dangerously inferiorised image of the female mind. Women in Glasgow fiction are often depicted as victims of their own inability to cope with modern urban life in general and men in particular. Of course, we could argue that there *is* a case for doing this kind of thing in the Glasgow novel; after all, many of the male authors studied so far provide equally honest

²³ Haywood, *Working-class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* 157.

²⁴ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 295.

²⁵ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 296.

²⁶ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 296.

²⁷ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 296.

and scathing explorations of damaged male identity. Showing up the detrimental effects of class and gender ideology on women's sense of self contributes to the general move towards social reform. Authors of both sexes are revealing that traditional gender roles are inherently limiting, harmful and antisocial. Janice Galloway and A.L. Kennedy are two of the most prominent female writers to focus on broken women; as I will show later on in this chapter, Meg Henderson resists this skewed image, achieving instead a vision of balance between weak and strong femininity which is perhaps more realistic than the ones provided by the other women writers under scrutiny here.

Janice Galloway's The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989) traces the physical, mental and emotional deterioration of a young female drama teacher named – oxymoronically – Joy Stone. Ian Spring, in 'Image and Text: Fiction on Film' (1993), has pointed out the connection between the writing of Kelman and Galloway – he sees Galloway's novel and Kelman's A Disaffection (1989) as the male and female versions of a similar tale: 'Both deal with psychotic or neurotic schoolteachers in the West of Scotland whose breakdown under a variety of personal and social pressures is meticulously related'.²⁸ Gavin Wallace, in 'Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity' (1993), argues that The Trick is to Keep Breathing resembles Alasdair Gray's 1982, Janine in its examination of 'psychological collapse from a feminine perspective'.²⁹ In Galloway's book – as in Gray's – we see the world through the protagonist's jaded eyes, and it is a singularly claustrophobic and depressing vision of womanhood in the modern urban world. Joy Stone is the mistress of a married man whose death has triggered a process of self-destruction which involves everything from bulimia, anorexia and obsessive-compulsive behaviour, to phobias about insects, self-absorption, self-pity, self-hatred and delusions.

²⁸ Ian Spring, 'Image and Text: Fiction on Film,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 214.

²⁹ Gavin Wallace, 'Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity,' The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 223.

She is riddled by a sense of guilt which has been the result of her own transgressions of social norms. Her surrender of autonomy to her lover, added to her wilful theft of another woman's husband, has made her an outcast in her own eyes as well as those of others. As she says, 'I am the problem' (T 12). One is tempted to see Joy as a female Mr. Alfred. She lives in an area of Irvine called 'Boot Hill,' a new estate 'meant for undesirables: difficult tenants from other places, shunters, overspill from Glasgow' (T 13). She has allowed her identity as a person to be overshadowed by her earlier role as the other woman in a man's life – the nameplate on her door is his, not hers (T 14). The death of her lover seems to affect her in terms of how she sees herself – she is concerned about what other people think of her in relation to him – and so is eager to be recognised as legitimate. At the memorial service, however, she is devastated when the Reverend extends sympathy and love to her lover's 'wife and family' instead of her; she feels that she has been exorcised, a 'ground-in stain' whose existence has been wiped out by a 'miracle' (T 79).

Galloway's portrait of damaged femininity is cutting: her heroine has broken the rules of her gender, and she is now suffering the psychological consequences – feelings of unworthiness are all-pervasive. To add to her feelings of isolation and bleakness, she finds herself living in a postwar estate intended, in part, for 'overspill' from Glasgow, 'with a poor bus service and few car-owners, graffiti everywhere, slaters slithering in the porch'.³⁰ In other words, she has been demoted as a woman and as a member of society. She hands herself over to men – first her lover, then her doctor and psychiatrists, even her boss at the bookmakers; she also looks to other women (Marianne, Ellen, the Health Visitor) for some kind of guidance in how to behave properly, lying to them about her eating habits and state of mind in an attempt to appear normal. The result, in all cases, is self-erasure. She lives through the eyes of the people around her, not for herself, and so becomes a reflection of what she thinks they expect of her.

³⁰ Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel' 91.

Despite the experimental nature of Galloway's novel, then (which is evident in various typographical tricks), the underlying message is familiar enough – women are bound by the rules of class and gender ideology, and the ramifications of rebellion against these social laws can be devastating. Cairns Craig draws attention to the relationship between the events in the novel and Galloway's manipulation of typography to create a visual sense of division in Joy's character – a loss of selfhood hinted at by the fact that text spills 'into the margins, trailing off the edge of the page and leaving the words truncated'.³¹ Similarly, Margery Metzstein, in 'Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway' (1993), explores Joy Stone's 'strong sense of alienation which accompanies [her] disintegration of self'.³² Joy's problem, Metzstein argues, is a 'loss of identity,' which she connects with the death of Michael and the process of grieving.³³ Certainly, Joy has lost control over herself – she is bent on disappearing both physically and socially. I think, however, that this process of self-reduction started well before her lover's death. She has spent her entire life trying to live up (and down) to the expectations of the people in her life, with the inevitable result that she has become a puppet, a victim of what she thinks the world expects of her:

I used to be so conscientious. I used to be so *good* all the time.
 [where **good** = **productive/hardworking/wouldn't say boo**]
 I was a good student: straight passes down the line. First year probationer taking home reams of paper, planning courses and schemes for kids that weren't my own. People made jokes, I was so eager to please. That's how good I used to be.
 [where **good** = **value for money**]
 (.....)
 [where **good** = **not putting anyone out by feeling too much, blank, unobtrusive**]
 (.....)
 [where **good** = **neat, acting in a credit-worthy manner**]
 (.....)

³¹ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) 193.

³² Margery Metzstein, 'Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway,' *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies*, eds. Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993) 138.

³³ Metzstein, 'Of Myths and Men: Aspects of Gender in the Fiction of Janice Galloway' 138-39.

If I was a good [ie **patient, thoughtful, uncomplaining**] girl long enough I would reap the reward.

(T 81, 82)

This was Joy's first mistake – trying to be a 'good' woman, which turned her into a traditional version of quiescent femininity, a commodity for use by other people, a complacent vessel for society's desires. Her next error in judgment is to become the mistress of a married man. She becomes a 'bad' woman, gives up her own home and independence, moving from her cottage to Michael's council house, where she is now stuck, unable to gather her wits about her to strike out on her own again (T 63, 65). She is plagued by health visitors, doctors and her boss, and cannot seem to articulate herself, to express her wishes and desires adequately enough to be understood. Either way – as a good teacher or a mistress – Joy is complicit in her own victimisation. She has relinquished her personhood. Alison Smith, in 'And Woman Created Woman' (1995), sees *Trick* as a 'perceptive study of the terrifying stasis of a woman's breakdown...essentially because [the death of her male lover] rips the surface off the everyday world to reveal nothingness and fear beneath the acceptable construction of female identity'.³⁴ Caught as she is between her perception of what constitutes the 'good' and the 'bad' woman, Joy Stone's collapse seems inevitable. Like Lizzie Stark, she tries to fulfil the necessary conditions for both stereotypes; in the process, she surrenders any possibility for self-actualisation in realistic terms.

In common with other female Scottish writers – such as Catherine Carswell in *Open the Door!* (1920) and A.L. Kennedy in *So I am Glad* (1995) – Galloway shows how women can become mired in the double-bind of passivity and antisocial rebellion. It is difficult to decide if by the end of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* Joy Stone has actually begun to recover from her nervous breakdown. The conclusion is inconclusive: Joy seems to

³⁴ Alison Smith, 'And Woman Created Woman: Carswell, Shepherd and Muir, and the Self-made Woman,' *Gendering the Nation: Studies in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. Christopher Whyte (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995) 25.

forgive herself, but simultaneously reaches for the whisky bottle, an ambiguous image that could be taken more than one way (T 235, 236). Unambiguously happy endings, however, are artificial things. Joy is nowhere near a complete cure from complicity in her own victimisation – her record of allowing other people (especially men) to control her life attests to a weakness in her character that she would need to address in order to come into full possession of herself as an autonomous agent. Her need to ‘forgive’ herself indicates the guilt she has been feeling, but it also signifies closure on the past, which at least summons hope for a less self-defeating future. If identity is a process – as opposed to a destination – then Joy is at least aware that she *needs* to take responsibility for her own life and destiny:

Maybe I could learn to swim.

(.....)

I’m gawky, not a natural swimmer. But I can read up a little, take advice. I read somewhere the trick is to keep breathing, make out it’s not unnatural at all. They say it comes with practice.

(T 235)

Burgess sees Joy’s story as optimistic; there is, she argues, ‘a great underlying strength’ in her case, despite the damage that has been done.³⁵ I agree with this assessment – Joy is learning that life, like swimming, is a matter of balance. Galloway’s novel is therefore a complex examination of female subjectivity in the face of modern urban life and men. As Wallace points out, she has ‘substantially enriched the Scottish novel’s forensic fascination with the problematics of identity’.³⁶ Certainly, there is an element of academic cool-headedness in how Galloway’s heroine views herself in relation to the world.

Another female writer who explores socially unacceptable expressions of femininity is A.L. Kennedy. Like Galloway, Kennedy’s women subvert traditional notions of what women are or ought to be. Burgess calls Kennedy’s voice ‘new but impossible to

³⁵ Burgess, *Imagine a City* 295.

³⁶ Wallace, ‘Voices in Empty Houses: The Novel of Damaged Identity’ 225.

categorise'.³⁷ Kennedy's second novel, So I Am Glad (1995), strikes an uneasy balance between realism and fantasy. Set in Partick, Glasgow, the novel's cold narrative style and emotionally-repressed heroine are in some ways reminiscent of Galloway's The Trick is to Keep Breathing (1989). Also in keeping with Galloway, Kennedy's Glasgow is drawn in less localised colours than most Glasgow novels; the city seems to exist as a backdrop to the largely psychological adventures of the heroines. Kennedy, it should be noted, is 'not particularly concerned with writing about Glasgow'.³⁸ Further, her statement 'I tend to feel that writers transcend place' indicates a definition of fiction that aims to be universally applicable, rather than regionally limited.³⁹ Jennifer is a radio announcer living in a bedsit, keeping to herself and suppressing her feelings under a demeanour of false calm:

I am not emotional. You should know that about me. You should be aware of my principal characteristic which I choose to call my calmness. Other people have called it coldness, lack of commitment, over-control, a fishy disposition. I say that I'm calm, a calm person, and usually leave it at that...

(G 4-5)

Jennifer then admits that her appearance of tranquillity is in fact an 'empty space – or, to be more exact, a pause. I am not calm, I am unspontaneous. When something happens to me, I don't know how to feel' (G 5). There is something almost sociopathic about Kennedy's female protagonist; she imitates human emotions rather than experiences them – she can 'reproduce them adequately at will' (G 5). Certainly, the absence of feelings makes her feel 'safer than safe' (G 6). At the same time, Jennifer has other antisocial tendencies. She is a sexual sadist who beats her male lovers. Steven is especially masochistic, begging her to dominate him. Jennifer complies, somewhat reluctantly:

³⁷ Burgess, Imagine a City 313.

³⁸ A.L. Kennedy, correspondence with the present writer (8 May 2003) 1.

³⁹ Kennedy, correspondence with the present writer (8 May 2003) 1.

Steve was impeccably polite – always ready with a please or a thank you – and all of that happened too often and then happened again. I felt tired. Impossibly tired. First thing, last thing, day-long, night-short weary. Not the appropriate emotion, I know, but the only one I could muster with any kind of consistency.

(G 51)

Jennifer finds the demands of her masochistic lover tiresome, and wishes she could drop the act, even for a while: ‘There doesn’t always have to be something you have to do. Sometimes we’ll be resting, surely and being ourselves. Sometimes we can relax’ (G 52). Being sadistic is not what it seems, then, since it is Steven (and not Jennifer) who controls the sado-masochistic relationship, albeit in a manipulative – rather than ham-fisted – manner. Jennifer’s unhealthy relationship with sexuality derives from the example set by her parents – as a child, she had been forced to watch them have sex, which has made her desperate for privacy, peace and safety (G 70, 71, 72). She has been taught that heterosexual relationships are based on violence and the victim/victimiser paradigm, not love: ‘I was frightened by their shapes and their colour and most of all by their noise, my mother’s noise. I thought she was hurting. Sometimes he would be hurt, too. All I did was watch’ (G 71).

This is Jennifer Wilson before the new tenant arrives at her building – a naked man whose true identity turns out to be Savinien de Cyrano de Bergerac. His sudden appearance in twentieth-century Glasgow initiates a chain of events which eventually breaks through Jennifer’s defences, allowing her to become more wholly human, less dichotomised.

Cyrano de Bergerac does not remember his past at first, and so allows Jennifer and the other tenants to call him Martin, mistaking him for another man. He is an amalgam of masculine and feminine attributes. Jennifer’s description of him emphasises this uneasy alliance of male virility and female softness:

A small man with the air of a prize fighter turned poetic, or a dancing butcher – all we can actually see of him are his hands which are fading olive and too large for

their arms and his head which is supplied with longish, coarse-ish, thinningish, apathetically curly hair and very striking bones. His profile has a remarkable, even predatory, focus that weakens down into a neat, soft mouth and an oddly tiny chin. A ghost of bristle shadows his upper lip. Because he has a habit of frowning with his mouth and not his forehead, he can seem either prissily savage or savagely prissy – like Red Riding Hood’s granny, mixed in with her wolf.

(G 9)

There is something not quite right about Martin – he glows in the dark (G 12-13).

Jennifer falls in love with Martin/Cyrano, so that we begin to wonder if she has actually created him from the desires and emotions that she has denied herself for her entire life.

Since other people can see him, however, we can assume that he is real enough.

Perhaps he is a bit of both. In the end, and with Jennifer’s help, Cyrano returns to the grave, leaving her with mixed feelings of sadness and joy – she does not want to lose

him, and at the same time is healthily unwilling to join him in death: ‘And I did not wish to die with him, to go with him. I could not, I tried, but I could not want that and

so he frightened me’ (G 276-77). She returns home with a new attitude – she is no longer ‘calm,’ but now cherishes the memory of Cyrano’s voice; as she says to her

flatmate Arthur: ‘I suppose I’ll get a life. I don’t know’ (G 280). When Arthur asks Jennifer if she will miss her relationship with Cyrano or be glad it is over and done

with, she replies ‘Both’ (G 280). The final sentence of the novel is significant: ‘I will miss this and I will miss Savinien and I will be glad’ (G 280). This is a similar ending

in many ways to Galloway’s – ambiguous and with the emotionally-damaged heroine learning to balance the contradictory nature of life. As Kennedy points out, however,

de Bergerac’s transition into a fuller sense of his own humanity is *untraditional*, which suggests that So I Am Glad, though narrated from a female point of view, is as much about damaged masculinity as it is about femininity.⁴⁰

So I Am Glad is heralded as Kennedy’s most ‘audacious’ work to date; indeed, the novel is a ‘love story set in contemporary West-End Glasgow which takes magic

⁴⁰ Kennedy, correspondence with the present writer (8 May 2003) 1.

realism to its limits'.⁴¹ Of course, we cannot forget the fact that it was actually Alasdair Gray, with Lanark in 1981, who first showed how magic realism could extend the possibilities of representation in the Glasgow novel. I agree, however, with the following assessment of Kennedy's methodology:

Kennedy has two perspectives; on the one hand, a marvellously inventive and ambiguous reworking of the classic Scottish 'either/or' tension between the supernatural and the psychological, and on the other, that of the modern Scottish fiction exemplified in work from Trocchi to Gray, Banks to Galloway, Welsh to Warner, in the depiction of a traumatised mind using displacement and fantastic imagination simultaneously to avoid and redeem the damage from which it hides.⁴²

So I Am Glad is open to at least three potential readings – a psychological analysis, in which Jennifer is actually imagining her dead French lover; a magic realistic interpretation, where Martin/Cyrano is literally brought back from the grave; and a post-modernistic explanation, which would mean that he is both real and unreal, blurring the line between the two traditionally opposed categories, a symbol of indeterminacy – past and present, imaginary and actual. The three readings can be reconciled, however, so that the love story can be examined as a compromise between all three fictional registers. This shift in the Glasgow novel tradition is welcome in its indeterminacy: 'Kennedy teases us, knowing full well we'll ask our old-fashioned questions of how and why, when the reality is that the author can make whatever fictions and irreconcilables are wanted. This new fiction accepts few or no limitations to its scope...'.⁴³

The tantalising question of the novel's genre aside, at its heart So I Am Glad is a study of modern Scottish urban identity, with its primary focus on women's subjectivity. Once again – in keeping with Galloway and even Owens – women are depicted as victims of their own inability to cope with the demands of everyday life. At the same time, however, Kennedy provides a more balanced portrait of modern femininity than that provided by

⁴¹ Gifford et al, Scottish Literature 946.

⁴² Gifford et al, Scottish Literature 959.

⁴³ Gifford et al, Scottish Literature 960.

Galloway in particular, so that Jennifer is a simultaneous victim/victimiser, caught between two destructive forms of existence. Jennifer resembles Galloway's damaged heroine in several respects. Like Joy Stone, Jennifer is emotionally troubled and harbours feelings of self-hatred. She does not like the world she lives in, and hides behind a façade of cool capability. She is a product of her environment. Kennedy juxtaposes Jennifer's problems with 'glimpses through her of a sick society, a world of atrocity and sadistic exploitation'.⁴⁴ She broods about the unavoidable fact of human (and especially male) cruelty:

I know without checking that what seemed quite a promising situation in many countries of the world beyond has slithered back into ignorance and spasms of random death.

That afternoon I might, for the sake of argument, recall that quite recently a friend has told me about a besieged group of soldiers broadcasting a tape to their besieging opposite numbers, dug in and waiting around one town or another in one war or another. Their tape had recorded proceedings while a young child was minced alive into small bore meat.

(G 10)

Jennifer does not know how to react to this horrible truth, and hides incomprehension behind callous laughter, 'in the absence of any more appropriate response' (G 10). Her relation of the incident is detailed, forensic, objective and matter-of-fact; this style pervades throughout *So I Am Glad*; the cool, almost detached manner in which Jennifer speaks about herself and the world manages to blend shock-value with naturalism. At the same time, the lack of traditional femininity or Glaswegianness in Jennifer's narratorial voice is significant: her identity seems to be unsexed and uninflected. She is a person rather than a representative of a gender or class position. Nevertheless, Kennedy's novel is a study of identity and a work of social criticism – she explores the interrelationship between the development of female subjectivity in reaction to a harsh, amoral modern urban world, but without resorting to the issues of class and gender ideology in order to do so. Jennifer has learned to deal with worldly nastiness by

⁴⁴ Gifford et al, *Scottish Literature* 959-60.

recoiling from it altogether, becoming instead a reflection of other people's needs and desires – a disembodied voice on invisible radio waves, a source of twisted sexual pleasure for masochistic male lovers. She is never in full possession of herself. Martin/Cyrano is therefore highly significant in this sense, because he is (on one level) Jennifer's attempt to come to terms with the reality of men, their influence on her life and character, and her perception of herself as a feminine being. With his preternatural glow, he is her literal and figurative knight in shining armour.

Martin/Cyrano becomes the occasion for Jennifer's emotional breakthrough, a catalyst for her development into full possession of herself as a woman and as a human being. It is tempting to see Cyrano as Jennifer's projected *animus*. His description of coming into self-awareness can be interpreted as a return from death or as an emergence from the depths of Jennifer's repressed unconscious:

Do you want to know the earliest thing of which I have any recollection? I can tell you that. I was asleep and knew that I was sleeping. I felt myself do it and was certain I would never wake. It was like a death without dying, Jennifer. There was a darkness cold and patient as the moon, without sound and without meaning and nothing more but my tiny thought of myself adrift along eternity. I was the black of an eye, a cold dry look pressed in against night, and I saw only the absence of God – a faraway disinterested ache, a faint taste of intellect on the edge of time.

(G 15-16)

Is Jennifer the 'God' to which Cyrano is referring? It is difficult to say, but the allusion to God as a distant and hurting intelligence recalls Jennifer's emotionally-damaged frame of mind. As Cyrano goes on to say, 'I am drifting, annoyed and lost, somewhere in the mind of an amnesiac Creator...' (G 17). There are hints throughout the text which seem to reinforce the idea that Jennifer has fabricated Martin/Cyrano. Arthur's light-hearted joke about fashioning a man from dough seems to suggest this possibility: 'Today I shall construct a monster out of scone. The perfect man...The sweetness of treacle, the brain of a raisin and the strength of a potato. They said I was mad, you know. Mad' (G 74-5). At the same time, however, there are more clues to indicate that he is real. If the other

characters in the novel did not acknowledge Martin/Cyrano's existence (which they often do), one would be tempted to conclude that he was little more than Jennifer's imaginary friend.

Kennedy's Cyrano becomes Jennifer's ideal man – vulnerable yet brave, sexual and romantic, woman-loving yet masculine, artistic yet aggressive, at once the intellectual, poet, lover and warrior. He is a fine balance of many human qualities which lets her express more of herself than any other man has allowed her to do before. Cyrano sees Jennifer as his intellectual equal, and he frees Jennifer from the restrictive and damaging victim/victimiser relationship she had with Steven. So, whether or not Cyrano is really there is not the point; rather it is the fact that Jennifer self-actualises in relation to Cyrano that shows up Kennedy's critique of class and gender relations in modern society. All her life, Jennifer has been attempting to fulfill society's expectations of what she ought to be as a woman, and has learned that human relationships are based on power politics. Her parents' sexual exhibitionism had taught her to be submissive to the wishes of others; being forced to watch her mother and father have sex was her early experience of victimisation, where she as a sensitive female child was disempowered by people with more authority. Witnessing the verbal cruelty between her mother and father also taught her that relations between the sexes are sadistic, not tender, a lesson that manifests itself in Jennifer's involvement in sadomasochistic sex games as an adult woman.

A progression can be detected in the publication of A Working Mother, The Trick is to Keep Breathing and So I Am Glad, a movement from total cynicism about women's ability to cope with modern life and men with Owens, towards ambiguity in Galloway, and ending with Kennedy's seemingly bold affirmation of female independence and self-possession. Although I would not wish to downplay Owens's contribution to our understanding of women as capable of both good and bad, and even though Galloway's

scrutiny of a damaged female mind draws attention to the effects of society's emotional and psychological violence towards women, I think Kennedy strikes a balance between viewing women as victims/victimisers and as complete human beings in a way that no Glasgow author – male or female – has done so far. Jennifer moves through the traps of power-play that permeate modern society towards an acceptance of herself as a woman and as a person; her honesty about her victimisation in the past, as well the matter-of-fact openness about her own participation in victimising others, has helped her to reconfigure her own character to be at once female and human. Indeed, the lack of *explicit* attention to the issue of gender and class throughout So I Am Glad can be seen as a positive move in itself. As Kennedy pointed out to me in correspondence, 'If I were to imagine [my characters] of such-and-such a class or gender and present them as such, they would be impossible to sustain as plausible characters'.⁴⁵

Despite the positive aspects of the ways in which Owens, Galloway and Kennedy affirm the feminine as humanised in their writing, I wish to strike a cautionary note. Although these writers provide in-depth investigations of the intricacies of the female psyche, this way of representing women can have the effect of downplaying both the external causes of female oppression, and women's ability to cope rationally with the difficulties of modern urban life. Owens's heroine is depicted as unnatural – she is a bad mother and wife – whose descent into insanity is both patriarchal punishment and a sign of disapproval of female independence. Galloway's Joy Stone buckles under the pressures of bereavement, bossy men and her own upbringing as a female; her recovery from madness at the end of the novel is hopeful, but ultimately uncertain. Kennedy's Jennifer deals with her problems differently, but with the same antisocial overtones – she starts out as an emotionally repressed sexual sadist and through a man's help becomes a more acceptably

⁴⁵ Kennedy, correspondence with the present writer (8 May 2003) 1.

ordinary heterosexual woman. Interestingly, Kennedy does not consider herself a feminist:

I have an interest in people...I have no interest in a theory that will tell me that one sex (race, class, creed) or another is better, or worse, or has sweepingly defined characteristics that apply to all members. If you look at anyone closely enough they will contain 'male' and 'female' and [a] huge variety of other elements. It is my job to look closely, without preconceptions and learn about those elements. Human beings are always more interesting, subtle and complex than anyone's attempts to classify them. I then have to try and build people who in some way reflect or imply a complete humanity – why would I want to give a reader anything less? It would be an insult to their intelligence.⁴⁶

Because Kennedy does not wish to label either herself or her work, I consider her commitment to celebrating the full humanity of men and women regardless of gender, class, creed or race to be the most laudable aim for fiction, working-class, middle-class, realistic or surrealistic.

At the same time, and despite Kennedy's aversion to undermining the humanity of her characters, the question of whether or not *Cyrano* is real hangs over the text, which draws attention to the possibility that he is a product of Jennifer's delusion. With Owens, Galloway and Kennedy, the female characters are victims of disempowerment by others, and they work through the psychological damage that can result. Although this way of portraying women draws attention to the potentially detrimental effects of gender ideology, there is a concurrent danger in depicting women as psychologically fragile. In their representations of femininity, these writers seem to subscribe to some of the ideas of the continental feminist movement, represented by such key 'French Feminists' as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous. As Elissa Gelfand points out, psychoanalytically and philosophically oriented French feminists 'posit connections between the structures of the psyche and those of the material world,' a valid theory which nonetheless is open to charges of essentialism, a common failing of some versions of

⁴⁶ Kennedy, correspondence with the present writer (8 May 2003) 2.

continental feminist thought.⁴⁷ The tendency to link women's emancipation with the *affirmation* of the female body – though this is a necessary part of undercutting the patriarchy – can have the unwanted effect of *conflating* the feminine with the physical. The oft-repeated phrase of continental feminists – '*l'écriture féminine*' – can be applied to the writings of Kennedy and Galloway in particular; in both novels, the female protagonists discover their personhood by adopting more positive attitudes towards their physicality, which is of course a step towards loving themselves as women. Kennedy's portrait of Jennifer the one-time sexual sadist who becomes a more properly feminine woman through a healthier sexual relationship with a man, for instance, simultaneously intersects with and undermines Cixous's affirmation of women's writing and self-expression as based on female sexuality.⁴⁸ Jennifer achieves agency through men and sex, but emerges as a more balanced human being. Galloway's typographically experimental story of Joy Stone, whose meandering and semi-coherent journey through insanity towards potential self-possession forms the bulk of *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, on the other hand, fits well with Irigaray's idea of feminine expression being 'fluid and playful,' rather than linear, lucid and logical.⁴⁹ For Kennedy and Galloway, women's identities – both damaged and under repair – are linked to their bodies and sexual behaviour, an anti-rational, physically-based view of femininity that could reinforce, rather than counteract, the idea that women are weak.⁵⁰ Strait-jacketing the 'feminine' into what amounts to traditional concepts of womanliness – such as the maternal, hysteria, madness and/or emotional dependency – limits the potentiality of women's expressions of selfhood.

Certainly, it is necessary that we understand how women can be influenced by negative

⁴⁷ Elissa Gelfand, 'Feminist criticism, French,' *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory: Approaches, Scholars, Terms*, ed. Irena R. Makaryk (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) 45.

⁴⁸ Gelfand, 'Feminist criticism, French' 48.

⁴⁹ Gelfand, 'Feminist criticism, French' 48.

⁵⁰ See Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa,' in *Feminisms: an anthology of literary theory and criticism*, eds. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 334-49. Also see Luce Irigaray, 'The Sex Which is Not One' (350-56); Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: toward an understanding of *l'écriture féminine*' (357-70).

ideas about femininity – as Kristeva emphasises in her psychoanalytic feminism – but without constructing viable ways of counteracting the ravages of misogyny, the cult of the female victim is in danger of dominating fictional representations of Glaswegian working-class women.⁵¹

One Glaswegian female author who does not construct feminine identity completely within essentialistic paradigms is Meg Henderson. Henderson attempts to explore a wider spectrum of femininity, but without falling into the psychoanalytical trap of viewing the feminine as a problem in itself.⁵² Instead of presenting women, their feminine nature or sexuality as the source of the problems they face, she looks to class and gender ideologies as the main causes for oppression. In this, her approach takes on the more positive aspects of Freudian theory – with Henderson, as with Freud, femininity is ‘an outcome not an origin’.⁵³ The women in her narratives must deal with inferiorisation on two counts – their sex and their class – and their identities as working-class women are examined as historically-produced constructions within which they struggle for autonomy and self-respect. Unlike Owens, Galloway and Kennedy, Henderson balances her scrutiny of women’s oppression with workable solutions; whereas the other three women writers tend to focus on the *effects* of class and gender, and give less attention to reinventing femininity in more positive ways, Henderson shows how women can achieve agency despite the damage done to them by social ideologies. Henderson’s writing is strongly realistic, historical and journalistic, and there is an emphasis on non-sexual woman-to-woman love and validation in the face of the misogynistic underpinnings of modern British society.

⁵¹ The feelings of inferiority experienced by Galloway and Kennedy’s heroines exemplify Julia Kristeva’s analysis of ‘abjection,’ the negative feelings about femininity that dog women despite advances in legal, financial and social circumstances. See David Glover and Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (London: Routledge, 2000) 7-8.

⁵² Sigmund Freud views femininity as a ‘riddle’ and then addresses women directly: ‘to those of you who are women... you yourselves are the problem,’ in ‘Femininity,’ *New Introductory Lectures*, in *The Penguin Freud Library*, eds. Angela Richards and Albert Dickson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973) 146.

⁵³ David Glover and Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (London: Routledge, 2000) 2.

Finding Peggy: A Glasgow Childhood (1994), for example, is an autobiographical novel in which Henderson explores her Glaswegian working-class roots as well as those of the women who influenced her. Based on real-life events, the narrative incorporates and inverts the influence of No Mean City – Glasgow, hard men, hairies and poverty are seen through female eyes, and the scathing honesty of the older work is offset by Henderson's more overt respect for her gender and class. The legacy of No Mean City seems to be lurking behind Henderson's reconstruction of her own life experiences: gangs, violence, poignant motherly figures, drunk and useless men, and back-court adventures provide the scenery and impetus for Henderson's growth towards womanhood. The book is clearly autobiographical, but also seems to blur the distinction between fact and fiction by embedding real-life details and family photographs in a hauntingly familiar, but updated slummy 'No Mean City' setting, complete with gangsters and razor fights. Henderson's Finding Peggy is a creative reconstruction of documented fact.

The title of the novel – Finding Peggy – can be seen both as a reference to Meg's personal research into the events leading up to and surrounding her aunt's death in childbirth, and as a narrative framework based on the quest motif; Henderson's true accounts of growing up in working-class Glasgow are given shape, coherence and a sense of development and progression via the conventions of the *bildungsroman*. Significantly, 'Peggy' and 'Meg' are both nicknames for 'Margaret,' which raises the question of which Margaret is being sought throughout the narrative. Then again there is Henderson's feminist agenda, which invests her text with an additional element of social and political purpose; Finding Peggy, like No Mean City, is a book with a mission. Not for Henderson the optimistic affirmation of the maternal as the right and proper way for women to 'find' themselves and contribute to the rebirth of humanity and Glasgow culture, as can be discerned in, say, Alasdair Gray's Lanark: A Life in 4 Books. Henderson combines

elements from autobiography and fiction with a message about the pitfalls of traditional working-class womanhood. Motherhood, for instance, proves a deadly trap for Aunt Peggy, and a source of hardship for Meg's mother. Finding Peggy is at its core a lesson on how working-class women can achieve agency. Henderson's brand of feminism is pragmatic, assertive, practical and ambitious. Education is at the heart of women's emancipation from poverty, bad marriages and debilitating motherhood; amusement – even disgust – at the role played by men's irresponsibility and ignorance in the sufferings of women pervades the text. Pride in one's femininity, class and personhood – not uncertainty, shame and self-hatred – is the ultimate message of the novel. Finding Peggy allows Meg to discover herself through a *female* working-class heritage, not the usual male one, which for her is disappointing and inferior anyway.

Henderson begins her gynocentric autobiography with a Prologue, the first lines of which underline the central theme of the text:

My life has been shaped by two women, who, in my childhood, instilled in me the values I still live by: my mother, Nan, and her sister, my Aunt Peggy...As I was growing up I wasn't aware of how much Nan and Peggy had influenced me, but the truth is that I bear their stamp, and the older I get the clearer this becomes and the more grateful I am for it.

(FP 9)

The narrative style of Finding Peggy is not as elegant as that of Owens, Galloway or Kennedy; the tone can at times be rather didactic, which is more in keeping with No Mean City. Henderson's text is clearly realistic and working-class in focus. This is not necessarily a regressive move: on one level, Henderson's story of her upbringing in the 'poorest and toughest areas of Glasgow' reaffirms the value of working-class experience in literature, and echoes McArthur's own interpretation of No Mean City as a testimony to the poor; on another level, the connections Henderson makes between her identity as a grown woman and a *female* working-class heritage not only counteract the overwhelming masculinism of modern Scottish literature and history, but also rewrite the subjectivity of

lower-class womanhood. Henderson's book is at once sincere, unabashed, straightforward and confident. This seems to mark a major shift in attitude towards Glasgow, the working class and women.

Henderson depicts her mother and aunt as strong women, but avoids the diametrically opposed stereotypes of the 'Glasgow mother' and the 'Glasgow hairy.' Further, she completely eschews the psychoanalytic image of women utilised by Owens, Galloway and Kennedy in their novels, opting instead for an approach that acknowledges her women's strengths and shortcomings, their vulnerability as female working-class individuals and their inadvertent heroism in their descendant's eyes:

Nan and Peggy Clark were strong women in that they believed in things, they had ideals and shared a dream of how life should be. This dream was entirely non-political, but it was in essence what started the Labour Party, though I'm sure they would not recognize what has evolved as the Labour Party as anything to do with them. They believed completely that people were good and honourable and that everyone was of equal worth; indeed it never occurred to them that this wasn't universally accepted. Looking back there was something naïve about that, and given the hard lives they had it is difficult to understand how they could have sustained such a belief. But there is something heroic and admirable about it too, painfully so, as my story reveals.

(FP 9-10)

Henderson draws attention to Nan and Peggy's integrity and socio-political idealism; she then expresses her wonderment at the women's optimism despite the hardness of their lives. Finding Peggy is like an investigative report, a search into Henderson's past for clues about her own identity as well as those of the women who made her what she is. The past that Henderson uncovers and narrates is a sad and painful one; however, as McArthur and Long did with No Mean City, she appears to tell it like it is for the Glaswegian working class, except that her perspective is firmly grounded in representations of *women's* experiences of class and gender prejudice. Men are pushed to the background of the events in women's lives: 'All small children stick closely to their mothers during the first few years; fathers are optional extras' (FP 19). They are part of

the environment within which the female characters struggle to survive and express themselves. Henderson learns very early about the selfishness and treachery of men: when as a young girl she is attacked by a drunken man and dragged into a derelict tenement to be raped, she manages to escape and find her father in a pub (FP 181). When she tries to explain to her father what has just occurred, he ignores her torn clothing, bloodied nose, split lips and swollen eye (FP 182). His only reaction to this evidence of assault is to show disapproval of her untidiness, and to instruct the girl to tell Nan that she had just fallen down (FP 182). To be assaulted by one man, and then ignored by another, damages Henderson's blossoming sense of selfhood as a woman: 'No matter what happened later, regardless of what I achieved or what others may have come to think of me, the shame and the guilt of being so debased and worthless in the eyes of the first man in my life, somehow linger on' (FP 183). Even as a young adult, Henderson remained traumatised by the incident: 'earlier assaults had left me with a dislike of being touched' (FP 229).

Finding Peggy is indeed an exploration of women's experiences of poverty, class prejudice and male power, but the text is also fuelled by Meg Henderson's research into the events surrounding the death of her Aunt Peggy Clark. Peggy's death in childbirth is caused by her own vulnerability and the indifference, cruelty and ineptitude of men. The narrative goes beyond the personal, however, and is a direct condemnation of the intertwined forces of the patriarchy and class system, and their effects on women. Henderson's determination to 'piece the story together' has resulted in a style that swings between sentimental personal memoir and unflinching journalistic exposé: 'What I found out was shocking and tragic and terrible, not just because it happened to Peggy and my family, but because it could have happened to anyone. I understood for the first time how vulnerable working-class women were, and still are' (FP 10-11). Henderson's ulterior motive is a political one:

The other side of the experience, however, was that I also appreciated for the first time the extraordinary worth of the ordinary people I grew up among, especially the women, like Nan and Peggy. They are part of the unacknowledged history of working-class women. They didn't make speeches or form trade unions, they just kept their families alive against all the odds, they survived and ensured our survival.
(FP 11)

With Henderson's book, the legacy of No Mean City has finally been used to its full, positive potential. There is a discernible pride within the restrictions of poverty and female inferiorisation that emerges from tender recollections of Nan and Peggy, an honest validation of working-class femininity which tackles the combined issues of class and gender. Further, as in No Mean City, events in the characters' lives are linked to larger forces of class prejudice and injustice. For instance, when the family is moved from their condemned tenement to a flat in Blackhill – a notorious slum – Henderson's narration turns to socio-political commentary: 'In the Fifties...it was generally acknowledged by those outside that those inside were a bad lot and by keeping them together the better areas of the city would be that much safer...It was our punishment for the crime of being poor' (FP 41).

Nan is devastated when she is forced to move her family to Blackhill. Always ambitious for her children, she fears the shame and stigma of the slum in particular, and poverty in general: 'The stigma of Blackhill was indelibly and irrevocably applied to all, and its residents were routinely subjected to abuse' (FP 41-2). Within this impoverished environment, however, Henderson watches as her mother creates a sense of community through compassion and practical advice to other women facing hardship:

Before long 34 became established as the place to go when in trouble, and the familiar, steady stream of worried women, clutching letters and looking for Nan became the norm. Once again I didn't realize it at the time, but I was witnessing the much-denied link between wealth – or lack of it – and education. Most of the people who brought their problems to my mother did so because they could neither read nor write. They weren't stupid and they weren't illiterate through choice, it simply went with their abject poverty and lack of power over their own lives. It came with the territory of deprivation.

(FP 44)

In her journey towards full womanhood, then, the young Henderson learns that the agency of working-class women in particular is limited by class ideology and finances. The solution, exemplified by Nan's practical and realistic problem-solving approach, is education:

All through my childhood I watched my mother fight highly effective campaigns to right wrongs, and to that end she valued education and knowledge. Education and knowledge equalled power, power to right wrongs for those unable to do so themselves, power to change the way she and Peggy had been raised.

(FP 11)

Here is Henderson's answer to the problem of class and gender disadvantages: self-empowerment through education, and the dissemination of knowledge to empower others. In a sense, she has answered the plea for social change at the end of No Mean City; McArthur and Long had expressed frustration with the status quo for the working class – 'just as if nobody could help it' (NMC 313) – and Henderson offers a viable way out of the ignorance, poverty, violence and hardship that so many Glasgow writers have been complaining about ever since.

Henderson scrutinises the lives of working-class people who worked within and fought against the pressures of a deprived and dangerous environment. She validates individual success within a failed class system and despite gender oppression, demonstrating that people can and do rebel against ideology in positive ways. Finding Peggy can be seen as a positive version of No Mean City. As Henderson asserts at the end of her Prologue, Nan and Peggy 'weren't destroyed; their values, their ideals have survived...it's that joyous picture of them laughing. They won in the end' (FP 12). Indeed, Meg Henderson herself can be seen as a symbol of their success; born of working-class parents, Henderson has achieved agency through education.

Henderson sees Nan and Peggy as her female role models, and her portrait of their characters and relationship suggests a respectful love of womanhood and working-class

power that is lacking in so many modern Scottish urban novels: 'To me they were beautiful women – whenever I hear the word 'bonnie' I think of them' (FP 19). Her father 'Skip,' on the other hand, is an alcoholic whose 'lack of concern for his family was past a joke' (FP 38). Henderson's descriptions of her mother sometimes fall into a reverence for the maternal; at the same time, however, she doesn't allow women's reproductive potential to override other aspects of a woman's humanity, such as reason, ruthlessness and calculated determination. At first glance, Nan is the epitome of strong, no-nonsense Glaswegian motherhood, but she uses this image in her campaigns for justice within and without the tenements:

She was anybody's idea of an earth mother, plump and maternal, with soft, concerned brown eyes that betrayed every emotion, dark brown hair caught up in a bun from which it was forever threatening to escape, and she always had a child by the hand. In her battles with officialdom she used this to its fullest advantage of course, knowing exactly what kind of Blackhill representative her adversaries were expecting. The best clothes were brought out and freshly pressed, stocking seams checked for ramrod straightness, hair carefully brushed and me (the 'wean') scrubbed clean. It caught 'them' off guard to be confronted with a well turned-out, articulate and polite matron instead of the stereotype they expected from the badlands of Blackhill.

(FP 45)

Nan is a calculating class warrior who adopts the superficial signs of middle-classness – such as good clothes, cleanliness, and elocution – to disarm the middle-class bureaucrats in her various campaigns for justice. At the same time, she does not hide the fact that she *is* from Blackhill, and hits the representatives of officialdom with an image of disconcerting respectability, coupled with an 'impassioned honesty,' which usually leads to victory (FP 45).

Within the Blackhill slum, Nan wields a surprising amount of power, especially when it comes to men. As Henderson reminds us, this 'was the Teddy Boy era, intensified in Glasgow by the Catholic/Protestant divide, and there were running street fights every night' (FP 46). One night, when the family attempt to access their flat through their close,

they find five Teddy Boys fighting one another with knives and razors. Whereas Skip immediately leaves the close, Nan walks boldly into the fray:

Nan instinctively waded in though, wielding the ever-present message bag that served as both handbag and shopping-bag for working-class women. She had made it herself at a craft class at a local school, but never had she envisaged using it as a weapon. She brought it down on whatever head was nearest, and grabbed handfuls of hair, the knives and razors flashing around her.

(FP 46)

Here is Johnnie Stark's mother with a backbone. The image of a woman attacking a group of hoodlums with a shopping bag is both comical and significant – the utter stupidity of male violence is overcome by female courage and a shopping bag. Admittedly, this is a decidedly optimistic view of gender relations, but the use of two gendered working-class symbols – the razor and the message bag – represents a battle between savagery and domestic harmony, between male competitiveness and female community, between the brute violence of men and the (supposedly) civilising force of women. Henderson's affirmation of the feminine as a force for social improvement is what is significant. She suggests that the bullying power of men needs to be opposed if women are to survive at all. Skip's retreat from violence is acquiescence to, and silent support of, the male status quo; Nan's refusal to accept the authority of the fighting men over the situation is a demonstration of feminism in action.

Another example of how working-class society is divided along gender lines is in Henderson's meeting with the gangster Billy Fullarton. A group of children, including Meg Henderson herself, are staring at the notorious Barlinnie Prison, when they are confronted by Fullarton and two of his henchmen. Fullarton marches the children back to Blackhill:

'Yer mammy's a decent wee wumman,' he said, 'She'd no' like ye gaun near that place. It's a bad, bad place. So don't go near it again, or Ah'll see tae ye. Unnerstaun'?

(FP 48)

A contrast is then made between the brutal vision of Barlinnie and Fullarton's 'cold, hard eyes' on the one hand, and the 'brilliant technicolour' of Nan's kitchen, with its smell of freshly-baked gooseberry pie. Once again, two opposing forces are set up – the masculine world of crime, punishment and hard men, and the feminine softness of home, hearth and mothers. Fullarton's admiration for Nan is significant – he pushes the children away from his life-denying male world towards the nurturing female one; if children are viewed as a symbol of the future of humanity, then femininity has won this particular battle.

Indeed, women and children are both beleaguered *and* assisted by men. Women oppose male power using any means they have at their disposal, including the use of men themselves. For instance, when Nan and a 'deputation of women' try to stop one man from beating his son, they are sent away 'with screams of abuse ringing in their ears, and poor Bobby got it again' (FP 52-3). Nan and Meg visit a Mrs. Logan, reputed to be the aunt of the notorious Billy Fullarton. Nan relates the story of child abuse to the other woman, with Fullarton and his henchmen listening in. Two days later, the gangster and his cronies beat up Bobby's father, and the child is never harmed again (FP 53-4). As Henderson points out, Bobby's father is now 'positively deferential' to Nan as the woman who had 'Billy Fullarton at her beck and call, though she never admitted having any part in what had occurred' (FP 54). Women are shown to exert their power over men in direct as well as indirect ways; the father's sycophantic attitude is testimony to Nan's power.

It is not only working-class men who are targets; middle-class men also come under attack, which demonstrates that working-class women have many enemies setting obstacles in their way, as well as many means with which to remove them. Once again, however, the tactics change. We are told that 'warrant sales' take place when someone in Blackhill cannot pay a debt – 'their possessions were sold off to make it up' (FP 54-5). In their effort to avoid warrant sales and evictions, the women use the notoriety of the district

'to its full advantage to create an atmosphere of menace,' which makes the sheriff officers and other officials 'reluctant to venture into Blackhill to enforce the warrant' (FP 55). Further to this, the local women pool their resources to buy up the goods during the sale and return them to the victim (FP 55). Henderson describes one confrontation between the authorities and the conspiracy of women:

The sheriff officers had taken the precaution of bringing police protection with them, a move that amused the women and made their loathing of both stronger. After all, what kind of men could they be, to be afraid to face a bunch of women without bringing the police for protection?

(FP 55)

Whereas the men see their assembly as a 'demonstration of strength,' for the women it is 'an admission of fear' (FP 55). The women, undaunted, buy up all of the goods, closing ranks on the men as they do so. At the end of the sale, while the 'bits and pieces' are being returned to 'the weeping woman,' Nan loses her temper:

'Excuse me!' she called after a bowler-hatted sheriff officer, 'Ah wis wonderin' about yer mother. Is she still alive?' He stopped a moment, puzzled, and stuttered that his mother was dead.

'Likely died o' shame,' Nan replied, as the other women gathered around. 'Hur wean growin' up tae dae this tae decent people.'

'I get no pleasure from this kind of thing,' the creature said, 'I am only doing my job.'

'Aye,' Nan said softly, 'Sumbody will've gied ye orders right enough. It's no' really your fault like.'

'Exactly!'

'Is that no' whit the Nazis said tae?' she asked.

'I don't need to take this from the likes of you! I fought in the War!'

'Bit oan whit side?' Nan retorted. 'Ah hope tae God it wisnae oors 'kis oor men wur surely *men!*' The other women formed a semicircle behind Nan as the police moved in to shepherd the sheriff officer towards his car. Nan reserved her fire until the car door was open and he had one foot off the ground ready to climb in.

'Ye don't seem sich a bad wee man,' she said kindly, 'Bit ur ye no' black affronted at earning yer livin' in this *durty wey?*'

He hesitated just long enough to register that her barb had gone straight home, before climbing into the car and being driven off.

(FP 55-6)

Nan uses words as weapons against the man to undermine his sense of respectability, morality and – perhaps most effective of all – his *manhood*. She suggests that he is a

fascist, dirty, and shameful, interspersing her tirade with the insinuation that he is not a real man after all, or if he is, then he is just a 'wee' one – an insult directed at the size of his genitals as much as his height and importance. Although the sheriff affects indifference, the women are not fooled: 'Their derisive laughter rang out, and though I had no real understanding of what had happened, I knew we had won somehow' (FP 56). Nan's tears of 'humiliation and rage' later on back at the flat derive from being one of the 'helpless and powerless,' and her earlier sherricking of the king – though justified on ethical grounds and perhaps successful in this particular instance – is ultimately just an expression of Nan's rage at women's relative powerlessness when faced by a social system ruled by middle-class, patriarchal authority. This is Henderson's reassessment of the hairy figure in Glasgow literature – an unladylike expression of femininity which is at once a sign of female working-class strength and vulnerability.

The most striking illustration of the helplessness of working-class women in Finding Peggy is Henderson's description of her aunt's death. When Peggy goes into labour, a locum is sent to the flat to assist her, the real doctor being unavailable. The young man locks himself and Peggy in her bedroom all day, from which the sounds of screaming are heard, until two policemen are summoned to break the door down. They find Peggy 'barely alive,' and she later dies of a massive haemorrhage at the Royal Maternity Hospital (FP 154-55). This incident plunges Nan into life-long depression, and eventually comes to haunt Henderson herself. She wants to find out why Peggy's death has destroyed her mother:

Devastating as the loss of Peggy was to all of us, and my mother in particular, there had to be another element to it that had destroyed her faith, her hopes and her belief in everything. It had shaken her to her very roots...

(FP 251)

Henderson conducts a thorough investigation into her aunt's untimely death. She discovers that the young locum had wrongly used forceps on Peggy, which had ruptured

her uterus, leading to the unstoppable bleeding that killed her. The medic who had carried out the post mortem confirms Henderson's findings: 'Whoever used the forceps that day killed the woman and the child. The haemorrhage was well-established, if I remember correctly there was very little blood left in her body, she had virtually bled to death before she reached Rottenrow' (FP 273).

Henderson then tracks down the doctor who had not been available when Peggy had gone into labour – Dr. James Hammond – who like the medic remembers her aunt's death very well. She arranges a visit to Hammond's home without letting the doctor know who she is (FP 275). The conversation that ensues not only reveals the depth of class prejudice at work in Glasgow, but also exposes the crimes of the middle class against the poor. In this, Finding Peggy is even more controversial than No Mean City, which focused on criminality *within* the working class, leaving the crimes of the upper classes relatively invisible. Henderson, on the other hand, does not pull any punches. Hammond, unaware that Henderson is related to Peggy, talks about her family in the following way:

'Well for a start they came from Blackhill... Now a young lady such as yourself wouldn't know anything about Blackhill. It was a hell-hole, a den of thieves and murderers, but as we used to say in those days, if we kept them all together, at least we knew where they were!'

(FP 276)

Then the cover-up is finally exposed – Hammond insists that he was present during Peggy's labour, that there had been no bleeding, and that the Royal Infirmary were to blame for the use of forceps which led to her death (FP 278-79). The final blow comes with Hammond's parting words to Henderson: 'Those women, the Margaret McAvoy sort, they had them like shelling peas. If she had lived she would have gone on spawning them, year after year, more thieves and murderers from Blackhill to terrorize and pollute the city' (FP 280).

Hammond's lies are meant to hide the fact that what had been done to Peggy was not only negligent in medical terms, but also illegal; as Henderson discovers, the young man sent in Hammond's place to attend to Peggy was most likely a medical student, not fully qualified (FP 285). Henderson's research may have led her to the truth about what happened to her family, but she is left with a painful legacy. She is angry at Peggy's husband for not fighting for justice, but her bitterness she saves for Dr. Hammond, mainly 'because of his attitude to the people of Blackhill, who had provided him with his 'big hoose' and his standard of living and had doubtless given him respect over the years, respect that he didn't earn and didn't deserve' (FP 290). She then makes one of the most pointed statements in the narrative: 'And his attitude to Peggy made me seethe with rage. Peggy had died because she lived in Blackhill. She had no money and came from the poorest orders of the working class, therefore she wasn't worthy of Hammond's personal or professional care' (FP 290). The injustice goes deeper than this, however, as Henderson emphasises: 'Amongst all of this personal grief was anger that *any* woman should have died as Peggy did, that the medical and legal world could regard a woman's life to be of so little consequence that they so quietly and effortlessly covered up the circumstances' (FP 291). Peggy was a casualty of the British class system *and* the patriarchy – indeed, Henderson makes it tempting to see them as one and the same societal force.

Henderson finally turns to her own family for eye-witness accounts of Peggy's suffering. She visits her Uncle George, who along with Henderson's father and another uncle had cleared out Peggy's room after her death:

'Ye don't know whit it wis like...Fur Peggy Ah mean. Me and yer Da an' Wullie hid tae clear the room oot efter. Thur wurr piles o' sheets and towels everywhere, a' soaked wi' blood. It wis like a...like a slaughtoose.'

(.....)

I thought of the three of them, all returned from war combat some ten years before, men who had seen terrible sights, cleaning out the bedroom after Peggy died. My mind went back to when I had been lying on my shelter and I had watched Uncle Willie rush out of the house and down the stairs where he was sick in the backcourt.

Now I knew why.

(FP 293)

As Uncle George reveals, there was blood everywhere, 'It wis oan the wa's tae...An' the smell. Even years later Ah could smell it in the hoose' (FP 293). This is the horror that can result from the intertwined ideologies of class and gender. Now Henderson can see why her own mother had been broken by her sister's death – 'Peggy's death, and the manner of it, had shaken her beliefs to their foundations...An intelligent woman, she would have finally understood that Peggy had died because Hammond had regarded her as worthless, and that the legal establishment had covered it all up. 'The boys' had protected each other' (FP 296).

Finding Peggy – with its bitterness and melodrama, its emotional rhetoric and anger, and its devotion to recording and affirming the lives of Glasgow's lower classes in literary form – marks a true coming-of-age in the story of the Glaswegian working-class literature. Perhaps coincidentally, there is an advertisement for No Mean City following the last page of Henderson's narrative; the juxtaposition of these two books, separated by many decades and both written by true working-class writers who find their voices by piecing together techniques from fiction and documentary realism, is somehow appropriate. With Meg Henderson's autobiographical novel, we have come full circle in scrutinizing the shadow cast by No Mean City. McArthur and Long's original interest in telling it like it is for the Glaswegian slum classes is alive and well – both within Glasgow and without – and the theory that the ideologies of class and gender conspire to produce damaged working-class identity has been reiterated, reformulated, opposed or regurgitated ever since. Scottish urban working-class fiction remains a contentious arena – which is a good thing – and much of this dynamism can be traced back to No Mean City. McArthur and Long fuelled a fierce debate amongst many Scottish writers and critics about the representation of working-class people and lifestyles in literary forms. Judging by Scotland's intense

interest in working-class themes and characters, this argument promises to continue. No Mean City's shadow of influence has been beneficial for many Scottish writers because it is the pressure against which they struggle to find their own voices. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the literary and cultural legacy of No Mean City is the dark energy under which many Scottish urban working-class authors have been writing for nearly seventy years. Acknowledging the full value of McArthur and Long's novel will enhance our understanding of its centrality in the evolution of Scotland's urban literary traditions.

Conclusions

'This threatening bleakness...': *No Mean City* and Working-Class Literature

The legacy of *No Mean City*, as I have shown throughout my examination of its influence on a selection of modern Scottish urban novels and short stories, is as dynamic today as it was in 1935. McArthur and Long's book, burdened by decades of critical misinterpretation, will now hopefully be considered in a new light; its qualities as a serious form of working-class literature, so often unnoticed because of its popular appeal as a gangster novel, are nonetheless considerable. Indeed, I have shown that mass-market gangster fiction can be explored as a valid sub-genre of blue-collar writings, and that books and short stories about the 'lower orders' of society, and 'popular' fiction in general, have literary validity. I have not attempted to make a case for *No Mean City*'s inclusion in the official 'Canon of Literature': such an achievement would be superfluous to my purposes here – indeed perhaps even counterproductive – and furthermore I am impressed by James Kelman's apparent lack of interest in having his own work canonised, an attitude which has made me rethink the value of the canonical process for understanding literature.² My aim in this dissertation is at once modest and ambitious – to argue for an open-minded approach to *No Mean City* and its literary impact in Scotland; to push for its validation as a major participant in the history of Scottish urban writing; and to show that many books and short stories which do fall within the canonical zone continue to be affected by a supposedly inferior work of fiction.

My apologia for *No Mean City* asks for and grants a fair hearing – a more objective reconsideration of the text's merits and impact. Part of my case for *No Mean City* has involved a thorough assessment of available research findings about the novel, its authors

¹ Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945 I: Continuity, Despair and Change,' *Scottish Literature in English and Scots*, Douglas Gifford, Sarah Dunnigan and Alan MacGillivray, eds. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002) 846.

² James Kelman, Sylvia Bryce, 'Hard to Say: James Kelman and the Art of Telling it Like it is' (Unpublished paper based on interview: 10 October 2002, University of Glasgow).

and the literary traditions out of which they emerge. Chapter One provided this social, cultural, political and biographical context based on a combination of sources both existing and new. Archival research in the Mitchell Library in Glasgow and the British Library in London yielded more data about No Mean City, Alexander McArthur and Herbert Kingsley Long than was necessary for this particular project; the surplus of information I have had at my disposal, however, has afforded me a more in-depth understanding of these enigmatic men, their lives and writing careers, and their notorious book than I could have hoped for if I had limited my research to published sources. My ongoing relationship with Long's daughter Gillian Prentice has also been rewarding, both on a personal and a professional level; her generosity in providing me with an interview, her father's papers and even photographs and correspondence, must be acknowledged. Without Gillian's contributions to my information base, I would never have realised just how prolific a writer and serious a journalist her father was. Seán Damer's research, which I also cover in my first chapter, was both a solid resource in itself, and a facilitator for my own investigations. The interviews Damer conducted with people who knew McArthur personally and professionally, added to his cataloguing of original newspaper reviews of No Mean City in Glasgow and England, have proved to be both interesting and invaluable. Damer's archival deposits at Mitchell included McArthur's correspondence and were especially useful; without these papers, I would not have been able to create as multifaceted a picture of this strange and elusive Gorbals writer as I have. The biographical dimension of the first chapter of my dissertation, besides enriching our knowledge about the writers of No Mean City, also serves to undo the erasure suffered by minor writers such as McArthur and Long.

The second chapter of my dissertation, which includes a reassessment of the critical tradition surrounding No Mean City and the question of its influence, also presents a

textual analysis of the novel based on the theories of gender and class that I outlined in the introduction to my dissertation, along with close attention to major issues raised by critics, such as style, content and literary quality. I accomplish several things in my examination of the text: first, I provide a thorough and detailed scrutiny of the plot, characterisation, themes, narrator, and purposes; second, my examination undermines many of the charges levelled by critics at No Mean City in terms of its alleged stylistic and narrative flaws; third, my concentration on the formalistic qualities of the book validates it as a work of literature worthy of serious study, and sets the stage for tracing its influence on Scottish urban fiction.

Chapters Three to Six, accordingly, fulfil the implications of the first part of my dissertation: the explicit and implicit effects of No Mean City's explorations and representations of class and gender ideology are explored in a variety of novels and short stories – both canonical and non-canonical. I have had to exclude more fiction than I have included, firstly for reasons of space, and secondly because I wished to provide depth and complexity of analysis, as opposed to breadth and comprehensiveness of vision. I have organised my study, particularly in Chapters Three to Five, in a chronological manner; the assumption underlying this choice in structure is that literature builds upon itself in an ongoing and developmental process. Chapter Six breaks this momentum. I concentrate here on works by women authors as a separate but connected species of literature in modern Scotland. My intention was to draw explicit attention to the gendered nature of writing, to demonstrate that many women authors incorporate the influence of No Mean City differently from men, and to avoid creating the impression that gender subjectivity is irrelevant to understanding literature.

There is still room for development, however, with regards to the study of No Mean City in particular, and modern urban writing in Scotland in general. Limitations of space

have precluded the examination of the international impact of either McArthur and Long's novel itself, or of fictions by other popular Scottish urban writers, such as Irvine Welsh, Ian Rankin, James Kelman and William McIlvanney. Their influence on English, Canadian and American literature would form the basis for worthwhile further study. Not enough has been done in this area, and I think a logical step beyond this dissertation would be a solid, internationally-based study of the impact of fiction by these and other modern Scottish urban writers.

My initial inspiration for this project came from a sense of bemusement about the long-standing and seemingly all-pervasive dislike of No Mean City in literary circles. I wanted to find out why the novel had such a questionable reputation, and to discover if I could see merit in the text that others had missed. I have succeeded in revealing the 'good' qualities of No Mean City, and have shown that its effects – so frequently decried as harmful – are actually the driving force for some of the most prominent writers working in Scotland today. I still do not quite understand why so many critics think the book is 'bad,' although I think that much of the negative emotion directed at McArthur and Long's novel – and indeed at its influence – is similar to the attitude that one sometimes sees levelled at other working-class writings, such as those by James Kelman and Irvine Welsh. Fiction about the doings of hard men and hairies, and, if truth be told, about working-class experience in general, appears to be a source of controversy in Scotland and elsewhere; I would be interested to explore the status of similar works within the literary traditions of other nations. My suspicion, based on the research I have done so far, is that there are discernible differences between how different cultures understand so-called 'working-class literature,' which may or may not be a function of differing attitudes towards, and indeed awareness of, the impact of class ideology on our perceptions of literary quality.

Certainly, a comparative study of recent working-class literature would yield some answers to these questions.

I do not know if my dissertation will change the general opinion that No Mean City is bad literature; on the other hand, perhaps my work will contribute to the realisation that even allegedly inferior books can nonetheless have a positive impact, and need to be looked at with more sensitivity to their part in the process of literature. My own opinion, which goes against the critical grain, should be rather clear by now – I think No Mean City, when considered as either cultural icon, gangster novel, working-class fiction, or sociocultural document, is an underestimated but major participant in Scotland's urban literary tradition, a cultural catalyst, a strangely dynamic source of continuing influence, and a good, gritty read. The collaboration between McArthur and Long – an unemployed baker and an English journalist – has proved to be of lasting significance to modern Scottish urban fiction. I end with McArthur's own words: 'I have been true to myself, and also to Glasgow...I hope that before many years pass Glasgow will appreciate "No Mean City"'.³

³ Alexander McArthur, 'Why I Wrote 'No Mean City'', Daily Record and Mail (1 November 1935) 7.

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