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SYLVIA BRYCE-WUNDER

OF HARD MEN AND HAIRIES: *NO MEAN CITY* AND MODERN SCOTTISH URBAN FICTION

No Mean City (1935) by Alexander McArthur and H. Kingsley Long is one of the most influential Glasgow novels of the twentieth century. Christopher Whyte argues that 'more than perhaps any other novel', *No Mean City* has 'succeeded in imposing itself as a lasting representation of life in the city'.¹ Ian Spring agrees: 'Whatever view we take of *No Mean City*... it was to introduce a theme [of poverty and crime] that would not go away and, in doing so, perhaps constituted the thirties' major contribution to the mythology of Glasgow and set an agenda for subsequent discussion of the nature of representations of the city.'² Manfred Malzahn sees *No Mean City* as a legitimate part of the 'legacy of the 1930s' which helped to create 'new possibilities and possible trappings for those who followed'.³ Moira Burgess acknowledges the book as one of the 'icons' of Glasgow fiction, and calls for a more serious and sustained investigation of the novel, whose 'importance has not been widely recognised... by later critics; very few writers on Glasgow fiction mention it at all'.⁴ She suggests that its ability to merge fact with fiction, and its sensationalistic descriptions of Glaswegian slum life may have something to do with the book's endurance.⁵ As she points out, 'Fact, fiction, sensationalism, sober description: the whole question of *No Mean City* and its shadow awaits further examination in terms of Glasgow myth'.⁶

No Mean City's influence, however, is not limited to Glasgow novels and short stories; its impact on Edinburgh fiction, for instance, extends its significance as novel and cultural icon. This article reconsiders McArthur and Long's treatment of class and gender ideology, and its effect on the representation of working-class masculinity and femininity in modern Scottish urban fiction.

No Mean City appeared during the first wave of the Scottish Renaissance of the 1930s. James Barke and George Blake were using their novels to examine the dynamics of class relations in Glasgow. Barke's *Major Operation* (1936) focuses on the city's industrial culture through a hospital-based relationship between a worker and a businessman. 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 Shield, a riveter. Burgess views 1936 as an 'annus mirabilis' for George Friel in particular, who had eight short stories published in under two years.⁷ Edward Shiels's *Gael over Glasgow* (1937) examines similar issues to *No Mean City* – unemployment, strikes and shiftless young men. Middle-class criticisms of the class system were also on the increase. Dot Allan's *Hunger March* (1934), like her *Makeshift* (1928), shows up the prejudiced attitude of bourgeois Glaswegians towards the so-called lower orders. The British class system, of interest to many Glasgow

writers, was under intense and critical scrutiny as the decade progressed.

No Mean City is part of this trend. McArthur and Long tackle the issue of class and gender ideology by exploring the damaging effects of the British class system on the development of working-class identity. Part of the novel's thesis is that many working-class people seek to redefine themselves in ways that belie their low social and economic status. The shame of being poor and living in a slum fuses with the ever-present fear of being a nonentity, part of the undifferentiated mass. Gender relations also come under scrutiny, so that *No Mean City*'s main concern is to demonstrate how individual working-class men and women dehumanise themselves and each other in their pursuit of social, financial and personal improvement.

The novel consists of three intertwined story lines. The main plot centres on the degenerative lives and careers of Johnnie and Lizzie Stark. Their personalities dominate the narrative. They seem to be the quintessential 'hard man' and 'hairy'. At first glance, Johnnie is the embodiment of tough Glaswegian masculinity, violent and sexually rapacious, and Lizzie the perfect gangster's moll. As the 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. They try to earn respect by adopting the outward signs of financial success and social superiority. A tertiary plot recounts the dancing careers of Bobbie Hurley and Lily MacKay. This couple pursue celebrity. *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.

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. All of the characters fail. Johnnie is dethroned by a younger hard man. Lizzie dies giving birth to another man's child. Peter and Lily 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, their dancing careers, relationship and reputations destroyed by scandal.

Johnnie Stark 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. He is both gangster and dedicated worker, both monster and man. 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!' (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 narrator's comparison of a boxing champion to a gangster can be applied to the cultural act of being a man: 'To be a razor king is something like being a boxing champion: it isn't enough to

win the title; one has to fight to hold it' (132). Like a boxer, Johnnie must belie the socially-acceptable side of his masculinity in order to survive as a man *qua* gangster – 'He wasn't sure what the Gorbals people thought about his sticking to his regular job with the coalman. He was afraid lest they should suppose that marriage had changed and softened him. He *had* to show them' (132).

Johnnie's deterioration throughout *No Mean City* keeps pace with his self-awareness. He is driven forward, from battle to battle, from prison sentence to prison sentence, from scar to scar. 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.

(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 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.

(113)

Johnnie is Razor King because he does not want to be the victim of an exploitative system. The criminal, on the other hand, has a chance of success: 'Tell me this: are they no' *aw* gangsters who win in this stinkin' world?' (114).

Johnnie's destruction at the close of *No Mean City* is an effect of his rebellion against the class system. He chooses to be unemployed because he is 'fed up with the toil' (182). He realises the unfairness of having to slave 'like a navy for next to nothing a week' (183). Working for a living therefore seems futile: 'He could not help remembering that one well-organized raid might bring him in more money than two months of solid work' (182). On the other hand, idleness and lack of money make it imperative that he keep the Razor King image alive. He must convince the Gorbals of his competence as a criminal in order to reap the rewards of crime. As he points out, 'A razor king

doesny *have* to pay for his drinks. There's more ways of making money than toiling for it' (114).

Johnnie is wrong. He does 'pay' for his drinks, but with something far more valuable than money. As he pursues his criminal career, the remaining shreds of his sense of manhood are 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. The disintegration of the Razor King myth accelerates. Johnnie is overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority. 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' (242). He fears her derision. The Gorbals now respects him for his ruffianism and little else. People humour Johnnie, agreeing with him out of fear of incurring his vile temper (256). 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' (256). He goes through the motions of bare-fisted fights and pub raids just to keep his image alive. Johnnie is resigned: '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' (298). Younger members of his old gang want to take his place. Hooligans pursue Johnnie down Crown Street and beat him senseless (310, 312). He dies the following morning (312).

The subjectivity of working-class women in McArthur and Long's novel does not escape scrutiny. The slum women of *No Mean City* are at a serious disadvantage. 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. The narrator discerns the origins of women's feelings of inferiority in their upbringing. He notes that girls who reach their late twenties unmarried are disparaged as being unable to 'get a man' (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' (87).

Lizzie Ramsay, the girl who eventually becomes Johnnie's wife, is at the beginning of the novel 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. When Johnnie Stark saves her from being harassed by a group of boys, Lizzie is meekly grateful (17). She expresses her admiration: 'It wis a sight tae watch they Plantation boys running away' (17-18).

It is not until several years later that Johnnie asks her out. Lizzie is not considered one of the 'hairy', because she dresses well and wears a hat. The narrator informs us that Lizzie is 'definitely on the look out for a young man' (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.

(90)

Lizzie wants Johnnie so that her babies are strong and healthy, and addresses him as 'Razor King', which appeals to his growing vanity (91).

Lizzie uses Johnnie's Razor King status to make herself feel superior. 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' (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' (103). 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' (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' (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 (137). She is also distressed by her family's 'scarcely veiled sneers' at Johnnie (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!

(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 (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 (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!' (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' (241-42). He understands that she wants to compensate for feeling low-class by being 'more of a gangster than himself' (242).

Lizzie's marriage to Johnnie lends her notoriety: 'she was no longer the Lizzie Ramsay they had known, but, rather, the isolated, admired-despised and alarming wife of the Razor King' (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.

(179)

She joins Johnnie in drinking and street fights (180). There are 'no open sneers because it wasn't safe to offend the wife of a razor king' (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' (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' (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!' (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 (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 (206, 208).

Lizzie 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' (210). She continues to extract a sense of self-importance from her marriage, and boasts about her 'kudos' as a gangster's woman (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 (216). 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' (242). Lizzie, the victim of her own low opinion of herself, is complicit in Johnnie's victimisation of other people.

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".' (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 (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' (283). She eagerly awaits Johnnie's release, 'he'll show them when he comes oot!' (283). At the same time, she maintains her relationship with Frank Smith, looking upon him 'almost as her husband' (284). Lizzie falls pregnant again, but Frank dies of a sudden illness, and she is left alone. Lizzie finds herself the object of contempt once again. When Johnnie returns home from prison, she cannot ignore his disdain (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.

(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 (293). Lizzie continues to dress respectably, gets a new job, and takes care of her baby (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' (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!' (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 derryt hooose 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.

(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, notoriety attracts the attention of the upper classes, and may perhaps lead to improvement. This is, of course, twisted logic. On the other hand, the novel's thesis is at its most eloquent here: the working class are socially invisible, and resentment against being nobodies can build up to social disruption. Johnnie and Lizzie are therefore products of the class system.

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' (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.

No Mean City is a disturbing, pessimistic novel. McArthur and Long's portraits of working-class people 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 masculinity and femininity which guarantee inequality, victimisation and sadism.

McArthur and Long's representations of working-class people deviated from those of the majority of Glasgow novels of the 1930s. Most 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.

Jack Mitchell recognises the significance of McArthur and Long's novel

for the evolution of urban fiction in Scotland: '*No Mean City* was a challenge. Would it be taken up?'⁸ Mitchell argues that Barke's *Major Operation* was 'planned as a counterblast':

[The] working class is portrayed as rich in full-blooded human relations. Theirs 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.⁹

No Mean City's depictions of lower-class people, by contrast, are not 'marxist' enough. McArthur and Long do not idealise the working class either as a group or as individuals; further, they are critical of the efficacy of socialistic politics for making society more just for the proletariat. 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 *No Mean City*, on the other hand, is a 'twisted' and falsified portrait of the 'proletarian community' of the Gorbals.¹²

Initial reviews of *No Mean City* focused on the novel as a disclosure of old evils and fears about Glaswegian working-class criminality, socialism and discontent. The *Times Literary Supplement* draws attention to the horror and savagery of slum life:

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.¹³

The Scotsman attacks *No Mean City* directly: 'This is an exceedingly sordid novel and it is on account of its very sordidness that it will startle readers'.¹⁴ 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'.¹⁵ Another reader stated, 'It is made up of vile filth and lying statements'.¹⁶

Between the initial responses to *No Mean City* and more recent treatments is a gap of almost forty years; the resurgence of interest in the novel 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, however, most 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*' itself has become little more than a critical reflex – a rhetorical device – used as a signal that better novels will be discussed next.

Critics who attend to *No Mean City* for more than a sentence or two usually conclude that it is badly written. Moira Burgess classifies it as the quintessential 'gangland' novel, a work which evokes 'a community... crowded with gangsters, 'hard men', and loose women'.¹⁷ She labels it as an exaggerated form of realistic fiction that spawned a 'brood of inferior imitations', such as John McNeillie's *Glasgow Keelie* (1940) and Bill McGhee's *Cut and Run* (1962).¹⁸ *No Mean City* is seen to endure as the ancestor of a supposedly inferior brand of Glasgow literature.

Douglas Gifford calls *No Mean City* the '1935 shocker novel of the Gorbals', notable for its 'crass stupidities and dangerous distortions'.¹⁹ He dismisses McArthur and Long as having 'greedy' and 'twisted' minds, and their novel as being neither serious nor worthwhile.²⁰ Like Burgess, Gifford maintains that McArthur and Long's novel is the harbinger of a negative literary tradition which views Scotland through a 'bitter' lens, and includes works which are marked by 'melodrama', 'pessimism', and 'barely-controlled anger'.²¹ 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.²²

Gifford here implies that naturalistic fiction is bad writing because it is a stereotypical approach to representing reality. With what Gifford calls its 'overall bitter view of Scottish life', *No Mean City* has established a harmful trend.²³

Other critics adopt a more dismissive critical approach. Freddy Anderson 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 slashing.²⁴

Anderson tackles *No Mean City* as the villain in the story of Glasgow's literary tradition – at once a trashy horror novel, an English attack on Glaswegian socialist politics, and a bogus indictment on Glasgow. Burgess is amazed that he 'can remain so vitriolic about a book sixty years after its publication'.²⁵

Edwin Morgan attempts a balanced view. First he covers what have become the customary responses by maintaining that the novel 'distorts reality through crude overcolouring and selective melodrama'.²⁶ Also in keeping with the general consensus, 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.²⁷ Morgan draws 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'.²⁸ In 'Glasgow Speech in Recent Scottish Literature' (1990), he states that 'crude and melodramatic though it was, [it] had a certain archetypal power about it'.²⁹ To put this another way, *No Mean City* is the paradigmatic 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'.³⁰ For Morgan, the nature and extent of *No Mean City*'s anxiety of influence calls for scrutiny, even though he judges the quality of writing in the novel itself as less than exemplary.

No Mean City has left Glasgow and Scotland with a problematic legacy. There is an anxiety of influence at work in modern Scottish urban literature, caused to a large extent by *No Mean City*'s hypothesis that participation in class ideology and mutually abusive gender relations can result in anti-social working-class identities. Some of the earliest novels to betray this impact include 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). 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 hard men and hairies, violence, crime and general inhumanity. With Jenkins, the social criticism broadens to include an analysis of individuals from both the working and middle classes; *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. Gaitens tries 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. McNeillie and McGhee hearken back to McArthur and Long's original characters, settings and plots, but do so with an eye to reinterpretation of the root sources of inequalitarian 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 a 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.

No Mean City is also an important point of reference for several Glasgow novels from 1970 onwards. Over the past thirty years, more and more Glasgow writers have viewed their city through the hyper-critical lens of social analysis – George Friel, William McIlvanney, Alan Spence and Alasdair Gray are notable examples of this continuing trend in modern Scottish urban literature. These four writers struggle with the representations of Glaswegian masculinity and femininity set in motion by *No Mean City* in an attempt to simultaneously undermine and reformulate the hard man and hairy image of working-class Glasgow. Friel's *Mr Alfred MA* (1972), McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* (1977), Spence's *Its Colours They are Fine* (1977) and Gray's *Lanark: A Life in 4 Books* (1981) are representative examples of Glaswegian fiction of the 1970s and early 80s that incorporate and reassess the influence of McArthur and Long's representations of working-class masculinity and femininity. Friel's anger against class ideology – 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. Spence attempts a more tolerant view of Glaswegian working-class experience and identity; he affirms the legitimacy of Glasgow as *both* no mean city *and* as 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 aesthetic terms – Glasgow's 'colours' are seen to be 'fine', satisfactory, acceptable, okay as they are. McIlvanney's *Laidlaw* is a strongly realistic novel which reinforces and expands on *No Mean City*'s existentialistic 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. Gray's *Lanark*, arguably the most experimental Glasgow novel produced so far, is like *No Mean City* an analysis of how class and gender inform the development of Glaswegian identity.

Over the past thirty years, yet another shift can be discerned in approach to the production of Glaswegian novels and short stories. Women's involvement on the fictional scene increases, which adds momentum and controversy to the ongoing debates about class and gender in relation to fictional constructions of Glaswegian working-class identity. These writers include Agnes Owens, Janice Galloway, A.L. Kennedy and Meg Henderson, whose focus on women's subjectivity expands on and transforms the old paradigm of the Glasgow hairy. 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. 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. 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 women in the works of Kennedy and Galloway are at times disturbing portraits of damaged femininity. Kennedy's *So I am Glad* (1995), with its sadistic and emotionally crippled heroine, might be seen as reinterpreting the hairy stereotype, while Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), about a broken woman desperately trying to maintain a persona of normality in the face of a nervous breakdown, might also be viewed rewardingly in relation to the view of gender relationships established in *No Mean City*.

Several key male writers have also continued to engage with McArthur and Long's characterisation techniques, both within the limits of the Glaswegian canon and without. James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) subverts the hard man stereotype with his scrutiny of vulnerable and dependant working-class masculinity. Beyond Glasgow, Irvine Welsh is especially notable for his application of the 'no mean city' hypothesis to working-class crime and poverty in Edinburgh. Welsh's cult classic *Trainspotting* (1993) reworks *No Mean City*'s gangs, drinking and violence into a late twentieth-century drug-hazed nightmare. The list goes on.

It should be noted that despite the discernible connections between McArthur and Long's depictions of working-class men and women and modern representations of urban masculinity and femininity, there is often resistance to this idea. James Kelman, for instance, denies any influence: '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'.³¹ At the same time, Kelman thinks that 'writers who were influenced by *No Mean City* aren't good writers... I mean, usually they're just shit, you know'.³² As I have tried to demonstrate, however, McArthur and Long's literary legacy, notwithstanding its many detractors, has become something to write against. The challenge put forth by *No Mean City* has survived the decades following its publication in 1935. To borrow the words of one of Kelman's characters from 'Naval History' (1991), modern urban Scotland is 'still writing... wee stories with a working-class theme';³³ however repressed, denied, followed, or reacted against, *No Mean City* continues to help condition the trajectories of these narratives.

Notes

1. 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) 322. All citations from *No Mean City* in this article are from the 1998 edition published by Corgi in London.
2. Ian Spring, *Phantom Village: The Myth of the New Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1990) 73.

3. Manfred Malzahn, 'The Industrial Novel', *The History of Scottish Literature: Volume 4, Twentieth Century*, ed. Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987) 236.
4. Moira Burgess, *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction* (Argyll: Argyll Publishing, 1998) 138, 162.
5. *Ibid.* 170.
6. *Ibid.* 170.
7. *Ibid.* 151.
8. Jack Mitchell, 'The Proletarian Novel: Part III – James Barke', *Scottish Marxist* (8: January 1975) 39.
9. *Ibid.* 42.
10. *Ibid.* 42.
11. *Ibid.* 43.
12. *Ibid.* 39.
13. 'A Glasgow Slum', *Times [London] Literary Supplement* (2 November 1935) 693.
14. Review of *No Mean City*, *The Scotsman* (31 October 1935) 15.
15. 'Letters to the Editor', *Sunday Mail* (8 December 1935) 28.
16. *Ibid.* 28.
17. Moira Burgess, *The Glasgow Novel: Second Edition* (Glasgow: Glasgow District Libraries, 1986) 33.
18. Burgess, *ibid.* 44.
19. Douglas Gifford, *The Dear Green Place? The Novel in the West of Scotland* (Glasgow: Third Eye Centre, 1985) 7.
20. *Ibid.* 7.
21. Douglas Gifford, 'Scottish Fiction Since 1945', *Scottish Writing and Writers*, ed. Norman Wilson (Edinburgh: Ramsay Head, 1977) 20-21, and 13.
22. *Ibid.* 23.
23. *Ibid.* 20.
24. Freddy Anderson, 'Early Days at Glasgow Unity Theatre', *Cencrastus* (1993) 18.
25. Moira Burgess, letter to present writer (9 December 2001) 1.
26. 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.
27. *Ibid.* 89.
28. *Ibid.* 89.
29. Edwin Morgan, 'Glasgow Speech in Recent Scottish Literature', *Crossing the Border: Essays on Scottish Literature* (Manchester: 1990) 314.
30. Morgan, 'Tradition and Experiment in the Glasgow Novel', 90.
31. James Kelman, Interview (10 October 2002) 3.
32. *Ibid.* 3.
33. James Kelman, 'Naval History', *The Burn* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991) 95.