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„Hard-boiled and Downright Social:  
The Contemporary Female Tartan Noir “

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***To my unborn son who has accompanied me throughout the entire period of my writing and my beloved partner who, with his unfailing empathy and pervasive sense of humour, has given me the time, space and encouragement I needed to work on this thesis.***



***Good writing occurs where it occurs. If you are alert enough and appreciative enough, you will learn to know it when you see it. There is no other way to guarantee its presence.***

**(McIlvanney, Introduction to *Laidlaw* vi)**



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## Introduction

“I went to Scotland but I could find nothing that looked like Scotland” (Hardy 1). This was the conclusion the Hollywood filmmaker Arthur Freed drew in 1953 from his stay in Scotland when vainly looking for an idyllic filming site for the parochial musical *Brigadoon*. The much cited anecdote splendidly illustrates the immense impact cultural representations have on the imagination of a country. Thus, what Freed was looking for was the Scotland he knew from books, magazines, films and images. In other words, green vastness, heather, tartan, kilts, clans, bagpipes, haggis, whisky and brave men upholding the spirit of William Wallace; the Scotland encoded in iconographic representations. These imaginative versions of Scotland might not reflect the culture of the northern part of the United Kingdom realistically in all its shades but they reveal how the Scots and their country are seen, how they want to be seen and how they make sense of themselves. In this context, the cultural studies scholar Chris Barker notes that “culture is understood to be a zone of contestation in which meanings and versions of the world compete for ascendancy. Consequently, issues of cultural representation are ‘political’ because they are intrinsically bound up with questions of power” (22). At this point it must be emphasised that dominant cultural discourses can also hinder the development of a country. In that case change can only be brought about by radically breaking with pernicious cultural images. In the light of these considerations, literature, as the arena to express, construct, negotiate and challenge cultural values and emblems, constitutes the perfect site to explore and study the past, present and future of a culture.

Particularly interesting insights are to be gained from the examination of Scottish literature in relation to its socio-political context, as the written medium has taken on a leading role in the country’s cultural assertion because of Scotland’s sub-political status within the British Union. Eager to project its own cultural and literary tradition, ‘the land known to be drenched in whisky and populated by sheep and tough men’ has eventually broken with

its parochial representations to finally step out of the shadow of England. In the course of Scotland's cultural demystification, social realism provided the perfect vehicle for representing and questioning the state of Scotland. Interestingly, this new literary orientation gained momentum shortly before Scotland's political devolution in 1999. It was also during this crucial period of time that the genre of crime has been reawakened to form a unique weapon of social criticism and provide a suitable literary channel to represent Scottishness. This new form of hard-boiled genre, cheekily labelled 'Tartan Noir', perfectly matched the tough masculinity with which 'Scottishness' had been, and is still, widely associated. Yet, cultural representations are negotiable. Thus, the moment Scotswomen set their hands to the noir genre the literary landscape as well as the cultural representation of Scotland changed for good.

The following pages revolve around contemporary female Tartan Noir fiction; four categories joining force to make up a Molotov cocktail of their own. These four forces, time, gender, place and genre, interact to create a uniquely compelling discourse, luring the reader to enter into a dialogue about women shaped by the time and space they inhabit. The attraction in exploring this unique literary blend lies in the very fact that critics have not yet attempted to describe it as a stand-alone phenomenon. Thus, one will find innumerable articles and books on female crime fiction or at best British female crime fiction which focus on describing the feminist agenda of female writers, placing Scottish crime writers into the same socio-political slot as their southern neighbours. Such analyses reduce female crime fiction to a common denominator, namely that of being written by women who purportedly share an inherent feminist purpose. Other publications, such as Douglas Gifford's renowned work *A History of Scottish Women's Writing*, link literature to nation and gender. However, while exploring the impact of famous female writers, such as A. L. Kennedy and Janice Galloway, on contemporary Scottish literature, Gifford does not stoop to include authors of genre fiction. And those reference works that do review contemporary

Scottish crime fiction all too often feature lengthy contributions on male scribes which overshadow the short mentioning of contemporary female Tartan Noir writers. These considerations, which by no means intend to discredit these highly informative publications, primarily demonstrate that writing about literature necessarily involves the process of selection and abstraction in order to offer a clear view not blurred by too many details. This thesis also had to abide by the unavoidable process of selection. Hence, it cannot claim to be holistic in the sense of giving credit to all Scottish contemporary female crime writers nor can it fulfil to offer a detailed analysis encompassing all possible angles from which the subject can be approached.

Departing from the conception that literature influences society as much as it has been shaped by the culture it springs from and can thus be read as a cultural text, this thesis explores the social issues raised in selected female Tartan Noir novels in relation to Scottish culture. For a thorough understanding of the socio-cultural issues to be investigated, the first chapter will provide the relevant historical background information, revealing how Scottish pre-devolution literature has interacted with the country's socio-political situation in the eighties and how this output has been categorised to shape the memory of a nation. Moreover, an attempt to define and trace the macabre genre of Tartan Noir will be made, in the course of which the genre's social potential will be discussed. Moving beyond the theoretical background, this paper finally provides a thorough comparative analysis of three contemporary female Tartan Noir novels, each written by one of the leading exponents of the Scottish crime-writing scene: Denise Mina's darkly ironic yet deeply compassionate *Garnethill*, Val McDermid's cheekily feminist and fast-paced *Hostage to Murder* and Louise Welsh's eerily atmospheric and compellingly gripping *The Cutting Room*. Specifically, the analysis of the texts seeks to examine how and to what extent these three female cutting-edge authors exploit the social potential of the crime genre in order to discuss themes which are socially relevant to the Scottish people and above all to women and challenge established cultural as well as literary

conventions to offer refreshingly bold perspectives on Scottish gender politics, nationalism, identity and subjectivity. It will be argued that these three scribes from Scotland are not merely producing popular fiction for entertainment but are spearheading a form of “compassionate social realism” (Mansfield, “Hack and slash on Glasgow streets” par. 1) which transgresses genre boundaries as much as deeply ingrained cultural norms to confidently open up to a long-neglected diversity.

## 1. Re-imagining Scotland: Fiction and the Scottish Nation

History is memory. This moment was memory reclaimed, a right restated, a truth reaffirmed. The nation of Scotland, with all its thrwn suspicions, numberless confusions, apathy, clumsy rivalries and disparate hopes, had remembered. (Bell par. 3)

These were the poignant words written by the renowned journalist Ian Bell of *The Scotsman* to capture one of the most crucial moments in Scottish history: the restoration of the Scottish Parliament. For the first time since the highly controversial Act of Union of 1707 dissolved the Scottish Parliament and thrust Scotland into a stateless nation to form a part in the United Kingdom of Great Britain, or to phrase it in Tom Nairn's words "-since 'the last day Scotland was Scotland' – "(*After Britain* 111), the Scots finally resumed their political voice in a devolved national Parliament in Edinburgh on 12 May 1999. As a matter of fact, when the prominent Scottish National Party (SNP) politician Dr. Winifred Ewing announced on this pivotal occasion that "[t]he Scottish Parliament adjourned on the 25th day of March 1707 is hereby reconvened" [emphasis added] (qtd. in Bell par. 2) the three-century hiatus seemed to vanish into nothing more than a bitter anomaly in the memory of Scottish history.

The above cited comments clearly reflect the ardent desire to assert Scotland as an independent nation with its own unique cultural identity. Thus, what seems to lie at the heart of Scottish devolution is not merely the recovery of political autonomy but that of a national identity. The cultural significance of a political devolution was also explicitly highlighted by Scotland's first minister of the devolved administration Donald Dewar in the opening ceremony of the Scottish Parliament on 1 July 1999: "This is about more than our politics and our laws. This is about who we are, how we carry ourselves" (qtd. in Farquharson par. 6).

In view of the longevity of the British Union it is indeed quite astonishing that Scotland has retained the will to maintain and define an identity distinctively

Scottish. In this context, the question arises as to how the Scots managed to keep the communal spirit alive in order to fuel a national identity needed for a future devolution when political channels have been blocked for such an incredibly long time? In the afore-cited statement, Ian Bell equates history with memory and thus implies the importance of 'cultural memory' (see Assmann 19-34) in the formation of national identity. 'Cultural memory', as defined by Assmann, is to be understood as the "outer dimension of human memory" (19) by way of which a community upholds its collective knowledge and shared past to establish and assure cultural consistency upon which it draws to form its identity (see Assmann 15-34). Moreover, Assmann points to the vital fact that history can only come into existence by way of reference (see 31), which on a collective level is subjective by nature and thus inevitably transforms factual history into memory (see 52). Hence, history can only turn into cultural memory if a community identifies, reflects, responds, recollects and collects its past. The answer to the earlier posed question thus seems to lie in the fact that the Scots have engaged in these processes. However, in order to ensure cultural continuity and assert a Scottish national identity distinguishable from a British state identity these negotiations must have inevitably been oppositional by nature. These oppositional cultural factors are of utmost importance for without them Scotland, that has come to share a language as well as much of its history with 'England', would have been culturally assimilated to the point of invisibility. Moreover, it has to be emphasised that as a result of Scotland's 'sub-political status' within the British Union, such historical, essentially social and political reflections, have been communicated not through politics but through the realm of culture only. As Alan Bold notes, "[a] nation's history and culture are always interdependent; when that nation is denied its national status the history becomes the culture and vice versa" (Bold 1). The concept of culture has generally been defined as "the way of life as a whole" (Williams 281). In addition, it has been widely accepted "that the art of a period is closely and necessarily related to the generally prevalent 'way of life', and further that, in consequence, aesthetic, moral and social judgements are closely

interrelated” (Williams 130). In the light of these considerations, one must inevitably come to the conclusion that cultural expression in the form of literature, visual and acoustic arts has taken on a significant role in preserving, reflecting as well as asserting an identity distinctively Scottish. Therefore, it is not surprising that a potent revival of Scottish culture, especially in the realm of literature, has preceded political devolution. In the following the Scottish literary expression of the pre-devolution period will be examined by focusing primarily on the novel and its interrelationship with the socio-political developments of that time.

Since the 70ies Scotland has experienced a literary boost which has been widely acclaimed and celebrated in numerous publications on Scottish literature. Without doubt, it has made an impact on Scottish literary historiographers who have recorded it as an “unprecedented explosion of creativity” (Petrie 2), a “new Scottish renaissance” (March 4), and even as a “Golden Age of Letters” (Maley 2). Moreover, many critics have argued that Scotland’s freshly flowering literary landscape has helped to imagine and shape a modern Scottish identity by asserting and projecting the necessary cultural confidence and in that way has pushed Scotland towards political devolution. For example, in *Scotland’s books: the Penguin history of Scottish literature* Robert Crawford suggests that “[...] there are connections between the recovery of a Parliament in Edinburgh and the ambitious course of modern Scottish literature” (660). Besides pointing out the interrelationship between aesthetics and politics, Crawford further states that “literature has operated in advance of political structures” (661) and so additionally highlights the political potential of literature per se. Yet the most detailed analysis of the interplay between Scottish literature and politics is to be found in Cairns Craig’s influential work entitled *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* in which he asserts that “[t]he development of the novel is profoundly linked to the development of the modern nation” (9). Along these lines he further reasons that it was through the literature produced during the crucial period of the 80ies and 90ies that

[...] Scotland went on imagining itself as a nation and went on constituting itself as a national imagination in defiance of its attempted or apparent incorporation into a unitary British culture, a defiance which has had profound political consequences in the last decade of the twentieth century. (36)

What critics generally agree on, thus, is that the literature that has sprung during the 'new literary renaissance' or 'Golden Age of Letters' is deeply rooted in Scotland and directly related to the socio-political condition of the late 1970ies. Hence, in order to understand and fully cherish contemporary Scottish literature one must consider it in the context of its political, social and cultural standing.

Interestingly, the successful literary movement of the 70ies stood in sharp contrast to the socio-political abyss Scotland was facing at the time. Only twenty years before the referendum of 1997 cemented a devolved Scottish administration, the political landscape presented a rather bleak outlook for Scotland. As has often been the case throughout human history, it all started with the discovery of oil, which in this case was found in the North Sea off Scotland's east coast in the late 60ies. The economic potential of the 'black gold' reawakened the Scottish national spirit and thus strengthened the cause of the Scottish National Party (SNP), which increasingly started to gain electoral credibility. Needless to say, this political mood provided the perfect breeding ground for intense debates on 'Scottishness'. Ironically, the dream of a full national independence soon thrust Scotland into a predicament which manifested itself in the "disastrous 'double whammy' that had been inflicted upon the Scottish people in 1979" (Petrie 2). The referendum in which a devolved Scottish administration was rejected constituted the first political setback. To be more precise, the motion was turned down due to the low voter turnout (the percentage of the electorate that voted for devolution was less than 40%) albeit the Scots voted by a narrow margin in favour of 'home rule' (see Petrie 2). Moreover, it has to be taken into account that the referendum was endorsed by the Labour Party to divert Scotland from full independence and therefore lead inveterate nationalists to reject the

compromise of an administrative devolution. Thus, on closer examination the result of the referendum clearly reflects the at the time prevailing political schisms in Scotland. Soon after the “devolution debacle” (Crawford 662) the predominantly socialist Scotland suffered the second devastating political setback: the advent of Margaret Thatcher’s Conservative rule, which cast a shadow on the issue of Scottish devolution for the next decade. Her political programme was characterised by a determined centralisation of power and rigorous neoliberalist policies of deregulation and privatisation, which were supported by dramatic cuts in public expenditure and tight fiscal control. The monetarist inspired course alongside with the concurrent economic recession resulted in unprecedented economic and social inequalities, affecting primarily those peripheral regions within the UK such as Scotland which suffered the repercussions of the privatisation of traditional heavy industries (see Petrie 3). The detrimental effects of the Thatcher policies on Scotland, that is to say, the escalating unemployment rates, the poverty, the socio-economic fissures, the overt attention to English interests and the rejection of Scottish nationalist endeavours, soon came to be criticised in Scotland as downright ‘anti-Scottish’. Without doubt, the introduction of the highly disputed poll tax in 1989, which was levied in Scotland a year before it came into effect in the rest of the UK, constituted the last straw for an already sceptical Scotland. As a result of their anti-Scottish but blatantly pro-English reputation the ‘Tories’ increasingly lost support in Scotland, while still being the most popular party in England (see Petrie 3). The growing political schism between Scotland and its Southern neighbour nurtured the feeling of political isolation and dislocation which in turn led the Scots to close ranks. As Richard Weight in his insightful book *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940-2000* observes:

The more the English revelled in the benefits of Conservative rule, the more the Scots and the Welsh saw them as a nation of callous, selfish individuals. In contrast, they saw themselves as people with a unique sense of community and compassion; a belief which the nationalist parties encouraged. [...] Thatcherism and Conservatism in general came to be synonymous with English nationalism in north and west Britain. (589)

Thus, Margaret Thatcher's endeavours to undermine Scottish nationalist sentiments produced the opposite effect as the Scottish communal spirit not only had endured but ripened during her rule. This growing sense of 'Scottishness' as opposed to 'Britishness' is also clearly reflected in the following figures taken from Scottish national surveys which were carried out to measure "the extent to which people mix and match national (Scottish) and state (British) identities" (McCrone, "National Identity in Scotland" 1) during the crucial pre-devolution- as well as post-devolution period.

**'Which of these best describes how you see yourself?'**

| %           | 1979       | 1992       | 1997       | 1999        | 2000        |
|-------------|------------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Scottish    | 56         | 72         | 72         | 77          | 80          |
| British     | 38         | 25         | 24         | 17          | 13          |
| <i>base</i> | <i>661</i> | <i>957</i> | <i>882</i> | <i>1482</i> | <i>1663</i> |

**Table 1: National Identity by year<sup>1</sup>**

(Scottish Election Surveys, 1979, 1992, 1997; Scottish Parliamentary Election Survey, 1999; Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, 2000 qtd. in McCrone, "National Identity in Scotland" 1)

The figures reveal that the Scottish national consciousness increased most markedly between 1979 and 1992, exactly the period correlating with Margaret Thatcher's dominant rule. Summing up, one can thus assert that the failure of the Thatcher government to incorporate and engage Scotland in the British agenda as a politically as much as socially equal partner "contributed to a renewed sense of a distinct national consciousness forged in direct opposition to the very values that underpinned Thatcherism" (Petrie 3).

The amalgam of the various sentiments prevalent during that period in Scotland, that is to say, the regenerated Scottish communal spirit and the general sense of disillusionment with British politics, gave rise to a strong cultural movement which manifested itself most notably in the realm of literature. As already pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, a "cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Figures shown are % of informants selecting their 'true' identity, either Scottish or British.

fightback” (Crawford 663) through the artistic realm is natural and vital for the survival of a community’s distinct cultural identity when political channels are blocked. Thus, the Scottish literary movement of the pre-devolution period was unavoidable, as Ian Bell notes, because “in a climate where there are no formal arenas for debate and no institutions of national self-identity other than a rather faceless Scottish Office, literature takes on greater importance” (qtd. in March 3). In essence, as Duncan Petrie argues, “[...] what was required was some kind of seismic shift in Scottish self-perception towards a confident, viable, distinct and essentially modern national identity” (2). The task of asserting, projecting as well as shaping this new, more confident and modern image of Scotland with which the Scots could identify was to a great extent, directly or indirectly, assumed by writers who, like the majority of their Scottish kinsmen, deeply opposed the values propagated by the British Conservative power-holders and “[...] began to explore Scottish identity and experiment with narratives that allowed such exploration” (March 3). In other words, one could argue that their agenda was to reflect ‘contemporary’ Scottish values and to eradicate the deeply rooted ‘Scottish cultural inferiority complex’ by exploring, to a certain extent, radically subverting and innovating exactly those characteristics of Scottish cultural tradition which for centuries have brand marked the internal as well as external perception of Scotland and have contributed largely to the so called ‘Scottish cultural cringe’.<sup>2</sup> In this context two questions arise: What has caused the Scottish nation to feel inferior and how has this sense of inferiority affected the nation and its literature?

Without doubt, Scotland’s cultural inferiority complex is to be traced to the country’s political incorporation in the British state since it entailed the imposition of a ‘supra-identity’ upon the Scottish identity, as the renowned political philosopher Tom Nairn explains in his insightful analysis of the British state entitled *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland*:

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<sup>2</sup> The ‘Scottish Cringe’ is a term commonly used by Scottish journalists to denote the sense of inferiority the Scots are said to have in relation to the cultural and political achievements of the dominant English nation.

Absence of self-confidence is the natural condition of a social formation whose collective or historical 'self' has been partly lobotomized and partly placed in cold storage. That is, the inveterate state of a nation never destroyed but permitted half-life within relatively unalterable parameters – low-pressure or 'low-political' autonomy founded on good behaviour at home, around the hearth, and then amply rewarded by the external (imperial) life-support system, the sustaining outward *habitus* of Britishness. (101)

In an interview with the Spanish literary critic Fabio Vericat, James Kelman, the master of Scottish working class fiction, points to the fact that this sense of inferiority has been replicated over generations infesting the perception of Scottish society as a whole:

If there is a lack of confidence generally, a sense of inferiority, then the historical context is crucial. You have to remember that Scotland has existed as a sort of colony of England for the past three hundred years; its ruling class sold the country back in the early 18th century. Scottish children have been educated to recognise not only their own inferiority but the inferiority of their parents, community and wider culture, including language. It is a typical colonial position. (qtd. in Vericat par. 3)

Thus, the key obstacle that has hindered Scotland to successfully display an authentic national identity roots in the fact that Scotland has had to deal with two identities, of which the British represented the alien yet politically and intellectually 'superior' identity. Moreover, this historical and social fissure, as Alan Bold notes, has been further enhanced by Scotland's geographical division in "Highland and Lowland, east and west coast" (2) and its linguistic "three-way split between English, Scots and Gaelic" (2). This notion of division and duality which haunted Scotland for centuries has become one of the driving forces and defining characteristics of Scottish literature, as Gregory Smith, who in 1919 has notoriously labelled this phenomenon as "the Caledonian antisyzygy" (4), explains:

Perhaps in the very combination of opposites – what either of the two Sir Thomases, of Norwich and Cromarty, might have been willing to call 'the Caledonian antisyzygy' – we have a reflection of the contrasts which the Scot shows at every turn, in his political and ecclesiastical history, in his polemical restlessness, in his adaptability, which is another way of saying that he has made allowance for new conditions, in his practical judgement, which is the admission that two sides of the matter have been considered. If therefore Scottish history and life are,

as an old northern writer said of something else, 'varied with a clean contrair spirit,' we need not be surprised to find that in his literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory. (4)

It was the much celebrated Scottish author Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson who contributed the most famous fictional account of the duality of human nature with his intriguing novella *The strange case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). In the final chapter entitled "Henry Jekyll's Full Statement of the Case" Alan Bold suggests that Stevenson describes what could be interpreted as "the moral predicament of the Scotsman" (103):

[...] I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me, and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life. Many a man would have even blazoned such irregularities as I was guilty of; but from the high views that I had set before me, I regarded and hid them with an almost morbid sense of shame. [...] Though so profound a double-dealer, I was in no sense a hypocrite; both sides of me were in dead earnest; [...] man is not truly one, but truly two. [...] It was on the moral side, and in my own person, that I learned to recognise the thorough and primitive duality of man; I saw that, of the two natures that contended in the field of my consciousness, even if I could rightly be said to be either, it was only because I was radically both; [...] It was the curse of mankind that these incongruous faggots were thus bound together--that in the agonised womb of consciousness, these polar twins should be continuously struggling. (Stevenson 48-49)

There are two essential points to be made on Stevenson's novella in the context of Scottish identity: On the hand, it offers a very modern perspective on the dual nature of man and his morality in that the 'good' protagonist Henry Jekyll, although he deeply resents the evils that have been committed, admits to be drawn to and sympathises with his separated 'bad' self. On the other hand, however, he experiences the duality of good and bad within him, as well as in their separate, pure manifestations, as unbearable. In other words, he suggests that as long as there are two opposing forces within human nature suffering will continue. In relation to the Scottish sense of division the message of Henry Jekyll would therefore be a rather gloomy one, as duality and division is experienced as human weakness and not as strength.

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a quite different representation of Scottish cultural identity, known as 'Kailyardism', started to permeate the literary world. Kailyard fiction, sometimes also indiscriminately classified as 'tartanry'<sup>3</sup>, successfully led its wide readership to Scotland's idyllic pastoral past, away from the impoverished industrial urban ghettos of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As remote from reality the image of Scotland in Kailyard novels might have been, it has sold and keeps on selling extremely well, as Alan Bold notes:

So we should be wary of categorising the kailyarders as sentimental fools; they were men who had a shrewd judgement on the public taste and the public responded by adoring the intellectually undemanding entertainment the kailyarders produced. (105)

Yet, the resort to a mythologized past also provided an incisive strategy of projecting national identity:

It was a kind of self-imposed, very successful *Kulturkampf*, one which naturally appears as "neurosis" in relation to standard models of development. Because of its success the elements of "pathology" inherent in it have become embedded as modern "national traits". (Nairn, *Break-Up* 153)

Moreover, Nairn pointedly observes that the popularity of the discourses of 'Kailyardism', 'tartanry' as well as 'Highlandism' are driven by "the will to continue 'being something', and hence to go on presenting a new image both to the outside world and to oneself" (*After Britain* 251). Thus, the underlying purpose of these literary representations of Scotland was to ensure cultural unity and continuity. Yet, Kailyardism proved to be highly problematic as it presented a "*fantasy alter ego*" (Nairn, *After Britain* 251) of Scotland as George Blake, one of the first exponents of the Industrial novel, argues:

The bulk of the Scottish people were thus condemned to a purely urban, sophisticated and mainly ugly sort of life during the nineteenth century. A really dramatic, often beastly revolution was taking place. And what had the Scottish novelists to say about it? The answer is – nothing, or as nearly nothing as makes no matter. They might as well have been living in Illyria, as in the agonised country of their birth. (9)

Moreover, in his book *The rousing of the Scottish Working Classes* the Marxist historian James Young points to the fact that the conservatism

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<sup>3</sup> 'Tartanry' is not a literary genre but a set of elements symbolic of Highland culture, adopted in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to promote a unique Scottish culture in the face of British dominance. Tartanry served as the basis for the development of Kailyardism in the late 19<sup>th</sup>.

propagated by the novelists of the Kailyard school profoundly hindered the dissemination of socialist thought:

The “kailyarders” inspired the continuity of propagandist images of a Scottish society as a rural idyll remote from strife and class conflict [...] the dominance of these images in Kailyard novels, together with the systematic indoctrination of working people in church and school, made it exceptionally difficult for the labour movement to popularise their quite moderate critique of the capitalist system. (168)

The “tendency to opt out of artistic responsibilities” (Bold 108), the evasion of reality, the heavy reliance on myth and Presbyterian values as well as the wide circulation and international popularity increasingly earned the Kailyard novel a dubious reputation as a commercial product designed for mass consumption.

As has already been pointed out, with the renewed spirit of nationalism unleashed by the political fiascos in 1979 the writers of the 80ies sensed the need to reflect contemporary Scottish values; a project which inevitably required a break with the mythic representations of Scotland. It is not surprising therefore, that Kailyardism was considered to have “pernicious effects” (Petrie 17) on the image of Scotland for its “mythic structures” were seen as “symptomatic of a national inferiority complex” (Petrie 17). In search of a modern, more realistic and identifiable literary representation of Scotland, a different genre was called upon, which, in contrast to Kailyardism, involved a vigorous rejection of nostalgia and parochialism and a thematic shift towards urban socio-political realities, as Duncan Petrie notes:

The reinvigorated engagement with questions of culture, politics and nationalism gave substance to an alternative discourse which unlike tartanry and Kailyard, projected a Scotland that was urban, industrial and working class in character and consequently closer to the real-life experiences of the majority of Scots. (17)

This “alternative discourse” has been termed ‘Clydesideism’ in recognition and remembrance of the Red Clydeside labour movement during the period between 1910 and 1932. These social and political protests, organised by the working class and directed against capitalism, were held in the city of

Glasgow which subsequently came to be known as the stronghold of working class struggle. Thus, working-class novels which are subsumed under the classification of Clydesideism mostly pay tribute to the urban working class experience in Glasgow. In this way writers shed light on the prevalent class conflict between the socialist working class, which came to be equated with Scottishness, and the conservative bourgeoisie, associated by contrast with Englishness:

[W]orking-class features are important because they are more identifiably Scottish than their more anglicised urban middle-class counterparts. Consequently, the assertion of a working-class identity in a Scottish context is likely to appear also as the assertion of a Scottish identity [...] (Malzahn 230)

Indeed, the figures in the following table show that Scotland had been predominantly 'working class' during the rise of Clydesideism, although manual labour has been gradually decreasing since the 60s due to a shift towards non-manual occupations (see McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the sociology of a stateless nation* 139).

| Class                                                                                                          | Percentage of total |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 'Propertied' class: (employers, self-employed professionals, farmers, own account workers)                     | 6.5                 |
| 'Service' class (1), upper: (managers and administrators, professional employees, intermediate non-manual)     | 21.9                |
| 'Service' class (2), lower: (junior non-manual, personal service)                                              | 27.3                |
| Manual, 'working-class' :(foremen and supervisors, skilled, semi-skilled, unskilled, and agricultural workers) | 42.4                |

**Table 2: Social stratification in Scotland, 1981**

(Source: Adapted from 1981 Census, Scotland, Economic activity (10% sample), table 18b qtd. in McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the sociology of a stateless nation* 140)

Thus, the appropriated urban working class novel provided a potent vehicle for the assertion of authentic contemporary working-class values, subsumed under the label of 'Scottishness,' in direct opposition to middle-class Englishness, as Cairns Craig points out:

The expression of Scottishness has come to depend on the classes which are least touched by English values: lower class and working class culture has come to be the repository of all that has been elided by the Scottish bourgeoisie's mimicry of English values. ("Going down to Hell is easy" 91)

Essentially, the advantage of Clydesideism over Kailyardism was that it allowed writers to explore social and political themes set in realistic locations and rendered in authentic tone. In other words, the thematic exploration of Scottish realities, the reflection of an unerring sense of place and language can be said to present the three constituent pillars upon which the discourse of Clydesideism based the new literary portrayal of Scottishness and thereby sought to turn those factors which were formerly experienced as inferior into cultural strength. Thus, with the new thematic focus the Scottish working class was not depicted as regressive but celebrated as socially progressive and morally upright. Englishness, equated with the bourgeoisie, by contrast, was uncovered as snobbish, conservative, decadent, disloyal and static. Another constituent factor of Scottish culture which received literary attention was language. "In Scotland", as Alan Bold notes, "language is treated as a weapon in a national, and nationalistic war. The Scottish writer makes a matter of decision – over the use of English, Scots, Gaelic – a matter of division" (4). With the discourse of Clydeside, however, writers turned their attention not just to Scots but its urban variety. In an attempt to break the negative associations of Scottish working-class dialects and to finally depict Glaswegians in their own voice, special emphasis has been given to the literary representation of Glaswegian speech. Although writers may only achieve literary approximations to the unrecorded 'patter' of the street, this new socio-realistic focus is noteworthy as the urban variety of Scots acts as a strong identifier of the working class and "the uneducated, disenfranchised, powerless underclass" (Corbett 13).

Driven by "the conviction that for experience to be significant it needn't be masked in exoticism or buskined with social status" since, after all "messiahs are born in stables" (McIlvanney, *Docherty* vii), William McIlvanney wrote his

famous working-class novel *Docherty* (1975) and with it laid the cornerstone of the Clydeside discourse. Born in 1936 in Kilmarnock, an industrial town in Scotland's coal mining area, as the youngest of four children to a working-class family affected by the economic crises, McIlvanney was himself well acquainted with the life of the underprivileged. Throughout his academic career he has remained ideologically committed to his roots and assiduously dedicated himself to a comprehensive literary representation of the Scottish working class experience in a postmodern world. This concern also lies at the heart of his third novel, *Docherty*, which depicts the struggle of the 'tough' coal miner Tam Docherty who firmly treasures the values of working class life. As McIlvanney insightfully explains in the novel's introduction:

I wanted to write a book that would create a kind of literary genealogy for the people I came from, the people whose memorials were parish registers. [...] The most basic premise on which I was writing was that their lives were full of an immanent significance which, not being made explicit in literary form, was often regarded as not existing at all. The only way to demonstrate its existence was to express it as fully as I could. (xi-xvi)

Moreover, by conceding that he engaged in "constructing a communal fabric of myth" (Introduction, *Docherty* xi) McIlvanney admits that his intentions go beyond a mere representation of working-class life. In fact, *Docherty* celebrates the long neglected figure of the working class rebel. In other words, as a "social idealist" (Kelly 1) and an inveterate Scottish nationalist, McIlvanney deliberately stages the 'common man' as the hero at the centre of his plots. In this way, as McIlvanney argues, "*Docherty* is essentially an attempt to democratise traditional culture, to give working-class life the vote in the literature of heroism" (xviii). Attempting to also give Scottish working-class culture an authentic voice, McIlvanney renders the dialogue of his characters in urban Scots. Their train of thoughts as well as their innermost emotions, however, are disclosed, mediated and analysed by a sophisticated authorial narrator whose English, as Cairns Craig points out, "is closer to Henry James than to Robert Burns" (*The Modern Scottish Novel* 82). While Craig criticises McIlvanney's juxtaposition of Scottish native dialogue and English narrative as a "mutilating dialectic of English-writing author and

Scots-speaking character" (*The Modern Scottish Novel* 83), other critics such as Gavin Wallace see the use of both linguistic varieties not as a shortcoming but an attempted reconciliation between two antithetical sets of cultural values – standard English uniformity as opposed to individual Scottish community – forced into an equivalence in which they articulate *for each other*. (221)

On the whole McIlvanney's portrayal of the Scottish working class in the shape of *Docherty* proved to be highly successful. "Hailed as a classic expression of Scottish identity" (Petrie 20), it was critically well received and even awarded the Whitbread Prize<sup>4</sup> for fiction in 1975. McIlvanney continued his investigation of the experience of the ordinary Scot in the face of a fast-changing world in his numerous subsequent works which all reflect his commitment to socialism as well as humanism. This can also be seen in his novel *The Big Man* (1985), which presented an artistic response to the Scottish socio-political conditions during the Thatcher years and was adapted for the screen starring Liam Neeson in the leading part. What seems to be most intriguing to note about McIlvanney's fiction, however, is that his unflinching endeavour to capture the existential struggle of the working-class 'hard man' led him to experiment with the genre of crime fiction which, as Duncan Petrie observes, allowed him "to engage in a more accessible way with the social realities of contemporary Scotland and in particular with the city of Glasgow" (140). Thus, on composing the eponymous urban thriller *Laidlaw* (1977) and its two follow-up novels *The Papers of Tony Veitch* (1983) and *Strange Loyalties* (1991) McIlvanney's prime purpose lay not in conceptualising a puzzle-solving adventure for light entertainment but in reflecting the contemporary fears and values of Glasgow's 'underclass' epitomised by the highly subversive and hard-boiled detective by the name of Jack Laidlaw. As McIlvanney keenly points out in the introductory notes of *Laidlaw*:

I saw the detective story as a popular form, capable of sustaining 'serious' writing. [...] I wanted to write a book that dealt with the life of the streets and took it seriously as any other matter of fiction ('Great problems are in the street,' Nietzsche says.) I wanted a book that

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<sup>4</sup> Since 2006 called Costa Book Awards

wasn't intimidated into imagining that popularity equates with superficiality. I wanted a book that was unapologetic about the form in which it was cast. (*Crime and Punishment* is, after all, a kind of detective story.) [...] I was hungry to connect with a contemporary theme [...] I woke out of my preoccupation with the past and found that I was fascinated with what was going on around me. This interest in things of my own time focused most dramatically on Glasgow [...] What I feel in Glasgow is the accumulated weight of working-class experience. The streets of the former Second City of the British Empire are haunted by what the industrial Revolution has meant to us, the tensions it imposed on the human spirit the resilience that grew out of the tensions. There, more intensely than anywhere else, you can sense the force that shaped the nature of modern Scotland (Introduction to *Laidlaw*, viii-ix)

McIlvanney's appropriation of crime fiction as a means to take stock of Glasgow's underbelly proved to be highly effective and further provided impetus for the unprecedented burgeoning of Scottish crime writing cunningly labelled 'Tartan Noir'. The emergence of the genre, its roots and characteristics as well as its capability for sustaining a socio-political discourse will be explored in detail in chapter 2 of this thesis.

What seems to be noteworthy for now is that William McIlvanney, disillusioned with the degradation of social idealism caused by neoliberalism, deliberately and directly used his writing for reflecting, discussing and questioning socio-political realities relevant to contemporary Scotland. This he has achieved not solely by depicting contemporary themes, realistic settings and characters but also by infusing the narrative voice with authentic urban dialect and above all by skilfully adapting a genre suited for his purposes. Although the discourse of Clydesideism with its potent celebration of working-class masculinity soon came to be outdated due to the dissolution of traditional working-class culture caused by the neoliberalistic policies implemented by the Thatcher government, McIlvanney's radical break with traditional representations of Scotland, his innovative use of genre fiction fused with gritty realism has had profound influence on Scottish contemporary writing.

Essentially, what was required was a thematic shift away from the now 'mythic' working-class community to its leftovers, the disillusioned urban underclass. Writers such as Alasdair Gray and James Kelman are especially noteworthy in this context as they have further broadened, refined, innovated and up-dated the working-class discourse in Scottish fiction. As Duncan Petrie notes:

Rather than mourning an idealised and rapidly vanishing urban industrial past, Gray [and] Kelman [...] began to explore a broader range of social experience and narrative situations, and a more complex idea of contemporary subjectivity. Moreover, the work of [both] shares a commitment to the creative re-imagination of urban Scotland, recasting the city of Glasgow as a modern metropolis [...] (39)

Beyond doubt, the appearance of Alasdair Gray's debut novel *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* in 1981 revolutionised the literary landscape of Scotland. The uniqueness of this masterpiece, praised as the "greatest Glasgow novel" (Crawford 647), lies in its experimental richness, particularly in terms of its unconventional use of magical and social realism. Moreover, it is in both form and content downright subversive and radical. That is to say, *Lanark* calls into question almost everything that the Western culture has come to accept and take for granted. Categories, conventions and finite entities such as space, time, life, body, thought, values and language are presented as suffocating imprisonments. The novel is also multilayered in that it addresses global, national as well as intimate individual issues. Still, it can be said to be uniquely Scottish. For example, the trope of 'duality', characteristic of Scottish fiction, pervasively permeates the novel. Thus, the Glaswegian protagonist Duncan Thaw who commits suicide lives on in Lanark, his alter ego, who inhabits the dystopian alter space Unthank. Moreover, Gray broaches the issue of the existential struggle of the individual and of society on the whole in a postmodern, capitalist Glasgow and in this way he engages with contemporary Scottish realities. Thus, as might be expected, the theme of individual, cultural and national identity symptomatic of the Scottish discourse is also central to *Lanark*. This can be seen in the following passage in which Duncan Thaw strikingly challenges the cultural representation of Glasgow:

[T]hink of Florence, Paris, London, New York. Nobody visiting them for the first time is a stranger because he's already visited them in paintings, novels, history books and films. But if a city hasn't been used by an artist not even the inhabitants live there imaginatively. What is Glasgow to most of us? A house, the place we work, a football park or a 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. (Gray 243)

The passage also alludes to the fact that concepts such as a sense of place, nation and identity are abstract by nature and thus have to be imagined and projected through the medium of culture in order to be shared collectively. This view strongly reminds of Benedict Anderson's definition of the concept of a nation as "an imagined political community [...] *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (6).

Thus, Gray seems to make a case for a new, more adequate imagination of Glasgow and the Scottish nation respectively. Judging from the critical reception and profound influence that *Lanark* has had on Scottish writers, one can conclude that with his novel Gray has certainly contributed to the cultural confidence of contemporary Scottish literature.

James Kelman first made an impact on the literary scene with the publication of his novel *The Busconductor Hines* in 1984. For Kelman literature is meaningful if people can relate to it in terms of theme, place, language and narrative mode. Thus, unlike Gray, Kelman has opted for a "fundamental commitment to realism in content and style" (Craig, "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman" 100). The characters around which his novels evolve are ordinary working class people, such as the Glaswegian busconductor Robert Hines. However, in contrast to McIlvanney's hopeful working class heroes, Kelman's

tragic characters are hopelessly trapped in disillusionment and isolation, as Cairns Craig poignantly observes:

In Kelman's fiction, there is a brutal awareness that the Scottish working class, who saw themselves as the carrier of historical change in the days of McIlvanney's Docherty, are now leftovers of a world which has no need of them; their choices are limited to acceptance of the atomisation of social improvement, or submission to becoming fodder for the only industry they have left – the poverty industry. ("Resisting Arrest: James Kelman" 102)

In this way Kelman confronts the reader with the uncomfortable realities of postmodern capitalist society, in which working class individuals are desperately struggling to come to terms with their existence devoid of meaning. However, the arguably greatest innovation Kelman has contributed in the course of his unrelenting commitment to depict reality as closely as possible, was his radically new approach to presenting working-class vernacular. Driven by the conviction that "if you lose your language you've lost your culture" (Kelman qtd. in Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* 100), Kelman has sought novel ways to project the contemporary urban dialect of Glasgow. The novelty of his approach lies in the dissolution of the language boundary between the traditional Standard English narrative voice and the non-standard direct speech of the dialogue (see Petrie 40). In other words, Kelman cunningly blends the Scottish working-class language with that of the narrative voice so that "the distinction between the language of narration and the language of dialogue is dissolved" (Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* 101). Moreover, he presents speech without typographical markers and thus enhances the seamless merging of dialogue, interior monologue and narrative voice.

The fusion of different linguistic styles can be seen in the following passage taken from Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines*, in which the protagonist Robert Hines surveys the decaying blocks of flats from his window:

Better off razing the lot to the ground. And renting a team of steamroadrollers to flatten the dump properly, compressing the earth and what is upon and within, crushing every last pore to squeeze out the remaining gaseous elements until at last that one rectangular

mass is appearing, all set for sowing. The past century is due burial; *it is always been being forgotten*. [emphasis added] (Kelman 168)

In the context of language use, the last phrase is especially noteworthy, as Kelman chose to use the non-standard form 'it is' over the grammatically correct form 'it has'. This treatment of language achieves to render the passage as neither standard nor non-standard. It rather creates a linguistic matrix between the two (see Rodger 122). In this way Kelman disrupts the rigid categorisation of language and with it its social connotations, as Cairns Craig insightfully highlights:

[N]o hierarchy of language is established which orders the value to be put on the characters' language in relation to any other mode of speech or writing within the text. [...] [W]hat this does is to create a linguistic equality between speech and narration which allows the narrator to adopt the speech idioms of his characters, or the characters to think or speak in 'standard English', with equal status. (*The Modern Scottish Novel* 101)

Summing up one can assert that with their highly innovative literary approaches to representing contemporary Scottish realities William McIlvanney, Alasdair Gray and James Kelman have successfully re-imagined Scotland and above all have laid the cornerstone for a confident, contemporary and uniquely Scottish literary scene. In other words, these writers have responded to the need of asserting Scottish culture in literature and so have helped to culturally emancipate Scotland from its powerful English neighbour. The process of this unprecedented cultural devolution, as has already been pointed out earlier in the chapter, required an intense exploration and novel representation of those cultural factors which for a long time have been regarded as inferior such as the Scottish dialect, working class culture and the notion of duality and division. Hence, such Scottish cultural characteristics are no longer envisaged as a burden but as strength in contemporary literature:

Between the failed devolution referendum of 1979 and the reconstitution of the Scottish parliament twenty years later, the major cultural effort in Scotland was to refute conceptions of the nation's failed cultural continuity. While there was a heightened recognition of Scotland's undoubted internal divisions, these came to be matters of celebration rather than neglect. (Craig, "National literature" 62)

Accordingly, it seems that in the quest for an adequate portrayal of Scottishness in the face of an almighty cultural pre-eminence of England the literature north the border has finally found its unique Scottish voice. Beyond doubt, post-1979 Scottish literature has shown that “[c]ulture owes its highest achievements to politically weakened times” (Nietzsche Section 8, par. 465). Yet, while Scotland’s weakened socio-political standing called for a focus on national realities, the Scottish literature of the early 80ies has also been criticised for its overt attention to Scottish issues:

[A] pre-occupation which is admittedly inward and introverted; some may say that it is no healthy preoccupation. But until there is a state of Scotland, we have no choice but to be so obsessed. Would it were not so. But we can stop *talking* about the state of Scotland only when we are in a position to *do* something about it. (Hendry 1)

Despite this persistent criticism, pre-devolution literature has also been attacked for its failure to reflect changing gender roles. It has to be taken into account however, that what these critics were commenting upon in the early 80ies was nothing but a stage in a continuously evolving process. It is true that literary discourses just like that of Clydesideism with its celebration of the Scottish patriarchal working class or that of Kailyardism with its focus on an idyllic pastoral past are nothing but abstract stereotypical representations of Scottish society, “but they are also dynamic: as we have seen they can be challenged and they do evolve” (Corbett 188). Thus, the imagination of a nation is socially constructed and continuously evolving:

The nature of a national imagination, like a language, is an unending series of interactions between different strands of tradition, between influences from within and without, between the impact of new experiences and the reinterpretation of past experiences: the nation is a series of ongoing debates, founded in institutions and patterns of life, whose elements are continually changing but which constitute, by the nature of the issues which they foreground, and by their reiteration of elements of the past, a dialogue which is unique to the particular place. (Craig, *The modern Scottish Novel* 31)

Pre-devolution literature has certainly succeeded in interacting with and reassessing Scotland’s past and present. Yet, just as Cairns Craig points out this dialogue is continually changing. While Thatcherite, anti-Scottish politics and the decline of the national industries during the 1980s provided the

impetus for writers to turn to social realism, its aftermaths are presently unchaining new waves of writing. Unemployment, identity, multiculturalism and gender roles are just some among the many themes which have entered the agenda of Scottish writers. Moreover, it is especially noteworthy that the often lamented lack of female perspective in Scottish literature is being successfully counteracted by the new generation of women writers who have started to engage in their own unique dialogue of identity and nation:

The achievement of contemporary women writers of fiction has arguably been the most substantial of all achievements in Scottish women's writing. It is outstanding in its new confidence in handling a wide range of genres from social realism and satire to recognisably Scottish versions of magic realism, surrealism and historical fantasy, and its willingness to explore the challenges and problems facing women in their personal development, in their relationships with other women, men, families and society generally, and – increasingly – in relation to history and nationality. (Gifford 579)

As varied the genres of contemporary literature may be, the vital influence of the literary voices of the pre-devolution period is still to be felt especially in regard to its social commitment in literature. This strong social commitment gave rise to an unprecedented wave of new female Scottish crime writing “which developed into an ideal formula for investigating the state of Scotland” (Plain 132).

## 2. Crime for a Reason: The Rise of Tartan Noir

In the late 1970's, amidst ardent strives to project and preserve a cultural identity distinctively Scottish, social realism started to permeate the literary world of Scotland. It was during this turbulent period of time that the long neglected genre of crime fiction has been given a new lease of life, since it provided the perfect medium for exploring issues relevant to contemporary Scotland. In fact, the Scottish recipe for writing crime has reached unprecedented heights of popularity well beyond the Scottish borders, burying under its success the once endemic formula of the classic British mystery of the 20ies and 30ies , also known as "Golden Age [detective] fiction" (Scaggs 50). It was the famous American hard-boiled novelist James Ellroy, who finally baptized the literary phenomenon made in Scotland when he lauded the Scottish crime writer Ian Rankin for his creation of Edinburgh's most famous fictional inspector, John Rebus, as "the progenitor-and king-of tartan noir".<sup>5</sup> However, despite its undisputed commercial success, the label 'Tartan Noir' has also sparked controversy among critics. In *the New York Times* Charles Taylor critically observes that 'Tartan Noir' is "a touristy phrase, suggesting that there's something quaint about hard-boiled crime fiction that comes from the land of kilts and haggis" ("Paint It Noir", par. 1). Most notably, however, the term has come under attack for its failure to differentiate between the various sub-genres of crime writing prevalent in Scotland. In other words, 'Tartan Noir' constitutes a very broad generic term, which embraces the whole panoply of contemporary urban mystery writing produced in Scotland, ranging from the police procedural to the psychological thriller. It is further noteworthy that the term 'Tartan Noir', while being frequently used in newspaper and online articles, is hardly ever referred to in reference books on Scottish literature. Robert Crawford is one of the few who does make mention of the term. In his *Scotland's books: the Penguin history of Scottish literature*, he rather vaguely suggests that Tartan Noir is the nickname given to "Scottish urban crime novels looping from the horrific to

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<sup>5</sup> Ellroy's famous assertion is quoted on the book cover of almost every recent printing in the Rebus series.

the humorous” (686). Although it cannot be denied that the phrase ‘Tartan Noir’ sounds more like a cunning marketing tool than an approved technical term of literature, its coinage does mark an important event for Scottish culture as it demarcates ‘Tartan’ crime fiction from the traditionally successful ‘English’ detective novel. In this context the award winning Scottish crime writer Val McDermid observes:

We have the rope of Agatha around our necks. She created an expectation [about British mystery writers] that was great for when she was writing, but now we want to write about the society we live in and the Agatha Christie formula doesn’t work anymore. (qtd. in Foster par.1)

McDermid describes arguably the most essential characteristic of Tartan Noir novels, namely their indebtedness to contemporary social issues. This commitment to social realism accompanied by a predominantly left-wing political attitude also constitutes the most fundamental difference between contemporary Scottish and classic British crime writing, which, as Julian Symons elaborately points out, projected the perspective of the ruling classes without questioning the established social order:

[T]he point is that these [Golden Age detective stories] were very special fairy tales, and that social and even political attitudes were implied in them. It is safe to say that almost all of the British writers in the Twenties and Thirties, and most of the Americans, were unquestionably Right-wing. This is not to say that they were openly anti-Semitic or anti-Radical, but that they were overwhelmingly conservative in feeling. It would have been unthinkable for them to create a Jewish detective, or a working-class one aggressively conscious of his origins, for such figures would have seemed to them quite incongruous. It would have been equally impossible for them to have created a policeman who beat up suspects. [...] Acknowledging that such things happened, they would have thought it undesirable to write about them, because the police were the representatives of established society, and so ought not to be shown behaving badly. And although an unemployed man might be seen sympathetically if he was trying to be helpful to his social betters, he was usually regarded as somebody who just refused to work. The social order in these stories was fixed and mechanical as that of the Incas. (105)

Thus, in contrast to writers abiding by the traditional ‘English’ crime pattern, Tartan Noirists have adapted the genre into a social and political mouthpiece for the marginalised and underprivileged. This seems to confirm the idea that

Tartan Noir “has more in common with the Russian novel<sup>6</sup> than it does with traditional detective writing” (D. Smith par.1).

As has been argued elsewhere the reason for Scotland’s social commitment in literature lies in the social and political trajectory of Scotland itself. Yet, the question remains: Is the genre of crime actually capable of sustaining the desired socio-political discourse? Gill Plain regards crime, in comparison to other literary genres, as an equally potent vehicle for exploring complex social issues, suggesting that “[t]hrough fiction, the inarticulable resentments of a stateless nation find form and expression, and this symbiotic relationship between text and context is equally manifest in crime fiction” (133). In his article “Crimes domestic and crimes colonial: The role of crime fiction in developing postcolonial consciousness” Stephen Knight not only concedes the genre of crime a social function but highlights its significance for investigating socio-political issues in postcolonial settings:

Crime fiction is of course only one of the many genres and voices in which nations and peoples debate their situation and identity: but a case can clearly be made for the recurrent importance of the genre in this context. [...] Many authors around the world have used the immense popularity and the crime-revealing structure of the genre to deliver, unostentatiously, affectively, and so all the more effectively, the potentially postcolonial meaning of crime fiction. (33)

In their book *Postcolonial Postmortems* Christine Matzke and Susanne Mühleisen further expand on the social potential of crime fiction in a postcolonial setting:

Crime fiction, especially of the ‘classical’ clue-puzzle type, has always been a genre with a highly moralising potential, in which conflicting perspectives could be negotiated through questions of good and evil, often confirming the status quo. While such aspects are still of central interest to the exploration of postcolonial detective novels – as in questions of authority and social power – crime fiction has long proved that it has more to offer. Often, the social order is no longer restored but questioned through alternative notions of justice. [...] Many authors have thus broadened the theme of investigation to address issues of community, beliefs and identity constructions across geographic and national boundaries, including gender and race relations. Others have

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<sup>6</sup> Russian literature is well known for its strong tradition of realism and social critique. Such refined social awareness is found throughout Russia’s literary history in the works of Nikolai Gogol, Fyodor Dostoyevsky and Mikhail Bulgakov, just to name a few.

broadened the genre by inventing recognisable sub-categories which relate to the social, political and historical formations of their specific postcolonies. (5)

The arguments presented clearly indicate that the genre of crime fiction offers three essential advantages for debating complex social issues: Firstly, its popularity guarantees a wide circulation. Secondly, it has proved to be extremely flexible in that it can be transcended and appropriated into various settings, ranging from rural upper class milieus to postcolonial urban working class communities. Last but not least the genre lends itself beautifully to questioning and negotiating established moral conventions and social mores. That is to say, the type of crime depicted and the way of dealing with it exposes the prevailing fears, ills and norms of society. After all, as the award winning noir writer Denise Mina lucidly remarks, “[c]riminality is not someone else, someplace else [...] [i]t’s part of the culture” (qtd. in Rochlin par. 7). In the light of these considerations, one can conclude that the genre of crime has the potential to reflect, reveal, negotiate and question the status quo of a culture and is thus more than capable of sustaining a serious socio-political discourse.

An equally interesting insight which can be gained from the above cited statements is that the Scottish adaptation of the genre strongly parallels the postcolonial appropriation, in that both use crime fiction to explore contemporary socio-political issues and call into doubt the prevalent social order. Thus, despite the fact that a postcolonial approach to Scottish literature is debatable, as Scotland presents the rare example of both the coloniser and the colonised, Tartan Noir has more in common with the postcolonial version of crime fiction than with the ‘classical’ English one; a fact which can be attributed to Scotland’s literary response to the political infiltration and ‘inferiorisation’ of Scottish culture within the British Union. In the following Duncan Petrie describes the socio-political significance of the freshly forged Scottish sub-genre:

[T]he genre does provide an accessible format through which relevant issues can be interrogated. The centrality of class, gender, national identity, and the modern city, alongside considerations of the meaning

of morality, justice and criminality in modern society, provides a clear indication of the more weighty dimensions that are contained within contemporary Scottish crime fiction, and equally central to the reimagination of the nation itself. (159)

Apart from asserting that Tartan Noir novels are essentially social, Petrie implies a further fundamental characteristic of the genre: the importance of being Scottish. That is to say, all of the Tartan Noir authors, who are all outspoken Scots themselves, create characters that are undeniably Scottish, in speech, act and their understanding of the world. Thus, the world depicted is that of the socially marginalised, predominantly working class, anti-hero, who, as has been argued in the previous chapter, have come to be identified with Scottishness. Moreover, the characters are strongly shaped by their urban environment, either Edinburgh or Glasgow, which figure prominently and contribute to the reimagination of the cities themselves. In accordance with Scotland's most famous cultural trait, the novels are imbued with the motif known as 'Caledonian antisyzygy'.<sup>7</sup> In the following Val McDermid humorously as well as pointedly captures this sense of ambivalence in Scottish culture:

I think it comes down to [...] the pull of two polar opposites in the same people. We're famously hospitable but we're also famously xenophobic. We have this sort of dark Calvinist past and it's still in place in the present. We also have this wonderful black sense of humour and we love to party. We've produced some of the greatest thinkers of the Enlightenment, and also some of the worst slag-faced bigots in the history of human thought. So there's always the dark pool of these opposites within us that produces a sort of dramatic tension. (qtd. in Taylor, "Kiss Miss Marple goodbye" 3)

Thus, texts written in Tartan Noir style offer no clear divide between good and bad but portray protagonists who themselves frequently act and think humanly anti-heroically as well as heroically subversively. That is to say, the investigating protagonists may sympathise with criminals as well as retort to criminal acts without feeling the slightest remorse. In addition, the characters are themselves not spared the cruelties of life but often find themselves amidst severe personal crises. As typical Scots they defy the sheer

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<sup>7</sup> For further information refer to page 17.

bleakness of life with vices and flamboyant black-humoured figures of speech rendered in authentic patter of the street.

Essentially, what differentiates Scottish sleuths from their 'English' Golden Age colleagues is their sheer lack of emotional detachment, their social-outsider status, as well as their compassion for the underclass and their blatant distrust of authority.

While it is legitimate to compare the Scottish crime novel to the Russian social novel one will have to acknowledge that the genre is deeply rooted in its own literary and cultural tradition as well as being greatly indebted to the American hard-boiled genre.

## 2.1 Literary Roots and Influences

James Ellroy may have called Rankin "the progenitor-and king-of tartan noir" but the popular Scottish crime sub-genre is to be traced back much further to a novel written more than a century ago: Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). With his exploration of the polarity within human nature Stevenson has provided the most characteristic literary example of the Scottish cultural phenomenon termed 'Caledonian antisyzygy' and in this way constitutes a major source of inspiration for contemporary Tartan Noirists who, as has been pointed out previously, are committed to portraying the Scottish nature as closely as possible. Yet, Stevenson's celebrated novella keeps inspiring contemporary crime writers also in other respects. After all, it is one of the first Scottish gothic novels in which an urban environment assumes a leading role. To be more precise, Stevenson introduces the reader to the city of London which, with its contradicting, beautiful and sinister appearance, sublimely mirrors the two-facedness and ambivalence within human nature:

It chanced on one of these rambles that their way led them down a by-street in a busy quarter of London. The street was small and what is called quiet, but it drove a thriving trade on the week-days. [...] Even

on Sunday, when it veiled its more florid charms and lay comparatively empty of passage, the street shone out in contrast to its dingy neighbourhood, like a fire in a forest; and with its freshly painted shutters, well-polished brasses, and general cleanliness and gaiety of note, instantly caught and pleased the eye of the passenger. Two doors from one corner, on the left hand going east, the line was broken by the entry of a court; and just at that point, a certain sinister block of building thrust forward its gable on the street. It was two storeys high; showed no window, nothing but a door on the lower storey and a blind forehead of discoloured wall on the upper; and bore in every feature the marks of prolonged and sordid negligence. The door, which was equipped with neither bell nor knocker, was blistered and distained. (4)

In essence, what has made Stevenson's novella so uniquely inspiring for Scottish writers is its compelling noir portrayal of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, as two natural entities with equal right to exist. Hence, not evil per se was depicted as the root of human suffering but the competing existence of both good and evil within human nature:

If each, I told myself, could but be housed in separate identities, life would be relieved of all that was unbearable; the unjust might go his way, delivered from the aspirations and remorse of his more upright twin; and the just could walk steadfastly and securely on his upward path, doing the good things in which he found his pleasure, and no longer exposed to disgrace and penitence by the hands of this extraneous evil. (49)

Stevenson's ground-breaking exploration of human duality, identity and moral norms constitutes an enduring legacy in Scottish crime fiction, which as Gill Plain notes, suggests the story's "ongoing relevance as a trope of national identity" (133). It is not surprising thus that "nearly every self-respecting crime novel carries an obligatory reference to Stevenson or his seminal novel" (Plain 133). Yet, it has to be emphasised that apart from the "often satiric" (Plain 133) references to the literary forbearer, Scottish crime writers are also perpetuating and refining the themes laid down by Stevenson.

The themes of human duality, identity and social conventions also pervade William McIlvanney's eponymous urban thriller *Laidlaw* (1977), which is known to be the first novel written in Tartan Noir style. The novel, as has been outlined in the previous chapter, has grown from the desire to eternalise

a realistic portrayal of the Scottish working class community. In the genre of crime McIlvanney discovered a “potential for development” (McIlvanney, Introduction to *Laidlaw* viii) which perfectly assisted his desire to forge a uniquely challenging text suited to his purposes. As the author insightfully explains in the novel’s introduction:

*Laidlaw* is less an example of the traditional detective story than an attempted challenge to it. I don’t read a lot of detective stories. With many of them I suffer from reality-starvation after a few pages and find myself staring at the depicted events across a credibility gap as wide as the Grand Canyon. This is not an objection to the genre, just an objection to the undemanding uses to which it is sometimes put. [...] With the arrival of Jack Laidlaw, the possibility for a book that had lain dormant in my mind jerked into life. He stood aggressively at the centre of a vaguely imagined novel and invited me to construct it around him. By being who he was, he suggested ways in which I might challenge some of the conventions of detective fiction and hopefully deepen them. His nature would to a large extent determine the nature of the book that would carry his name. (viii-X)

Essentially one could argue that McIlvanney projects, explores and questions the Scottish state as much as he transcends the crime genre through the figure of Detective Jack Laidlaw. Moreover, it is important to recognise that with the creation of Jack Laidlaw McIlvanney opened up a new path for Scottish crime fiction as the fictive Scottish maverick epitomises the antithesis of the classical British detective. Thus, in contrast to his classical ‘English’ forerunners, Laidlaw is a highly unconventional, downright subversive hero, whose “most certain thing [...] [is] his doubt” (McIlvanney, *Laidlaw* 187). To be more precise, Laidlaw is a highly ambivalent character, who is constantly torn between his life as a policeman, as a family man and philosopher:

Laidlaw sat at his desk, feeling a bleakness that wasn’t unfamiliar to him. Intermittently, he found himself doing penance for being him. When the mood seeped into him, nothing mattered. He could think of no imaginable success, no way of life, no dream of wishes fulfilled that would satisfy. [...] He was drinking too much – not for pleasure, just sipping systematically, like low proof hemlock. His marriage was a maze nobody had ever mapped, an infinity of habit and hurt and betrayal down which Ena and he wandered separately, meeting occasionally in the children. He was a policeman, a Detective Inspector, and more and more he wandered how that had happened.

[...] He felt his nature anew as a wrack of paradox. He was potentially a violent man who hated violence, a believer in fidelity who was unfaithful, an active man who longed for understanding (McIlvanney, *Laidlaw* 4-5)

As the above cited passage illustrates *Laidlaw* is well aware of his shortcomings, his duality and even bigotry. However, exactly this painful self-awareness makes him superior to the other characters, in that he presents the only character who is truly capable of exposing the superficialities of society. Laidlaw's philosophical significance clearly surfaces in the following quote, in which he comments on Bud Lawson's attempted vengeance against his daughter's murderer: "What I've got against folk like Lawson isn't that they're wrong. It's just that they *assume* they're right. Bigotry's just unearned certainty, isn't it?" (McIlvanney, *Laidlaw* 187). The passage moreover points to Laidlaw's attitude towards criminals. That is to say, he is willing to uncover crimes but renounces from judging the offenders, for in his view all human beings are culprits. This ideology earns Laidlaw an outsider status among his colleagues who fail to transcend their assimilated prejudices. Thus, while the inexperienced Detective Constable Harkness is incapable of comprehending the murderer's motives for killing Lawson's daughter, Laidlaw simply equates the offence with a very human act which asks to be decoded:

'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.'

'What do you mean? Laidlaw said. You resign from the species? [...] This murder is a very human message. But it's in code. We have to try and crack the code. But what we are looking for is a part of us.' (McIlvanney, *Laidlaw* 59-60)

Hence, with his sophisticated humanist and downright social attitude Laidlaw is able to penetrate the people and 'their' city, Glasgow, which also figures prominently in the novel. In the light of these considerations, one can certainly argue that the ambivalent character of Jack Laidlaw, although not being a native Glaswegian nor a common man of the street, displays a sensitive understanding of Glaswegian working class attitude, which

contemporary Tartan Noir writer Denise Mina vividly describes in the following:

Glasgow has the highest per capita imprisonment rate anywhere in Western Europe. If you're working-class or lower-middle-class, you'll know somebody who's been in prison. There's a kind of socialist assumption in Glasgow. Everybody assumes that sticking it to the man is a good thing. They have a real respect for criminals. (qtd. in Rochlin par. 9)

With the depiction of Laidlaw as a man who is fallible just as any other human being, who understands the way people think, feel and act and who consciously rejects conventional value judgements, McIlvanney created a very likeable hero for Scotland. Thus, it is not surprising that *Laidlaw* has served as a role model for the following generation of Scottish writers who have fruitfully emulated, refined and propagated the genre of Tartan Noir.

It is important to recognise that Laidlaw's toughness as well as his compassion for the marginalised strongly reminds of the hardboiled American detective. In this context Gill Plain observes that "Scottish crime fiction emerges from a hybrid tradition that owes more to American than English popular culture" (Plain132). Hence, Scottish authors did not so much look to their English neighbours but rather looked to the West and got inspired by the American hard-boiled genre. Moreover, it should be noted that

[t]he hard-boiled school came about not in reaction against Golden Age fiction, or indeed as a result of any programme of rebellion, but simply as a separate and rival development in the USA – a country which was anyway bound to tire of borrowing from the Old World and to find its own voice. Chronologically speaking, the Golden Age and the hard-boiled era are the same period. Agatha Christie introduced Hercule Poirot in *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, which was published in 1921, the same year that saw on the other side of the Atlantic, the birth of *Black Mask*, the magazine that would nurture the hard-boiled school. (Ousby 92)

Apart from highlighting the fact that American hard-boiled fiction has developed as a separate sub-genre of crime, Ian Ousby also points to the fact that the popular genre was forged to give America its own unique voice. Hence, just as Scotland, America sought to counteract the cultural pre-eminence of England through the medium of literature. In the light of this

consideration, it is all the more interesting that Tartan Noir shares general key characteristics with the American hard-boiled mode.

As the flamboyant name of the genre already indicates hard-boiled fiction is tough. This main feature runs like a thread through all four essential characteristics of the American sub-genre. To be more precise, hard-boiled fiction is characterised by “a threatening and alienating urban setting” (Scaggs 56) in which the boundary between good and evil is blurred. The use of American vernacular in “fast-paced dialogue [...] attempt[ing] to capture the language of ‘the streets’” (Scaggs 56) presents the second main constituent since ‘the American way of fictive crime’ aims above all toward social realism. As the celebrated American crime writer and creator of popular detective Phillip Marlowe Raymond Chandler (1888-1959) observes when he describes the achievement of his role model Dashiell Hammett (1894-1961), the progenitor of the hard-boiled detective (see Scaggs 55):

Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-wrought duelling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the language they customarily used for these purposes. (Chandler 1988: 14)

The tough maverick detective, around whom the plot revolves and through whose eyes the world is perceived constitutes the third fundamental ingredient of the American sub-genre. “[Hard-boiled] detectives are hard-edged but honourable, tough-talking, blue-collar figures uncorrupted by power and intractably opposed to decadent forces of wealth” (Plain 133). Last but not least, it should be noted that the traditional hard-boiled mode “represents an assertion of both masculinity and national identity” (Plain 132).

It cannot be denied that the above outlined essential characteristics of the American hard-boiled mode closely correspond to the basic features of the Tartan Noir novel. It seems reasonable thus to assume that ‘Tartan’ crime writers have appropriated the sub-genre into a Scottish setting. The projection of social realism, as well the assertion of masculinity and national

identity after all perfectly fit in the literary discourse of Clydesideism, which sought to defy the traditional mythic representations of Scotland by focusing on the urban Scottish working class community, which came to be equated with 'real Scottishness'. Moreover, as Gill Plain insightfully explains, "[t]he alienated figure of the detective was a trope well suited to the articulation of opposition to Thatcherism, and from these polemical roots crime fiction developed into an ideal formula for investigating the state of Scotland" (133). However, Plain also alludes to the fact that "[t]he literary-political coalition between the tough-guy detective and the Scottish hard man is ultimately a limiting and destructive one, constructing Scottish masculinities as inevitably alienated, inarticulate and violent" (135). The following chapter is therefore dedicated to answering the question which inevitably arises at this point: To what extent, if at all, have women writers succeeded in transcending and transforming the genre to create their own unique discourse of postmodern and post-devolutionary Scottish identity?

### 3. Sisters in Crime: Engendering Hard-boiled Fiction

While the women were hunkered down with a fact, learning to live with it, the men were chafing against it. [...] Their righteousness was total. These were rough men. Several of them lived with violence as part of their life. One of them might like to talk of the time he'd met a safe-blower or had a drink with a well-known criminal. But there were crimes and crimes. And if you committed certain of them – like interfering with a child or raping a girl – they emasculated you in their minds. They made you a thing. (McIlvanney, *Laidlaw* 33)

As William McIlvanney strikingly demonstrates, the Tartan adaptation of the hard-boiled mode constitutes a potent vehicle for exploring 'Scottishness', which, as the passage clearly brings to the fore, has come to be ostensibly associated with the tough working-class macho male. Yet, if 'Scottishness' is conceived of as masculine, how do Scotswomen relate to their nation? In the article "Women and Nation" Susanne Hagemann observes that "there is no obvious connection between women and nationhood" (317). Berthold Schoene underlines this assertion suggesting that nationalism "is a profoundly gendered discourse that interpellates men as 'insiders' while at the same time excluding and quite literally alienating women" ("The union and Jack: British masculinities, pomophobia, and the post-nation" 83-4). In fact, as Lynn Abrams and Esther Breitenbach in the pioneering work *Gender in Scottish history since 1700* point out, women do not feature prominently in the traditionally male-centred Scottish historiography:

In the voices heard in the historical record, and in the gendered character of representations of Scottish national identity, there remains of course an asymmetry. Though women are not wholly absent, men (and maleness) are much more obviously present. Iconic figures have always been important to representations of national identity [...] In Scotland over the centuries, the figures of Wallace and Bruce have been reinterpreted to symbolise Scottish national identity in a manner fitting the political circumstances of the time – for example, both as the harbingers of the Union of 1707 and as symbols of separatism – and new iconic figures have also been constructed such as Burns, Scott, Livingstone and the heroes of Red Clydeside. (36)

Although women have been consistently excluded from Scotland's national narratives, national identity arguably constitutes the cultural category with the

most potent cohesive force. Anthony Smith notes that of all collective identities, national identity is the “most fundamental and inclusive” (174). Hence it follows that gender identity is not capable of fulfilling the same cohesive function as national identity:

[T]he very universality and all-encompassing nature of gender differentiation makes it a less cohesive and potent base for collective identification and mobilization. Despite the rise of feminism in specific countries, gender identity, which spans the globe, is inevitably more attenuated and taken for granted than other kinds of collective identity in the modern world. Geographically separated, divided by class and ethnically fragmented, gender cleavages must ally themselves to other, more cohesive identities if they are to inspire collective consciousness and action. (A. Smith 4)

A. L. Kennedy seems to share this view, summing up the situation of female Scottish writers, she powerfully asserts that “I am a woman, I am heterosexual, I am more Scottish than anything else and I write. But I don’t know how these things interrelate” (100). The renowned contemporary Scottish novelist is not alone in embracing her national identity. The following table illustrates that Scotswomen generally possess a strong national consciousness:

| <b>National Identity</b> | 1979 |     | 1992 |     | 1997 |     | 1997<br><i>Referendum</i> |     | 1999 |     |
|--------------------------|------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|---------------------------|-----|------|-----|
|                          | (%)  |     | (%)  |     | (%)  |     | (%)                       |     | (%)  |     |
|                          | M    | F   | M    | F   | M    | F   | M                         | F   | M    | F   |
| British                  | 43   | 34  | 28   | 22  | 25   | 22  | 21                        | 10  | 20   | 14  |
| Scottish                 | 53   | 60  | 69   | 74  | 71   | 73  | 79                        | 89  | 73   | 80  |
| <i>Sample Size</i>       | 325  | 336 | 445  | 512 | 410  | 472 | 309                       | 363 | 712  | 770 |

**Table 3: National Identity by Gender**

(Source: General Election Surveys, 2979, 1992, 1997; Scottish Referendum Survey, 1997; Scottish Parliamentary Election Survey, 1999. qtd. in McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: the sociology of a nation* 169)

Despite the fact that most women in Scotland define themselves as Scottish, they remain largely excluded from political decision-making, as Arthur McIvor observes:

[T]he ability to vote and open access to the institutions of power (e.g. local and national government) have not been translated into anything like near equal representation of women. In the mid- 1990s, only 9 per cent of British MPs were women (7 per cent Scottish). In the early 1980s, only 13.7 per cent of Scotland's 1,639 local councillors was female. Indeed, occupational segregation, the undervaluation of female labour and a domestic sexual division of labour within the home and family have remained persistent features of Scottish women's lives throughout this [the 20th] century. (McIvor 205)

In the light of these considerations, it seems all the more remarkable that contemporary Scottish women writers have successfully usurped the most masculine and nationalistic version of crime fiction. The members of this emerging group of female Tartan Noirists function as cultural diagnosticians as much as crime writers, unveiling the long neglected female slant on Scottish society. Their quest to break through the literary glass ceiling has been largely inspired by their female American colleagues whose novels have assumed a pioneering role in engendering the hard-boiled genre. It should be noted, however, that although the genre lends itself readily to social criticism, it has been anything but easy for women authors to penetrate the though sub-genre since it has come to serve as the playground for celebrating the non-conformist 'macho' hero while at the same time cementing the established patriarchal power. In his influential essay "The Simple Art of Murder" (1945), Raymond Chandler provides the arguably best description of the conception of the classical hard-boiled hero:

[D]own these mean streets a man must go who is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing, he is that in all things. (1973: 198)

"This potted schema is", as Sally Munt notes, "undoubtedly subjective" (3), expanding on the symptomatic emphasis on male protagonists in Anglo-American crime fiction she further observes that

[t]he overriding principle of the hero is that he is modelled on either an idealized self-projection or a respected friend of the author, who then becomes an icon of humanity: Man. [...] Women, if appearing at all, do not act, they *react* to primary characters – men. (4)

Basically, what was needed was “[t]o take on the genre; to rethink it, reformulate it, re-vision it” (Klein, *The Woman Detective*, 227). The wind of change heralded by the women rights movement of the 1960s provided the necessary impetus for authors to write authentic female experience back into the male-dominated pages of popular fiction:

As society has changed since the 1960s, we see parallel changes in the female detectives portrayed in novels. These changes include such things as looks, sexuality, attitude toward marriage, family and friends, as well as violence, patriarchal institutions and justice. (Hadley 9)

One of the first to rebel against the traditionally one-dimensional portrayal of women in popular fiction was the American academic and outspoken feminist, Carolyn Gold Heilbrun aka Amanda Cross, who with the creation of Kate Fansler in 1964, provided the antithesis of the stereotypical housewife and “the epitome of the feminist sleuth” (Swanson, James 55). Coming from a wealthy upper-class background and holding a prestigious post as a professor of English literature, Kate is an economically and intellectually independent woman. How little Kate has in common with the traditional image of the loving housewife surfaces in the following passage of the second book in the Kate Fansler series, *The James Joyce Murder* (1967):

I’m not very good at ladling out sympathy. I try to respond as sensibly and forthrightly as I can, but to tell you the truth, I’m not the motherly type. Of the students who don’t like me, and their numbers are legion, half say I’m as hard as nails and the other half that I’m cold as fish. They’re probably right. (Cross 142)

Apart from being celebrated as “ground-breaking regarding the feminist movement” (Hadley 108), Heilbrun’s depiction of Kate has also been criticised for being too soft-boiled. Indeed, as a woman of wealth, high social status, and profound educational background Kate Fansler could figure as Miss Marple’s American niece rather than a new hard-boiled heroine.

However, as Heilbrun points out in the following, the venture of overcoming gender barriers entails refined diplomacy:

Writing in 1963, the year of *The Feminine Mystique*<sup>8</sup>, I hardly dared to give my protagonist more than an independent life: she was a professional, she was rich, attractive, with sexual experience, and no wish to marry – eccentric enough at the period, but not so far out as to displease the conventional reader – and, alas, certainly not feminist. (123)

It was not until the appearance of *Edwin of the Iron Shoes* in 1977 that the first real female hard-boiled detective made her debut as Sharon McCone, whose innovative portrayal earned the award-winning American author Marcia Muller the title of the “founding ‘mother’ of the contemporary female hard-boiled private eye” (Swanson, James 156). The San Francisco based private investigator McCone is, just as her male predecessors, a tough, independent loner. As a woman she sees herself “as equal to her male fellow citizens” (Bertens, D’haen 19) yet is well aware of the gender bias prevalent in society. Thus, when Lt. Gregory Marcus, homicide detective in San Francisco, asks her whether she is “the woman who’s been investigating the arsons and vandalisms” (Muller 2), the first thing that comes to McCone’s mind is to brace herself “for one of the variants of the usual remark, along the lines of ‘what’s-a-nice-girl-like-you-doing-mixed-up-with-an-ugly-business-like-this?’” (Muller 2)

Muller’s feminised version of the hard-boiled mystery has served as a model for contemporary American women writers such as Sara Paretsky, creator of the acclaimed hard-boiled heroine V. I. Warshawski, who have successfully expanded, refined and disseminated the genre still further. Although women writing in the hard-boiled tradition have adapted the genre in terms of gender and thematic emphasis, they have emulated the basic elements of the classical male version. That is to say, almost all female hard-boiled stories unfold in dingy urban settings rife with profanity and explicit violence. Moreover, it is noteworthy that since Muller most of the American female

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<sup>8</sup> The publication of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 unchained the second wave of the feminist movement in America.

hard-boiled sleuths are depicted as lone heroines who live their lives isolated from their families. This strategy facilitates the heroines' independence as Sally Munt suggests:

Given that for women 'identity' is so bound up with relationships, as they are defined socially and psychically as a self-in-relation, this mechanism can be understood positively as proposing independence as an ideal. Relying on the liberal myth that solitary individuals can select and reject social roles at will[.] (49)

A further typical feature of the traditional hard-boiled mode which has entered the female version is the use of the first person narrative voice, which Klein sees as a powerful device for questioning the male monopoly on subjectivity:

The vehicle of crime fiction has enabled constructions of female identity and self-hood, modelled on the autobiographical "I" which has always worked well in the hard-boiled American tradition, interrogating the male "eye's" claim on the public domain, on the making and breaking of social codes, and on the exclusion of female subjectivity. Breaking genre taboos appears to have much in common with breaking the taboos of theoretical discourse. (Klein, *Diversity and Detective Fiction* 13)

However, as Susanne Hagemann points out, this does not mean that "texts by men are necessarily patriarchal and texts by women necessarily subversive" (317) or feminist. In fact, Marcia Muller and her successors do not ostensibly address feminist themes but pay attention to a wide range of social and political topics in which gender issues are implicated. Stephen Knight notes that "Muller and Sara Paretsky and their followers [...] link crimes domestic and crimes political in a way that is very familiar from a postcolonial reading, and even when the personal politics deal with separatist feminism and lesbianism [...] social politics are still strongly emphasised" (27).

The arguments presented clearly demonstrate that the once purely male hard-boiled genre has undergone a considerable make-over from the moment women used it as a vehicle for addressing deplorable political and social circumstances. This substantial evolution provides further proof of the genre's flexibility in that it is capable of sustaining a varied range of discourses. Thus, it is, as Mary Hadley points out, "eminently suitable as a

medium for discussion of serious themes, both feminist themes in particular and wider themes of social justice to which a feminist slant contributes” (5). Owing to its flexibility and popularity, the tough sub-genre of crime has been appropriated into myriad settings around the world acting as a popular mouthpiece for marginalised and discriminated groups. Patricia Plummer further expands this view:

The actual murder investigation becomes a prop in a plot which is more concerned with issues of gender, ethnicity and migration, the global vs. the local, and how these forces impact on and shape individual identities. These are matters that are fast becoming the actual sites of investigation in crime fiction, or at least in its more complex (and thus often less commercial) manifestation. (256)

All this considered, the most intriguing question still remains to be tackled. What happens when a bunch of creative Scotswomen set their hands to the hard-boiled genre?

### 3.1 Scottish Women Hard-boiled

Ian Rankin may have been crowned the king of Tartan Noir but it is the female brigade of Tartan Noirists who must be credited with bringing the genre to fruition. Being Scottish and being female, these writers unquestionably know what it is like to belong to a fringe group; an experience which is also reflected in their novels and which makes them an eminently compelling read. It is not surprising, therefore, that the tough female scribes from Scotland are appreciably gaining ascendance, enjoying international readerly as well as critical acclaim. Writing in *The New York Times* in an article powerfully entitled “The new Noir, not always by men or by Americans”, Margo Jefferson astutely comments that

[s]ome of the most original writers of this imported noir are women. Noir has always shown that greed and chaos are as close as the company we work for or the politicians we vote for. The best female writers are adding families to that list - with a vengeance. And if male writers have explored the eros of violence, these women explore the violence of eros. (Jefferson par. 9)

Hence, just as their male colleagues, female Scottish crime writers are committed to uncovering social inequities adding however topics which are more directly related to women, as Nicole Décuré points out:

In today's novel of detection, crime occurs and social and political problems are revealed. Women's novels deal more particularly with issues related to women's oppression: abuse, rape, pornography, prostitution, abortion, etc. (158)

Yet, there are also subtler ingredients which contribute a female touch to the traditional Scottish recipe of noir crime. The predominant use of a female focalizer casts a feminist eye on the condition of Scottish culture, going far beyond the scope of Clydesideism and transcending the encrusted Scottish literary tradition of male subjectivity. Indebted to social realism, female Tartan Noirists moreover aim to portray authentic female experience. That is to say, in order for the protagonists to be credible female Scots, they have to manage the balancing act between different social roles, as Scottish crime writer Denise Mina notes:

Crime is a very hard genre to feminise. If you have a female protagonist she is going to be looking after her mum when she gets older; she is going to be worried about her brother and sister; she will be making a living while bringing up kids. (qtd. in Guttridge par. 5)

Thus, although most of the Tartan Noir heroines are loners in the sense of being strong-minded, non-conformist individualists, their social background, their family and friends figure prominently in the novels as social ties play a pivotal role in Scottish culture. Moreover, the strong implication of the protagonists' private life adds an intense emotional dimension to the plot, as Ian Ousby suggests:

Female private eyes [...] are implicated much more deeply in their stories. Their cases come from their private lives in the first place, often from hearing that someone they know has got into trouble [...] In the female private-eye novels personal involvement is not just a convenience to get the story going but a signal that its theme will be the detective's own self-discovery and self-definition. She is not just there to solve a mystery but to learn about herself by understanding women from her family past better, or to see herself more clearly by comparing her life with the fate of women friends. (Ousby 186-187)

Yet, what really makes female Tartan Noir so unique and distinguishable from engendered versions of the American hard-boiled mode is its deep

connection with Scotland and her people. Scottish crime authors generally evoke “a strong sense of place, [...] they are not just Scottish writers, they are actually writing about Scottish backgrounds” (Fulton qtd. in Cornwell 1). That is to say, in comparison to female American hardboiled heroines, Tartan protagonists are much more openly nationalistic; a characteristic which is rarely ascribed to post-modern socialist feminists. Delving deep into the Scottish culture and the themes related to it, these female writers show an exceptional commitment to the Tartan nation as much as the postmodern woman and individual in general. Susan Mansfield fittingly describes this new engagement as “a kind of compassionate social realism, steeped in Glasgow and spearheaded by clever, resourceful women” (“Hack and slash on Glasgow streets” par. 1).

Thus, the issue of national identity is not avoided but tackled in an innovative – female way, inevitably and irrevocably subverting the ‘hardman’ stereotype which has come to epitomise Scottishness. Hard-writing chronicler of society’s darkest corners Denise Mina, bold mystery author Val McDermid and noir crime laureate Louise Welsh are the three leading exponents of the gendered Tartan Noir club. Being Scottish, female, hard-boiled and downright social, these authors are all labelled as contemporary female Tartan Noirists, yet their work, which is introduced in the following, gives also proof of the diversity within the genre.

### 3.1.1 Denise Mina: A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle

When Denise Mina asked her PhD supervisor whether she should “run off and be a crime writer” (qtd. in Rochlin 2) and he unequivocally replied, “if I were you, I would” (qtd. in Rochlin 2), her fate as a crime writer was sealed. However, for the young Glaswegian “it felt too frivolous to want to be a writer for fun -- [she] had done a law degree and always felt that [she] should do something socially useful” (Mina, “Sexual slavery in Glasgow” par. 7). Inspired by the socially critical novels of Bulgakov and Orwell (see Mina,

“Sexual Slavery in Glasgow” par.7), she transferred her academic knowledge on mental illness and female offenders to the realm of popular fiction and engineered a gritty Glasgow thriller which revolves around the hard-bitten, sexually abused ex-mental patient Maureen O’Donnell, who unflinchingly exposes domestic as well as institutional violence. Mina’s inexorably realistic portrayal of the flawed Scottish heroine with a drinking problem earned her a place among the best-selling Tartan Noir fold. In fact, her debut novel *Garnethill* (1998) won the John Creasey Memorial Award for the best first crime novel in 1998. Followed by the equally successful sequels *Exile* (2000) and *Resolution* (2002), the compelling thriller constitutes the first novel in the “brilliant but gruelling” (Guttridge par.2) *Garnethill* trilogy. However, Mina’s thirst for writing crime with an ardent social conscience has not been quenched yet. Just a year after the completion of the *Garnethill* trilogy, Mina creates her first stand-alone thriller, *Sanctum* (2003), published as *Deception* in the US. In this “elegantly engineered novel of psychological suspense [...] Mina executes a stunning shift of style and tone to come up with an entirely different perspective on her recurring theme -- that domestic dysfunction breeds criminal violence” (Stasio, “A Change of Scene” par.2). Soon after this riveting psychological thriller, Mina returns to writing a gritty, urban Tartan Noir series. *Field of Blood* (2005) presents the first in the five-book series featuring Paddy Meehan, “a spunky female reporter from Glasgow’s Irish Catholic working class, surrounded by a garrulous group of mostly Protestant, and drunken, male colleagues at the fictional Scottish Daily News” (D. Smith 1). So far Mina has published three novels of the acclaimed series, which purposefully exposes the reader to a riotous Glasgow of the 1980s and 1990s. Without doubt, Mina is a prolific writer who is eager to setting hands to a varied range of genres. Thus, her substantial work also comprises a number of short stories as well as comics and graphic novels. In fact, “she was the first woman writer to do 12 instalments of comic-book series Hellblazer” (Guttridge par. 10). As an inveterate Scottish socialist feminist, Mina does not even stop at subverting the poetic epitome of Scottish identity, Hugh MacDiarmid’s 1926 poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the*

*Thistle* to the highly successful drama *A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle* (2008). Mina's version of the 'national' monologue presents a masterly humorous, feminine yet notably Scottish deconstruction of the notion of national identity, which is exposed as a far too subjective concept in order to be of general validity. "The irony", as Mark Fisher poignantly notes, "is that the very act of analysing the country in this way is a particularly Scottish characteristic and, in its wit, irony and free-ranging allusions, *A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle* is nothing if not a Scottish play. An entertaining one at that" (par. 3).

Mina's work has justifiably received high critical acclaim. Thus, *The New York Times* praises *Garnethill* as a "shattering first novel [...] you can't look away from" (Stasio, "Crime" 1) whilst another review in *The Guardian* lauds Mina's debut for introducing "a striking new voice in the fertile hinterland of Scottish noir" (Jakubowski par.1) Her novels of crime have also made an impression on the king of Tartan Noir, Ian Rankin, who sees her as "one of the most exciting writers to have emerged in Britain for years" (qtd. in Wright par.3). Writing in *The New York Times*, Marilyn Stasio further observes that

Denise Mina's bold, brave crime novels make up for all the indignities women suffer in genre fiction — especially the notion that a female protagonist is better off being likable than being real. Mina smashed that false article of faith with her dead-grim *Garnethill* trilogy, featuring a hard-bitten heroine who fights the social conditions that lead to the abuse of women, children and the elderly in a Glasgow slum" (Stasio, "Dirty Work" par. 1)

With a penchant for serious, cutting-edge themes dressed in fast-paced mystery and jet-black humour, her novels can certainly be credited with being hard-boiled and downright social. Most importantly, however, her novels employ a strong female voice, by way of which Mina achieves to deconstruct traditional masculine notions of Scottishness while constructing unique discourses of postmodern female Scottish identities. Indeed, Mina's female characters reveal their own deep connection to their homeland, as the following passage from the second volume of the *Garnethill* trilogy, *Exile*, illustrates:

She was going home to Glasgow and for the first time remembered that she had a life beyond her present troubles. She loved the colours of the city, she had a place and history there, she understood the obscure kindness of the people and the rationale behind the brutal weather. She'd missed the cleanness of the air, the archaic turns of phrase and the rasping guttural speech. (*Exile* 396)

### 3.1.2 Val McDermid: Breaking Taboos

As has been argued elsewhere the hard-boiled genre is open to subversion and what can be more subversive than a Scottish “cynical socialist lesbian feminist journalist” (McDermid, *Report for Murder* 3). The extraordinary creation of a lesbian amateur private eye has been brought to startling life through the character of Lindsay Gordon, shaped by the Scottish crime writer Val McDermid, who is credited with being “the first British detective writer to have an overt lesbian as a protagonist” (Hadley 78). With her highly popular Lindsay Gordon series, which debuted with the critically and readerly acclaimed *Report for Murder* in 1987, “McDermid unveils the difficulties of being lesbian and the prejudices of our culture” (Hadley 12). Moreover, as a Scottish working-class socialist lesbian feminist, McDermid paints an unflinchingly realistic picture of Lindsay. “To some extent”, McDermid admits, “Lindsay is an alter ego. [...] So, like me Lindsay was Scottish, lesbian, feminist, broadly left in her politics and a journalist” (qtd. in Markowitz 136). However, Lindsay Gordon is not the only strong female character that has sprung from McDermid’s imagination. Eager to move the genre of crime in several directions, she is also responsible for launching the hard-boiled detective series centred on Kate Brannigan, a straight, modern professional sleuth and the acclaimed thriller series featuring Tony Hill, a sexually dysfunctional crime profiler, and his witty assistant police inspector Carol Jordan. In fact, the impotent hero’s debut in *The Mermaids Singing* (1992) earned McDermid the Gold Dagger Award for the best crime novel of the year.

Having grown up in a Scottish mining community and being a dedicated socialist, McDermid preferably sets her stories in urban working class districts. The feminist American urban noir spearheaded by Muller and Paretsky provided the creative impetus for McDermid:

The catalyst for me was Sara Paretsky's first novel, "Indemnity Only." A friend who was living in the U.S. sent me a copy of it, and it was just a revelation. Here was someone writing about contemporary women's lives that seemed to have a connection to the kind of lives that I saw around me. It had an urban setting and it had politics -- politics in a personal sense and in a wider social sense. It was almost like reading Paretsky gave me permission to try to write the same style of book. I could write contemporary urban novels that had a socio-political dimension, which is what I'd always wanted to do. That was really what pushed me into actually starting it. (McDermid qtd. in Taylor, "Kiss Miss Marple Goodbye" 1)

Thus, "[l]ike the other 1980s detective writers, McDermid used the medium of the detective novel to address societal problems and to broaden the scope of the genre" (Hadley 79). However, what distinguishes McDermid from most of her Tartan Noir colleagues is her explicit focus on the issue of sexual orientation. That is to say, McDermid boldly exposes the reader to her characters' sexual preferences by way of which she achieves to add depth to her characters and explore themes linked to homo- as well as heterosexuality. Hence, McDermid, as Hadley notes, purposefully "places Lindsay's lesbianism right at the forefront of her plots as she openly comments on her lustful feelings for various characters, demonstrates her sexuality, and shows the reader the implicit and explicit prejudices to which lesbians are subjected" (78). The straight heroine Kate Brannigan, on the other hand, is described to enjoy a monogamous and equitable relationship and the masculine hero Tony Hill is depicted as sharp-minded yet sexually impotent. On balance, one can safely assert that McDermid's feminist and lesbian appropriation of the tough mystery genre has pushed Tartan Noir to the cutting edge of postmodern topics.

### 3.1.3 Louise Welsh: Crossing Boundaries

Female Tartan Noir authors are hard-boiled and downright social yet they are also remarkably bold in their choice of subject matter and narrative perspective. In this respect the Glaswegian prose aesthete Louise Welsh has definitely excelled them all. In her intense and atmospheric debut thriller *The Cutting Room* (2002), she courageously explores the darkest side of pornography from the first-person perspective of a male homosexual Glaswegian auctioneer called Rilke. The masterly realisation of this unusually provocative mixture with a gothic flavour has propelled Welsh to immediate success. Celebrated “as the novelist who will finally make the difference between the genres of crime fiction and literary fiction disappear” (Lawson par. 1), *The Cutting Room* was awarded the Crime Writers' Association Creasey Dagger for the best first crime novel and the Saltire Society Scottish First Book of The Year Award. Welsh's second mystery masterpiece *Tamburlaine Must Die* (2004), which accompanies the renowned poet and dramatist Christopher Marlowe during his last days, proved no less challenging or successful. With the three-dimensional depiction of Marlowe as a bisexual, atheist and artist Welsh, again, has chosen to portray fictional reality through the eyes of a highly complex, ambiguous and downright human character. The reviewer Daniel Swift lauds the novella for being “informed by a thorough grasp of not only the day-to-day of Marlowe's life but also a sympathetic willingness to imagine the in-between” (Swift 3). In her third critically acclaimed noir thriller, *The Bullet Trick* (2006), Welsh conjures up the louche netherworld of the entertainment scene of Berlin, London and Glasgow, perceived through the eyes of the Glaswegian conjurer William Wilson. As in *The Cutting Room*, the novel delves deep into issues related to gender and sexual politics, inexorably portraying the exploitation of women in the entertainment business. Writing in *The Austin Chronicle*, Marrit Ingman compliments Welsh on her third noir novel stating that

the beauty is in Welsh's ability to construct a setting with spare, understated prose – a hardboiled patter successfully transplanted from Raymond Chandler's Los Angeles to dank, whiskey-soaked pubs, where depressive pensioners and other degenerate Glaswegians drink to disappear before the sun has finished rising. (1)

Louise Welsh stands out for her extraordinary choice of character, narrative perspective and topic. Yet, as unusual her choices at times may seem as natural they are because all these narrative ingredients align to unfold a unique discourse of its own. In an interview Welsh explains that “[t]he Cutting Room and The Bullet Trick are both to an extent exploring the objectification of women in pornography and entertainment, and so it is logical to follow the male protagonist’s gaze” (Freeman par. 7). Thus, Welsh cunningly employs the male voice to implicitly “give expression to often unheard female voices” (Freeman par.8). Moreover, Welsh’s discourses of gender and sexual politics are steeped in pure Scottishness in terms of setting and style. Hence, as Val McDermid notes, Welsh’s work “absolutely fits in with Scottish crime fiction, which has its own flavour. It’s more interested in the psychology, the why somebody commits a crime and how others respond, coupled with a very black sense of humour that is very much part of the Scottish psyche” (Freeman par. 6).

Although only a glimpse into the work of the three major female Tartan Noirists has been granted, the information presented clearly illustrates that the Scottish sisters in crime, Denise Mina, Val McDermid and Louise Welsh are writing crime with a strong social conscience by foregrounding ardent social themes linked to women, Scotland and postmodern society. Drenched in gritty social realism, their novels offer cutting-edge social and political commentaries on postmodern Scotland. What else can be meaningfully said about the work of these contemporary female Tartan Noirists is yet to be discovered in their texts. The chapters to come will therefore turn to examine the social themes raised in Denise Mina’s riveting *Garnethill*, Val McDermid’s naughty *Hostage to Murder* and Louise Welsh’s groundbreaking *The Cutting Room*, unveiling what Tartan Noir “has to offer to the study of contemporary representations of [Scottish] women and the social issues that affect them” (Klein, *Diversity and Detective Fiction* 6).

#### 4. The Importance of Being Scottish in Female Tartan Noir

This is my country  
 The land that begat me.  
 These windy spaces  
 Are surely my own.  
 And those who here toil  
 In the sweat of their faces  
 Are flesh of my flesh  
 And bone of my bone. (Gray par.3)<sup>9</sup>

##### 4.1 A Sense of Place: Re-presenting Glasgow

"Modern Scottish identity is much more firmly allied to a sense of place than to a sense of tribe - 'I am a real Scot from Bathgate' has much more resonance than 'I am a real Scot because my granny was a real Scot'" (107). Christopher Smout's observation, which has come to be widely supported and actively exploited by the Scottish intelligentsia, suggests that Scottish identity is defined territorially rather than ethically. Hence, the assertion of a Scottish national identity inevitably involves the assertion of a sense of place. This territorially bound representation of nationalism has found a strong echo in the works of contemporary Tartan scribes, who, in the course of constructing as well as de-constructing the concept of national identity, have unswervingly sought to mediate the meaning of Scottishness as closely as possible. Glasgow, which stands for "the particular, in many ways terrible, nature of the urban experience" (Whyte 317), has come to occupy a notable place in the space of Scotland's national narratives. Despite epitomising Scottish socialist working-class struggle and post-industrial disillusionment, Glasgow has earned a strong reputation of being the stronghold of an urban 'booze and blade culture', as Paul Kelbie writing in *The Independent* informs:

Scotland's soaring murder rate is blamed on a "booze and blade" culture among the young. According to the statistics, there were 127 homicide victims in Scotland in 2002, 11 more than in 2001 and the highest annual total since 1996. In more than half of those murders a sharp instrument was used and in at least 44 per cent of cases the

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<sup>9</sup> This stanza of Sir Alexander Gray's poem, entitled *Scotland*, is inscribed on the Canongate Wall of the Scottish Parliament building.

accused was drunk. In 10 per cent of cases, the accused was on drugs and in 15 per cent of cases, drunk and on drugs. [...] For years Glasgow has tried to live down the "No Mean City" reputation of 1930s when gangs armed with razors fought pitched battles in the streets. But authorities now fear that the gangland culture is making a comeback. (1)

In the light of these facts, the setting of Glasgow is meaningful, not only physically, as Scotland's urban heartland, but also ideologically in relation to identity, language, class and politics. It goes without saying that novels set in Glasgow are bound to sparkle with hard-edged realism. It is not surprising, therefore, that the socio-cultural phenomenon of Scotland's largest city figures prominently in contemporary Tartan Noir novels.

Glasgow also constitutes Denise Mina's fictional turf. In fact, as the title of her arresting debut novel, *Garnethill* (1998), already intimates "[h]er writing is imbued with a keen sense of place" (D. Smith 1). Right in the heart of Glasgow, Garnethill denotes a district which ranks among neither the best nor the worst of places in the Tartan cityscape. Situated 'in between' yet still 'above' Glasgow's epicentre, Garnethill strikingly parallels the entrapment as well as superiority of the novel's rebellious protagonist, Maureen O'Donnell, whose life seems inexorably intertwined with the bleak metropolis: "Her flat was at the top of Garnethill, the highest hill in Glasgow, and the craggy North Side lay before her, polka-dotted with cloud shadows" (Mina, *Garnethill* 9). It is noteworthy that for her compelling portrayal of Glasgow, Mina purposefully employs a third-person focalizer, envisioning the city ostensibly from Maureen's point of view. Consequently, the perception granted is that of a despairing yet struggling young woman, who, painfully aware of her Catholic working-class and highly dysfunctional background, does not dare to hope for happiness. It is a sobering, at times deeply depressing, yet downright unvarnished take on Glasgow, which not only suits the genre but also betrays an ideological stance. To be more precise, although Mina gives account of the manifold faces of contemporary Glasgow, the industrial, the commercial, the bourgeois, the working-class as well as the criminal Glasgow, the face which surges through most powerfully is that of the dim, post-industrial,

somehow hopelessly wasted, Glasgow, inhabited by legions of petty criminals, deadbeats and depressed individuals vainly trying to escape the grim reality of postmodern urban life by way of excessive consumption. In short, it is the depiction of a city in decay which uncovers the tragic side effects of neo-liberalism and the economy of consumption and in this way impressively complements the stranded existence of the characters, particularly that of Maureen:

She took a cut-off to the High Street and walked down to the Pizza Pie Palace, a badly Americanized restaurant destined for insolvency from the first. The walls were varnished red brick, hung with chipped tin adverts for cigarettes and gasoline. Two battered papier-mâché cacti stood on either side of the door. The bonnet of a Cadillac had been unwisely attached to the wall just above the till, at forehead level. She could see Leslie sitting at a table at the back of the room, still wearing her battered biker's leathers, with two enormous cocktails in front of her and a cigarette in her hand. (Mina, *Garnethill* 14)

The decaying face of Glasgow is reinforced by, at times seemingly apocalyptic, references to the city's virtual nemesis:

It was a brisk, sunny day. The light in Scotland is low in the autumn, gracing even the most mundane objects with dramatic chiaroscuro. Deep hard shadows from tall buildings fell across the streets, litter bins stood on the pavement like war monuments, and pedestrians cast John Wayne show-down shadows as they stood at the traffic lights, waiting to cross the road. They drove west up Bath Street, passing alternately through withering puddles of shade and warming blasts of sunshine, heading up to a drive-through burger place at the poor end of the Maryhill Road. Maureen hadn't been here for a few months and the area had suddenly become desolate. Subsiding buildings had been bolstered up or else abandoned, their windows and doors boarded up with fibreglass. The city surveyors had always known there was an ancient mine there; they thought it was safe but the medieval miners had left weaker struts in it than they had supposed. Maryhill was falling into a five-hundred-year-old hole. (Mina, *Garnethill* 166)

The portrayal of Glasgow as a derelict city marked by economic insustainability, excessive consumerism, collective paternalism and vacuity of meaning is further underpinned by Maureen's contemplation of a shabby shopping space:

Given that arcades are the poor precursor to shopping malls, this was a poor arcade: it was full of fancy-goods stores, 99p shops, with

window displays of discount toilet rolls, and frozen-food shops. Many of the units were empty to let. A small central place was furnished with benches and fake trees stuck in large pots. The pots had been used routinely as ashtrays and were full of cigarette ends and greasy ash. Above, a clear Perspex roof lit the resting shoppers in an unflattering splat of light. (Mina, *Garnethill* 167-68)

The passage relentlessly draws attention to urban planning in Glasgow which is exposed to forsake and displace individual freedom for capitalist interests. In fact, the very definition and purpose of 'urban planning' in capitalist society lays bare the inevitability of its social failure:

Urban planning is a response to the imperative of collective action in the urban system, and yet it cannot transgress the very social relationships from which it is derived. It is, in short, a mode of intervention that is only implemented when it serves the specific interests of capitalism [...] The capitalist State is thus caught up in a constantly escalating spiral of urban interventions. (Dear and Scott 14-15)

Michael Dear and Allen Scott also point to the paradoxical nature of the urban experience embedded in a capitalist system. That is to say, while capitalism implies the access to private property, the city implies collective space. In addition, the access to accumulate wealth, despite of a freely regulated market, remains bitterly unjust which leads to the unequal distribution of wealth and the division of the city into rich and poor, segregating the blue- from the white-collar class. Consequently, the working-class urban experience is doomed to be characterized by sheer disillusionment, as Friedrich Engels in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* notoriously observes:

The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive, the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space. And, however much one may be aware that this isolation of the individual, this narrow self-seeking is the fundamental principle of our society everywhere, it is nowhere so shamelessly barefaced, so self-conscious as just here in the crowding of the great city. (Engels 64-65)

Without doubt, class tensions, social inequality and individual disillusionment also surface in Mina's portrayal of Glasgow as the story revolves around the highly marginalised, ex-mental patient, Maureen, and her similarly

unconventional friends. At this point it is worthy of mention that by way of Maureen's sense of place Mina not only projects the urban experience of Glasgow's 'underclass' but also strongly sympathises and sides with the unpropertied and underprivileged. This, she also achieves by strategically placing her characters within Glasgow. Thus, Maureen's closest friend, the warm-hearted, socially committed and loyal working-class Scot Leslie inhabits the poorest area in the north of the city, of which Mina renders a dystopian yet oddly poetic description:

The veranda overlooked a patch of wasteground with irregularly undulating hillocks, bald and strewn with litter. Children were shouting and chasing each other around, apparently without purpose, as a flamingo pink sunset bled into the navy blue night" (Mina, *Garnethill* 149).

In striking contrast to Leslie, Elsbeth, widow of Maureen's ex-boyfriend Douglas, resides in the noble West End of Glasgow. On accompanying Elsbeth after Douglas's death to her "tasteful West End apartment" (*Garnethill* 63), Maureen reveals her view on the bourgeois area:

As they neared the university the driver turned the cab off the Great Western Road into a crescent street. It was lined with elegant blond sandstone tenements on one side; on the other ornate cast-iron railings barred the steep drop to the river Kelvin. Elsbeth [...] opened the security door into a close with shimmering green tiles up to shoulder height topped off with a border of *pseudo-Mackintosh roses*. *The fancy tiling ceased abruptly on the first floor*, replaced by green gloss. [emphasis added] (Mina, *Garnethill* 58-59)

By drawing attention to the 'pseudo-Mackintosh roses' and the sudden breach of style on the first floor, Maureen, despite acknowledging the elegance of the borough, alludes to the hypocrisy and inauthenticity of the 'upper' class, again disclosing her allegiance to the working-class and the needy. Hence, Maureen's Glasgow is a city where social inequality sticks out like a sore thumb. This view also surfaces in her depiction of the domestic violence shelter: "The reserve funding was running out rapidly now and the house looked shoddy in comparison to its neighbours. It stood out in the elegant street of terraced houses like a meatball in caviar" (Mina, *Garnethill* 157). Mina undeniably displays an empathetic social awareness of Glasgow as she mediates the Scottish urban experience in vivid detail. Hence, she

does not fall short to capture the true flavour of Glaswegian working-class life even in relation to food, as Maureen and her friends rejoice in eating uniquely Scottish combinations of junk food, such as ice cream spooned into Irn Bru and generally live on cheap greasy meals which Mina depicts in relentless detail:

Liam squeezed watery tomato sauce from the plastic bottle on his plate of chips. [...] He watched his sister steer oily rivulet away from her chips and beans into a safe empty space the side of the plate. She dabbed it off with a paper napkin. 'I can see', he said, 'that you're used to eating in top-class restaurants such as this one.' [...] She cut a bite out of the bridie and put it in her mouth. It hadn't been microwaved properly and undissolved fat still clung to the slimy inside of the cold pastry wall. (Mina, *Garnethill* 69- 72)

As a final point, it is especially noteworthy that "Maureen's favourite building in Glasgow" (Mina, *Garnethill* 365) is the Luma Light Bulb Factory (1938) which constitutes one of the rare examples of modernist architecture in the Scottish metropolis:

She sat down at a table and looked out over the neo-Gothic university building, down to the river, past Govan airport, looking for the light-bulb factory far to the west, next to the motorway. It's possibly the most beautiful building in Glasgow. (Mina, *Garnethill* 138).

The inner discourse not only illustrates Maureen's yearning for clarity and authenticity but also encapsulates the protagonist's ideological position, as Modernism is a movement informed by reason, revolution as well as a Marxist perspective on aesthetics:

Modernist architecture was the clearest link between cultural modernism and the 18<sup>th</sup> century idea of modernity. It denounced the age for its timidity and nostalgia, its constant revival of past styles, as neo-classicism and neo-Gothicism [...] Form should reflect function; there was no useless ornamentation. (Kumar 98)

Apart from symbolising radical renewal, Modernism, as Neil Leach notes, "resists easy definition. Indeed, the provisionality of modernism, its fragmentary nature and constant search for progress and new form, would seem to preclude any totalizing definition" (3). In view of these arguments, Mina's references to various historical stages and aesthetic forms of expression, such as the 'neo-Gothic university building' and the 'modernist

light-bulb factory', can be read in terms of identity and nation, underpinning the sheer impossibility of delimiting a concept for a specific Scottish cultural identity as well as arguing for the abandonment of past concepts for the sake of true social progression.

Glasgow also constitutes the seedy playground for Louise Welsh's atmospheric first novel, *The Cutting Room* (2002). Her noir Glasgow performs a spectacular striptease to reveal its most basic and brutal form, showing itself as the stronghold of the self-indulgent celebration of egotism, rife with profane amusement and hardcore violence. As Rilke's acquaintance, the drug dealing transvestite Leslie notes, "You know, Glasgow imports more baseball bats than any city in Britain, and there's not a single baseball team in town" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 164). Essentially, "Welsh's feel for the Glasgow cityscape" (McDowell 1) hinges on the protagonist's limited perspective. A passionate auctioneer of 43, Rilke, has acquired the ability to expertly identify and inspect man made objects, which, correctly read, yield insight into the most intimate secrets of their proprietors. Equipped with "the skill of a searcher" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 20) and years of experience as a self-indulgent, gay hedonist, Rilke takes the reader on an unsettling journey through Glasgow's ruthless underworld, exploring the most hidden chambers of the city's consciousness. As objects come alive, "the city becomes a character in its own right; Gothic, dismal, decaying and frightening in equal measure" (Johnstone par. 3). Right from the outset, Welsh evokes the noir side of Glasgow as she sublimely draws a parallel to Robert Louis Stevenson's gothic depiction of London by pointing to the two-facedness and ambivalence of the city and its inhabitants: "I hate Hyndland. You'll find its like in any large city. Green leafy suburbs, two cars, children at public school and boredom, boredom, boredom. Petty respectability up front, intricate cruelties behind closed doors" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 2). Just as Mina, Welsh offers an unremittingly pessimistic view of Glasgow. Throughout the novel, the Tartan metropolis is portrayed as a place of rampant consumption

awash with loners addicted to sex, drugs and gambling. Perhaps even more impressively, she conjures up the brute image of a decadent city in decay:

I veered right and took a turn round the fountain. It had been erected as a tribute to the man who brought fresh water from Loch Katrine to the city of Glasgow. It stood there dry, derelict and neglected. Rain, beating an irregular tattoo against the rubbish, gathered in its through, graffiti sprayed across its statuary and enamelled zodiac plaques. I examined the most recent legends. *God is Gay, SEX Credit cards accepted, Nicholson bangs monkeys*. [...] I turned my back on the fountain, walked past the kids' playground and towards the duckpond. Litter lined its border, shreds of the day. Crisp packets, juice bottles and no doubt not a few condoms. Everywhere I could sense decay. The pigeons were roosting on a skeletal willow poised above the water. Grey, tattered feathers fluffed out to protect them from the rain. Winged rats. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 27-28)

As the passage clearly illustrates, Welsh masterly translates gothic imagery into a contemporary hard-boiled setting, creating a gripping narrative of space loaded with aesthetic as well as political valence. Thus, the image of the dried out fountain covered in debris of consumption powerfully alludes to the emptiness and transitory nature of sensual pleasures. In other words, Welsh's Glasgow is a postmodern city marked by the detrimental effects of a throwaway society. It is racist, sexist, homophobic, fanatically religious and atheistic as much as it is diverse, liberal and agnostic. In fact, it seems that almost anything can be bought, sold, thrown away and recycled:

We slipped through a fluorescent white tunnel, then climbed high over the city on the curving expressway; the River Clyde oil-black and still beneath us, a backdrop to the reflected lights of the city; the white squares of late-night office work; traffic signals drifting red, amber, green, necklaces of car headlamps halting then moving in their sway [...] scarlet neon sign of the *Daily Record* offices suspended in the dark sky to our right [...] On the radio a Marilyn Monroe sound-alike whispered an invitation to an Indian restaurant, where her voice intimidated, she would fuck and then feed you. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 98-99)

Welsh's Glasgow, Alan Bissett poignantly observes, resembles "a perpetual simulacrum which, as Welsh intimates through her reference to Monroe, promises and commodifies sexuality as a consumer good as much as it recycles literally 'dead' images" (61). Figuratively speaking, Welsh thematises the constantly evolving process of constructing and negotiating

identity through past images as well as the objectification of women for commercial purposes and the perpetuation of stereotypical images of womanhood.

Apart from picturing the city as a commercial place “choked with litter” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 66), Welsh also references Glasgow’s metamorphosis from Scotland’s industrial heartland to a post-industrial consumer-based metropolis:

At Charing Cross I was absorbed into the late-afternoon tide of office workers. Here, then, was sanity. The industrial age had given way to a white-collar revolution and the sons and daughters of shipyard toilers now tapped keyboards and answered telephones in wipe-clean sweatshops. They shuffled invisible paper and sped communications through electronic magic. Dark suits trampled along Bath Street, past the storm-blasted spire of Renfield St Stephens, home to prepare for another day like the last and another after that. Cars crept at a sluggish pace towards curving slip roads and the motorway miles below, where three lanes of paralysed traffic shimmered in a heat haze. Buses forced their way to obedient queues of defeated commuters [...] Elevator buildings that inspired the Chicago skyline disgorged men and women crumpled by the day, some barely a step from the door before they lit their first fag of freedom [...] And all around me mobile phones. People talk, talk, talking to a distant party while the world marched by. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 65)

“Dark suits” trampling along Bath Street, “obedient queues of defeated commuters”, “men and women crumpled by the day”, all these images intimate that the victory of the service economy over the manufacturing economy is not to be understood as progress but as social defeat, unleashing the fragmentation and ultimately the alienation of the individual. In this way, Welsh attacks the Thatcher policies of the 80s for displacing Scotland’s traditional culture and instigating its cultural eclipse. “Here, then, was sanity”, mocks Rilke and criticises yet also pities the wave of people caught up in the spiral of capitalist demands. However, the culminating vision in the passage is that related to vice – “some barely a step from the door before they lit their first fag of freedom” – by way of which Welsh insinuates that vice and self-destructive behaviour is the only freedom left to those enslaved by the system.

It is clear from these observations that Welsh's Glasgow is a temple of corruption, consumerism, materialism, and the commercialisation, thereby also objectification, of previously elusive concepts such as identity and love. According to Alan Bissett, "*The Cutting Room*, then, is thematically more Marxist even than many novels by Kelman, as every relationship in the novel is mediated through the exchange of money" (62).

Unlike Denise Mina's and Louise Welsh's bleak take on post-industrial Glasgow, Val McDermid offers a bright outlook on the current state of the city. In her *Hostage to Murder* (2003) she envisions Scotland's former industrial capital as a cosmopolitan metropolis. Thus, for McDermid's feminist protagonist, Lindsay Gordon, Glasgow is

one of the most exciting cities in Britain. [...] The cultural life was vibrant. The restaurants were cosmopolitan and covered the whole range from cheap and cheerful to glamorous and gourmet. There were plenty of beautiful places to live, and more green spaces than most cities could boast. Some of the finest countryside in the world was within an hour's drive. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 3-4)

This view certainly corresponds with that held by the Glasgow City Council which asserts that "Glasgow 1990 was part of 'an evolutionary process' and 'a well-managed campaign' by which the city moved from being characterised by having some of Europe's severest social and housing problems in Europe to becoming a City of Culture" (Gold 231). Essentially, it is this time of transformation which McDermid captures for Glasgow is depicted as a city in flux; a city struggling to shed its reputation as a regressive, dangerously sexist and dismally homophobic place. Consequently, although tenacious stereotyping and prejudices towards the gay community have not been fully eradicated, the city projected in McDermid's *Hostage to Murder* has undergone drastic social changes since the turn of the millennium:

'You know Café Virginia? In the Merchant City, down by the Italian Quarter?' Lindsay nodded. It hadn't been a gay venue when she'd lived in the city. It had been a bad pub that sold worse food, called something stupidly suggestive like Pussy Galore. But she was aware that it had been reincarnated as the city's premiere gay and lesbian

café bar, although she hadn't paid it a visit yet. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 12-13)

In striking contrast to Glasgow, Belfast is portrayed as a starkly unprogressive, parochial city, heavily traumatised by the atrocities that have been committed:

Morning rain on the Falls Road, grey sky only half a shade lighter than gunmetal; a comparison that still came too easy to too many people in Belfast. Ceasefires, peace deals, referendums and still it caught people by surprise that the disasters on the news were happening some other place. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 16)

The diverging images of the cities are further fuelled by the differing portrayals of a conservative Belfast betting shop and the innovative, Glaswegian Café Virginia:

To the uninformed eye, just a busy Belfast betting shop, nothing to differentiate it from any other. Odds were chalked up on whiteboards, sporting papers pinned to walls, tiled floor pocked with cigarette burns. The clientele looked like the unemployed, the unemployable and the retired. Every one of them was male. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 17)

Café Virginia was suffering its daily identity crisis in the hiatus between the after-work drinkers and the evening players. The music had shifted into more hardcore dance, making conversation difficult, and there was a strange mixture of outfits on display, from business suits to T-shirts that clung to nipples and exposed midriffs (35) [...] The bar area occupied the front of the café, but beyond she could see a bigger room. Wooden booths lined the back wall, but the rest of the space was occupied with round metal tables and Italian-style chairs with slender chrome legs. At two of the tables, lone women sat with coffee cups, cigarettes and newspapers. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 50-51)

Thus, McDermid underscores Glasgow's newly found diversity by comparing it to Belfast's stagnating, patriarchal cultural life. It is interesting to note, however, that for the Irish petty criminal and henchman to the novel's chief villain, Kevin O'Donohue, Glasgow equals Belfast: "Kevin followed Michael out into the street sniffed the air like a dog in a new wood. 'So this is Glasgow', he said. 'It's not that different, is it?' There was a note of disappointment in his voice" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 59). By way of the character's different views on Glasgow, McDermid implicitly points to the

various, simultaneously existing yet also shifting identities of the Tartan metropolis. Glasgow's different faces, in particular the young, postmodern, the patriarchal, working-class and the post-industrial face, also surface in the following passage in which the Irish gangster duo, Kevin O'Donohue and Michael Conroy, comb through the city's bars and pubs:

They'd explore pubs ranging from raucous student bars with loud insistent music to more traditional pubs where old men nursed their pints with the tenderness of new mothers [...] They walked back through streets shared with drinkers heading home, the air aromatic with curry and fish suppers, to the scruffy B&B where they were inconspicuous among the transient workers and DSS claimants who made it their home. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 60-61)

Despite abundant references to the various facets and identities of Glasgow, the image which is propagated most is the bohemian, for the novel's protagonist and main focal character, Lindsay, proudly inhabits the Glaswegian West End, a district known to house Scotland's educated, open-minded, left-liberal intelligentsia who are keen to distinguish themselves from conservative philistinism:

Lindsay drove out through the south side of the city towards the prosperous suburb of Milngavie. She never failed to be struck by the contrasts in Glasgow, even between areas that superficially seemed to have much in common. The average income in Milngavie was probably only marginally above that in the smart part of the West End where she and Sophie lived. But, culturally, it felt like a different world. The West End had traditionally been more genteel, drawing its residents from the academics at the university and the medical staff at the city's hospitals. Now, it had added media, IT professionals and the arts to mix, making it a place where Lindsay felt as at home as she was ever going to be. But Milngavie had always felt more culturally barren. The money here came from retail empires, from accountants, from people who preferred Andrew Lloyd Weber to Mozart or the Manic Street Preachers. The difference was obvious to her even in the architecture. This was the land of bungalows and detached houses, where to inhabit a semi was somehow to have failed. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 86-87)

In fact, Glasgow's West End presents Lindsay's adoptive home as the character originally has grown up on the Highland peninsula Kintyre. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that despite her being a cosmopolitan urbanist, Lindsay is shown to possess a strong national feeling and a

particularly deep bond to the place she has grown up in. Thus, for Lindsay the Kintyre peninsula is “one of the most beautiful places on the planet” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 147):

The heather was turning purple on the hills, and the familiar grandeur of the landscape made Lindsay feel at home as the city never would. She recognized her membership of the national trait of sentimentality for her native land, but she didn't care. The sense of ownership she felt driving through Argyll to the Kintyre peninsula was something that could never be taken from her. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 146)

The fact that Lindsay feels Scottish to the core yet refuses to dwell in “sentimentality for her native land” points to an innovative engagement with the concept of Scottish identity within a contemporary, globalised context and clearly breaks with the traditional discourse of Scottish nationalism. Thus, “in spite of her attachment to the land. She couldn't live here. She'd known that since her early teens. She needed wider horizons, different responsibilities” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 344). In the light of these considerations, her choice to live in the ‘bohemian’ quarter of Glasgow is significant as it marks her as an educated, progressive and self-determined Scottish woman who embraces the city's new plurality. Hence, on balance, one can assert that McDermid's representation of Glasgow clearly makes a case for a new, more cosmopolitan image of the post-industrial metropolis by purposefully transcending traditional parochial as well as patriarchal representations of Scottish identity.

#### 4.1.1 Language, Class and Attitude

Being Scottish comprises more than a place of birth; it is, above all, lived experience, or to be more precise a state of mind, which expresses itself most notably in terms of language, class and attitude. These three social phenomena are inextricably interconnected and closely linked to a particular place. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the quest for national self-assertion within an English dominated union the ‘rough patter’ of Glasgow's street has entered fiction to make Scottishness literary real. Thus, “at the same time as Thatcher was attempting to discredit the language of class,

Scottish writers were finding radical and innovative ways to redraw, redefine and re-assert its fundamental importance” (McGuire 94). Spearheading the movement, writers such as William McIlvanney, James Kelman and Irvine Welsh have set a new linguistic benchmark for Scottish contemporary fiction. However, their literary appropriation of the vernacular ostensibly facilitated to encode the Scottish ‘hardman’ stereotype and thus inevitably lead to a marginalising effect in relation to gender, race and sexual orientation, as Kirstin Innes in her essay entitled on “Identity and Language in the Post-*Trainspotting* Novel” highlights:

The much-feted new visibility of Scottish culture, which coincides with the working-class male’s literary enfranchisement, appears to be won at the expense of women, gay men and ethnic minorities, whose voices are silenced by the new literature’s blatant misogyny, homophobia and racism. (Innes 303)

In the light of these considerations, the linguistic as much as narrative choices of contemporary female Scottish authors are all the more interesting as these may well encapsulate Scottishness in different, novel ways and in this sense also provide useful diagnostic measures for social changes in Scottish culture.

If William McIlvanney has given “working-class life the vote in the literature of heroism” (McIlvanney, *Docherty* xviii), Denise Mina can definitely be said to have given voice to the previously unheard, marginalised females behind Scottish working-class experience. In her novel *Garnethill* she brings into focus a female working-class Catholic as the prime centre of the story’s “perspectival orientation” (Jahn N.3.2). That is to say, throughout most of the novel, Mina inexorably mediates Maureen O’Donnell’s world on her own terms. To be more precise, Maureen’s perception is rendered through a narrative voice which enlivens the character of Maureen via an idiom bristling with language steeped in Glasgow. Hence, Mina, like Kelman, infuses the narrative voice with Scottish working-class language and in this way masterly blurs the boundary “between the language of narration and the language of dialogue” (Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* 101). Although Mina does not

reproduce 'Glasgow patter' in its totality, she achieves to recreate an authentic, credible and socially realistic approximation of working-class urban Scots. The recipe, in part redolent of Kelman's linguistic mix, is simple and highly effective: Mina blends a good measure of Glaswegian vernacular with Standard English and wraps it in mordant banter and jet-black humour. The following presents just a small selection of the wealth of Scottish words on parade within the narrative text as well as the direct discourse: polis (police), hen (affectionate term for women), aye (yes), wee (small), teuchter (country person, a Highlander), lassie (girl), canny (cannot), gutties (underpants), gutted (highly disappointed), ginger (fizzy lemonade), messages (shopping). Apart from exhibiting a strong feel for common Glaswegian terms, Mina also proves to have a good ear for the 'banter' rooted in Glasgow. Indeed, the noir wit of the voice encoded in *Garnethill*, which frequently draws on highly original and very Tartan similes, provides exhilarating comic relief amidst the relentlessly nasty reality of Glasgow. Thus, Maureen's relationship with Douglas, which in her view equalled "[e]ight long months of emotional turmoil", is said to have "passed as suddenly as a fart" (Mina, *Garnethill* 9), a bronzed complexion is graphically depicted as "tanned like a tea bag" (Mina, *Garnethill* 274) and the ex-girlfriend of Maureen's brother Liam is described as "rough as a badger's arse" (Mina, *Garnethill* 27-28). As the last example illustrates, Mina does not shy away from using expletives. In fact, linguistic vulgarisms in contemporary Scottish literature, also known as "Kelmanisms" (Talib 30), have come to emblematically represent Scottish working-class culture in defiance against Conservative snobbishness. In *Garnethill* Mina cunningly takes this attitude a step further as she endows her female characters with as much rough language and repartee as their male counterparts, effectuating the subversion of the 'hardman' stereotype:

A shiny-faced young waiter came over to the table and interrupted Leslie's pizza order to tell her he thought leathers were sexy. Leslie blew a column of smoke at him. 'Get us a fucking waitress', she said, and watched as he walked away.

'Leslie', said Maureen, 'you shouldn't speak to people like that. He doesn't know what he's done to offend you.'

'Fuck him, he can work it out for himself. And if he can't, well, he'll be offended and that makes two of us.'

'It's rude. He doesn't know what he's done.'

'You are correct, Mauri,' she said, 'but I think that the important lesson for our young friend to learn is that I'm a rude woman and he should stay the fuck out of my face.' (Mina, *Garnethill* 14-15)

Thus, Mina not merely renders a general description of Scottish 'underclass' life but specifically focuses on the female Scottish 'underclass', who are as much a part of postmodern Glaswegian working-class culture as their male counterparts:

Three tiny girls were playing at skipping ropes out the back. They stopped and stared at Maureen. The we-est girl had a square head too big for her body and thin, wispy baby hair, pulled up into a ponytail at the top of her head. She was dressed in a pale pink skirt and a red woolly jersey with bleach scars on the sleeve. Her mouth was stained with orange juice. Maureen made a silly face at her. She blushed, giggled and pulled her skirt up to cover her juice-stained face.

'That's wee Magsie', said Leslie. 'She's three and a half. Aren't ye, wee teuchie?'

Wee Magsie kept her skirt over her face and giggled shyly, rocking from side to side.

'Yes,' said the biggest girl, who could only have been seven. 'I'm her big sister and I've to look after her today.'

Wee Magsie ran away.

'Don't be fucking stupid, wee Magsie,' shouted her big sister, running after her and dragging her back. She spat into a tissue and wiped at the orange stains on wee Magsie's face. Magsie held onto her sister's jersey with both hands and grinned as her face was roughly scrubbed.

'See that?' said Leslie. 'They're wee mammies before they stop being kids.' (Mina, *Garnethill* 147-148)

The unflinchingly realistic portrayal of the conditions of the young female urban 'underclass' as well as the allusion to their predestined future intimate the novel's main thematic concern, namely that of the unequal distribution of opportunities for women, affecting especially those stemming from working-class and/or dysfunctional backgrounds. This concern is mirrored in Maureen's sensitive awareness of class differences which shows frequently in the novel. When for instance Douglas's rich mother, Carol Brady, demands to meet her over lunch Maureen suggests "an expensive seafood restaurant in town" because "[s]he'd look like an idiot if she suggested somewhere small time" (Mina, *Garnethill* 101). Needless to say, the meeting between these two

women from utterly different class backgrounds also provides plenty of fuel for conflict. Aware of the prejudice against working-class alcoholics, Maureen dresses her family's chief vice in a common Glaswegian euphemism. However, the attempt to bridge the class gap fails as Carol Brady takes full advantage of Maureen's 'weakness' to patronise and insult Maureen and her family:

Brady looked at her. 'I heard that your mother is ...unwell,' she said.  
 'Yeah, she is unwell,' said Maureen, grateful for the euphemism.  
 'There's a thick streak of Celtic melancholia in our family, It's the Irish blood.'  
 'Celtic melancholia?' Brady looked at her blankly.  
 'Alcoholism.'  
 'I see,' said Brady. 'They said you were from an unsavoury family.'  
 Maureen dropped her fork. It clattered onto her plate.  
 'Who said that about my family?'  
 'The police', said Brady, and smiled at her in a way that was oddly insulting. (Mina, *Garnethill* 111-112)

The satirical dispute not only addresses the still prevalent class struggle but also alludes to Maureen's working-class loyalty. In fact, Maureen displays a left-wing political attitude which is not only implied by her action but by small masterly interjected details of her likings. Thus, Mina purposefully discloses to her readers that Maureen treasures a stolen copy of George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* and Mikhail Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita*, both of which are downright subversive texts, being highly critical of the culturally established order and the value beliefs implemented by capitalism. Indeed, most of the characters in the novel act subversively and generally distrust authorities. Thus, the police are disliked and evaded for being socially and emotionally incompetent, the authority of employers is undermined by taking secret breaks for smoking (in the course of which smoking prohibitions are ignored), marijuana is commonly enjoyed and stolen half-pint glasses as well as lent library books constitute standard household equipment. Essentially, what is rejected most is 'Thatcherism' and the attitude attached to it. This surfaces most clearly in the following key passage which lays bare that *Garnethill* is socialist to the core:

Marie was the eldest. She moved to London in the early eighties to get away from her mum's drinking, settled there and become one of Mrs.

Thatcher's starry-eyed children. She got a job in a bank and worked her way up. At first the change in her seemed superficial: she began to define all her friends by how big their mortgage was and what kind of car they drove. It took a while for them to realize that Marie was deep down different. They didn't talk about it. They could talk about Winnie's alcoholism, about Maureen's mental health problems, and to a lesser amount about Liam dealing drugs, but they couldn't talk about Marie being a Thatcherite. There was nothing kind to be said about that. Maureen had always assumed that Marie was a socialist because she was kind. The final break between them came the last time Marie was home for a visit. They were talking about homelessness and Maureen ruined the dinner for everybody by losing the place and shouting, 'Get a fucking value system', at her sister. (Mina, *Garnethill*, 25-26)

Summing up, one can assert that Mina boldly stages a tough and self-assertive working-class female with a downright 'Scottish' attitude as the heroine at the centre of her plots, composing a powerful response to the male dominated discourse of Clydesideism which has tenaciously permeated Scottish national consciousness.

*The Cutting Room* offers a totally different but hardly less radical approach to encoding Scottishness. Subverting Scotland's traditional 'macho' image, Louise Welsh launches a male Glaswegian homosexual by the resonant name of Rilke as protagonist narrator, whose non-conformity and eccentricity not only surface in his sexual preferences but also find expression in his idiom as well as his overall attitude. A devoted aesthete, Rilke impresses with refined English interjected with few but well-placed French words, which achieve to add chic and aloofness to his account. Hence, the narrative voice features hardly any Scottish words or expletives. However, Scottish diction is by no means evaded as the direct discourse is steeped in Glaswegian slang. Rilke's noble aloofness is in this way penetrated by rough Scottish diction, resulting in a linguistic contrast which sublimely mirrors the contradiction and complexity of this highly original, dandy like character. That is to say, on the one hand, Rilke asserts himself as an educated cosmopolitan and on the other as a down to earth Glaswegian who knows the ways of his tough hometown well. This is notably reflected in his feel for register. Thus, when the youngest of the workers involved in clearing the McKindless house

openly addresses the auctioneer's lateness, Rilke skilfully retaliates in Glaswegian patter:

Nobody greeted me. Disapproval hung rank in the air. [...] Before I rounded the corner this had been a merry scene, with my defection the main topic. Now they looked at their feet and chewed on their breakfasts. They'd had an hour to ruminate on my faults as an auctioneer as a man. Jimmy James, the head porter, shook his head slowly. Niggle, the youngest of the crew, excited at my folly and not wise enough to yet bide his time, broke the silence.

'You're awfy late, Mr Rilke.

'And you're awfy kind to get me my breakfast, Niggle.'

I relieved him of the potato scone and egg roll he had been about to raise to his mouth and helped myself to a foam cup of coffee that was marking a ring on the polished surface of an occasional table. His expression buckled.

'Oh, dinnae greet, son. Someone give him another roll before he starts bubbling. And the rest of yous, what are you waiting on?' (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 37-38)

Rilke's dexterity to code-switch gives proof of not only his awareness of language, class and attitude but also of his ability to manipulate these social factors for his own ends. In some measure one could even argue that this versatility makes him elusive. Indeed, he is hard to pigeonhole as he fully adheres to neither working-class nor middle-class values. The following passage, for instance, gives proof of Rilke's human, downright social and also subversive stance:

A bruised boy with the face of a prophet, stood whispering, 'Any change, please? Any change? As each one turned from him he offered his empty polystyrene cup, like a gift, to the next. I tipped him a pound.

'You'll only encourage him,' grumbled a beefy man, sweating in his grey pinstripe, trundling by, without pause for debate. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 66)

The fact that Rilke rather sides with the marginalised than with those conforming to the capitalist system reveals that Rilke does, to a certain extent, betray a typically Scottish, socialist working-class ideology. This attitude generally surfaces in the novel as Rilke and his circle of acquaintances display a strong distrust of authorities, a reluctance to morally condemn petty criminality as well as an abundant use of expletives in their direct speech. Thus, Rilke's acquaintance, the drug-dealing transvestite

Leslie criticises the police who have raided his flat for drugs in highly abusive language: “What kind of sick fuck becomes a policeman? (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 58)”. It is further noteworthy that Leslie inhabits a ‘rough’ Glaswegian working-class area which is described in vivid detail by Rilke, bringing into focus the dire living conditions and prospects of Scotland’s urban ‘underclass’:

Les’s street was full of children. Three girls were practising a dance routine they’d seen on the television [...] A couple of middle-aged corner-boys stood outside the pub, smoking, watching the game. You have to learn to pace yourself when you have all the time in the world. ...a young girl crossed the street and made towards me. Once upon a long time ago she’d been pretty. You could see it in the length of her leg, the turn of her cheek. The corner-boys’ gaze followed her, checked out the taut thighs, the neat rear, then turned away, pitched downwards on the seesaw of desire, as they caught sight of her gaunt face, the creased, dark hollow of her eyes [...] Her thin frame crackled. Mercury in her veins. A girl living on borrowed time. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 156-157)

As the passage intimates, Welsh, similarly to Mina, directs her gaze toward the tragic fates of socially deprived, working-class women. This concern also aligns with the position of the protagonist narrator, who, not being part of the traditional ‘macho’ nor the female world, is able to empathise with the forlorn women of postmodern Glasgow. Although Rilke, just as many Scottish women, cannot be placed totally outside of the Glaswegian ‘underclass’ ethos as he is tough, streetwise, knows his Glasgow patter, empathises with the underprivileged and befriends petty criminals rather than the police, he is not part of the concept of Scottishness associated with the male working-class stereotype, not only because he is gay but also because he cannot envision himself as part of the traditional celebration of nationality, as his description of the Orange Walk reveals:

The Orange Walk is part of West Coast of Scotland folklore. Every spring in tiny towns on the edge of nothing, where the steel mill has closed and the mines have shut down, in large cities where factories lie derelict and shipyards despair of orders, men dress themselves in the raiment of the Orange Lodge and march in the name of King Billy. The parade and the mob are an accumulation of the mad, bad, poor, and dispossessed. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 274)

Subversively aloof yet at the same time emotionally involved, Rilke does not feel part of the mass but wanders freely, like an observer, between Glasgow's different worlds, placing himself outside of the traditional, narrow frame for asserting Scottish identity.

In Val McDermid's *Hostage to Murder*, the main female characters, Lindsay Gordon, her lover Sophie and her colleague Rory are all studied, open-minded Glaswegian lesbians with a cosmopolitan touch. Their educational status as well as their progressive cultural attitude are strongly reflected in their idiom, which comprises a modern mix of Standard English, Glaswegian 'patter' as well as slang and fashion words. Reflecting a very modern Glasgow, the novel offers an amalgam of a number of language varieties, taking into account not only the demotic patois of the post-industrial city but also the cutting-edge jargon of the gay community. In this manner McDermid achieves to take account of Glasgow's diversity also on a linguistic plane. Thus, while the young lesbian journalist Rory McLaren is shown to have a penchant for Glaswegian expletives, "I'm a nosy wee shite" (14), Giles Graham, "lifestyle editor and secretly agony aunt of the *Standard*" (46), draws "in the English accented speech of the privately educated Scot" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 47). In addition, some of the minor characters' speech is rendered in pure Scottish vernacular. Most notably this applies to the Glaswegian second-hand car dealer, Tam Gourlay and Lindsay's father, the Highlander Andy Gordon, both of which are depicted speaking vernacular Scots, as the following passage, in which Tam and Andy set sail for St. Petersburg in order to assist Lindsay in her enterprise to free Tam's kidnapped stepson, illustrates:

Tam shook his head in admiration. 'I can hardly believe the way she's set this whole thing up. She's some lassie.'

Andy's mouth twitched at the corners. 'She's that, all right. Christ knows where she gets it from. [...] [E]ver since she was wee, Lindsay's aye been one for diving in at the deep end. And this time, I couldnae stand back and leave her to it. Not when I could do something a bit more useful than just giving her Sasha's phone number.' [...]

‘I really appreciate you doing this,’ Tam said. ‘Lindsay told me you insisted, wouldnae take no for an answer. That means a lot, you know. The way you’ve weighed in when it’s no’ even your fight.’ (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 176)

Tam Gourlay and Andy Gordon can be said to represent the epitomes of the good natured working-class Scot as they are down to earth, morally upright, and display a strong sense of community. Yet they also depart from the traditional sexist and homophobic Scottish working-class stereotype, in that they fully accept Leslie’s sexual orientation.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that McDermid engineers an authorial-figural narration, employing various reflector characters, with the protagonist, Lindsay, constituting the main perspective, as well as an authorial narrative voice. It is also interesting to note that the linguistic blend of Standard language, colloquialisms and urban jargon features in the narrative text, authorial and figural, as well as in the direct discourse. Hence, just as Denise Mina, Val McDermid radically departs from the traditional binary opposition between Standard English and demotic Scots and in this way redraws the boundaries of cultural identity: “Right then, Andy Gordon’s *lassie* was sitting in the Georgian restaurant Sasha had recommended, contemplating a dish translated on the English menu as ‘meat drunk on the plate’” [emphasis added] (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 177). As the quoted passage indicates, the narrator approximates the idiom of the characters by using Scottish words and in this way establishes “a linguistic equality between speech and narration which allows the narrator to adopt the speech idioms of his characters, or the characters to think or speak in ‘standard English’, with equal status” (Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* 101).

Diverse as they are, all of the three novels are drenched in Scottishness in terms of place, language, class and attitude. However, instead of perpetuating or ignoring established platitudes about Scotland and her culture, they activate these encrusted images of Scottish identity to subvert them. Thus, Mina sends off a flawed but very hard-boiled Glaswegian

working-class girl to combat prejudice against non-conformity in a men compliant world, Welsh boldly employs an eccentric, morally torn homosexual as the epitome of the Caledonian Antisyzygy and McDermid uses a Highland lesbian journalist as the saviour of Glaswegian justice. They deconstruct and transcend the traditional, 'hetero-patriarchal' representations of Scotland by mediating an authentic, diverse image of contemporary Glasgow and providing innovative yet tangible prospects for Scotland's cultural future. Essentially, what they bring to the fore is the elusiveness and obscurity of the concept of national identity as well as identity as such. By supplying vanguard explorations of shifting Scottish identities, these women authors re-claim their space, contending that women do have a say in the obscure process of identity construction:

The 1990s have seen the addition of many new Scottish women writing from a more confident assumption that being female and being Scottish are linked and culturally positive. The breadth of the work by contemporary Scottish women writers now ensures the redrawing of the literary map of Scotland, allowing for these writers a natural assumption of place in a culture previously more accessible to male Scottish writers. Women writers have become fully part of 'the bedrock' of this 'small/and multitudinous country'. (Christianson and Lumsden 1)

## 5. Subversive Heroines: Forging New Images of Womanhood

### 5.1 Denise Mina's Maureen O'Donnell

The intrinsically female voice of Mina's *Garnethill* proffers a refreshing, gripping and highly convincing take on the female experience in contemporary Scottish culture. Offering a women's gaze, Mina's female characters do not try to be female they simply are. Thus, the protagonist Maureen O'Donnell is anything but distant and triggers instant sympathy on the side of the reader: "Having been brought up Catholic it seemed that she had always been passing her inner life in front of someone or other for approval" (Mina, *Garnethill* 13). Despite her Catholic upbringing, the reader learns that Maureen has been raised in a four-child, working-class and highly dysfunctional family. As if these were not enough reasons for social marginalisation in Glasgow, Maureen also is a child abuse survivor, a former mental patient and the ex-lover of the married psychiatrist, Douglas Brady, stationed at the very clinic she had been treated in. Yet, things turn out even worse for Maureen. After a night of heavy drinking, Maureen wakes to discover the mutilated corpse of her ex-lover Douglas in her living room. To top it all, Maureen and her drug-dealing brother Liam are immediately singled out as prime suspects, as Maureen's closest friend Leslie explains:

The police don't have an infinite amount of time to spend on anything. They just go with the most obvious answer. You're both so dodgy-looking [...] You've got a psychiatric history which you've already lied about, you were his mistress [...] And Liam, heavy guy, dealer, public enemy number one, wee sister seeing married older guy. Gets protective and kills him. (Mina, *Garnethill* 150)

Trapped in a spiral of accusations and prejudices against women with a history of mental disorder, Maureen resolves to fight back. Refraining to surrender to her fears, she moves back into her flat, in which the treacherous slaughter of Douglas has occurred, and embarks on a unique quest for justice by way of which she finds out about a series of brutal rapes of female abuse victims at the same psychiatric hospital she has received treatment in and discovers a connection between Douglas's death and the rapes. Taking

the law into her own hands, she becomes the knight in 'shabby' armour for all those suppressed, silenced, abused and forgotten women:

She couldn't have blood on her hands, not a rapist's, not anyone's. And yet when she thought of Yvonne's snakeskin anklet, she knew she didn't just want to stop the man who put it there, she wanted to hurt him to make him feel a little of what the women had felt. It wasn't enough to stop it happening again. [...] Maureen paused and looked at her cigarette. It would be wonderful to hand it over and step back, to relinquish responsibility and let McEwan do all the work, let him be responsible if anyone else was killed. But she thought of Yvonne with the rope burn on her leg, about poor dead Iona and about Siobhain, and knew she couldn't hand them over to the police, that it would be an act of cowardice, that they would damage the women even more. McEwan hadn't even asked how Siobhain was today. (Mina, *Garnethill* 315)

Thus, Mina does not recreate a hardboiled feminist heroine in the sense of her American forebears but takes the possibly weakest link in society and throws her back on her own resources. In this way, "Maureen becomes that most unlikely of sleuths, the detective as victim, as she solves crimes involving helpless, disturbed, and poverty stricken Glasgow women – including herself – while struggling to maintain her tenuous grasp of on her own sanity" [sic] (Brunsdale 272).

It is noteworthy that despite Maureen's depression, Mina endows her with the capability to think rationally and challenge authorities as well as common preconceptions. Thus, against all odds, Maureen repudiates the passive role ascribed to her, assumes responsibility and takes action. An additional ironic twist is that the only psychiatrist Maureen ever really confided in turns out to be the ruthless rapist and killer. It was he who told her to change the ending whenever she suffered from painful flashbacks of her father's sexual assault. And Maureen definitely changes the ending. Instead of waiting for the murderer to destroy her life, she drugs him with acid, handcuffs and headbutts him and forces a confession. Essentially, *Garnethill* is the story of a woman beyond the verge of a nervous breakdown, still sane enough to question and subvert the insanity of established social norms and authorities.

Through her exceptional creation of Maureen O'Donnell, Mina not only traces the injustice committed to mentally ill women but the female struggle for identity and purpose in a misogynistic culture. That is to say, as an emancipated female ex-mental patient, Maureen is rejected by patriarchal society. However, she is aware not only of the fact that the identities ascribed to her consist of nothing but shallow labels but also of the ingrained gender bias and sheer sexism in her culture and in that way is able to transcend the expected behavioural roles, as the following dialogue between Maureen and Detective Chief Inspector Joe McEwan reveals:

'Are you a feminist?' asked McEwan, acting surprised and dragging her back to the game.

'Yeah, said Maureen [...]

McEwan laughed. 'I thought you liked men', he said.

'Yeah, feminists don't like men and Martin Luther King picked on white people. You don't know many feminists, do you Joe?'

'No', he said oblivious to her supercilious attitude, 'but I know what they look like and they don't look like you.' He pointed openly to her large tits and looked away, leaving Maureen [...] aghast. He knew he'd offended her but he didn't give a shit. (Mina, *Garnethill* 178)

Although Maureen can be called a postmodern socialist feminist who sees the suppression and exploitation of women to be rooted in the patriarchal system, she does not intend to live up to any established cultural identifiers, except to one, namely an anti-authoritarian stance, involving the staunch solidarity with the suppressed as well as like-minded friends. Thus, Maureen retrieves a sense of identity from her friends and her social commitment. Maureen's ardent social conscience is complemented by her best friend Leslie, a vigorous advocate for women's rights:

Leslie worked in the shelter with women who had been systematically beaten and raped by their partners. In Leslie's world men rape children, they kick women in the tits and teeth and shove bottles up their backsides; they steal their money and leave them for dead and then feel wronged when they leave. (Mina, *Garnethill* 17)

Indeed, Mina's heroine breaks with many prevalent gender expectations: For one thing, Maureen is shown to possess strong female networks and feelings of solidarity, especially towards those ostracized by society and in this way she reflects a commitment traditionally associated with the Scottish male

working-class ethos. For another, she does not hold a romantically idealised view of love nor does she care about stereotypical images of female beauty. Hence, whenever there are references to normative standards of beauty or heterosexual love they are divested as commercial and trivially superficial. Thus, Maureen's perception of women is crucial as it offers a cunning social critique of contemporary Western gender roles, as the following passage, in which Maureen intimates her opinion about the look forced upon women working for airlines, illustrates: "Straight in front of them were the check-in desks, manned by heavily made-up women wearing silly hats" (Mina, *Garnethill* 366). Although Maureen is aware of and largely rejects stereotypical roles assigned to women, she is by no means immune to the commercial pressure exerted by the beauty industry:

Maureen had a weakness for cosmetics, even the pseudo-scientific face creams that made mad claims. She knew that surgery couldn't really come in a tub, that cream would have to be sold as a medicine if it did anything but moisturize, but still, when she felt bad, a good temporary solution was a face mask and a new tub of miracle face cream or a hair dye. She wandered up and down the aisles, pausing at displays, reading packets, and settled on a dark hair dye that would condition *and* moisturize, and a face mask she'd used before. The mask was too harsh for her skin, it left it red and sore, but the cream came out of the tube black and turned bright orange as it dried. It always gave her a buzz. (Mina, *Garnethill* 215)

The passage also beautifully brings to the fore that Maureen is a very round, multifaceted character. Without doubt, the tangibility of Maureen is to be attributed not only to the narrative perspective through which Mina mediates Maureen's feelings at first hand but also to the duality with which she endows her protagonist. Thus, instead of creating a socially detached super-heroine, she forges an authentic female character with strong as well as weak sides. The crucial difference which transforms Maureen into a heroine is that she is conscious of her weaknesses as well as social conditioning. This clearly surfaces in Maureen's awareness of her shame in relation to sexuality:

She opened the food cupboard and the cutlery drawer: same thing in all of them. The police had been through them and moved everything. They must have been very thorough. Flushed with a sudden shamed panic she went into the bedroom and opened the door to the bedside cabinet. Three broken vibrators had been tidied away in a little

triangular pile. The one with the acid burns from the leaky batteries was on the bottom with the red screw-top lid placed neatly beside it. She kept meaning to throw it away but was too embarrassed to put it in a bin, as if all of her neighbours would find it and come to the door *en masse* demanding an explanation. Both of her Nancy Friday politically correct wank books had been leafed through. [...] She went back to the kitchen, trying to convince herself that once she told Leslie it would become a funny story, and made herself a coffee. (Mina, *Garnethill* 275)

Thus, on the one hand Maureen is a postmodern, self-determined, informed young woman who knows how to take her sexual gratification into her own hands and on the other she feels ashamed about it. However, by “trying to convince herself that once she told Leslie it would become a funny story” Maureen intimates that she is well aware of the ludicrousness of her shame. It is exactly this ambivalence and the consequential reflections in shades of grey, offering no clear cut moral boundary between good and bad, which make Mina’s heroine authentically human as well as quintessentially Scottish and in this way also highly purposeful for penetrating the male dominated scene of Scottish literature. “Yeah, [...] it would be brilliant to do something that mattered” (Mina, *Garnethill* 354) opines Maureen and in this spirit she spearheads the struggle of fringe groups for a well-deserved place within society. Thus, *Garnethill* achieves to field “a critique of patriarchal society [...] through a strong female hero who is *relatively* whole and centred. Fractured and fragmented *yet* authentic and autonomous, this fantasy figure provides a re-entry for the marginalized into society in order to regain power” (Munt 61).

## 5.2 Val McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon

With the creation of the feminist lesbian amateur detective, Lindsay Gordon, McDermid shines a spotlight on the lesbian experience in Scottish society, invigorating and diversifying the predominantly heterosexual Tartan noir scene. Yet, the character of Lindsay is intriguing not only in respect to her sexual orientation but also in respect to various other aspects with which McDermid has endowed her enigmatic heroine. At first glance Lindsay appears to be the female epitome of the American hard-boiled hero

reminiscent of the Chandler tradition. That is to say, she drives a racy MGB roadster, which she repairs herself, is scarred with a bullet wound, which she contracted in the course of a previous investigation and with her motto being “Life’s hardly worth living if you don’t take the odd risk” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 265), she generally prefers to walk on the wild side. In *Hostage to Murder* her tough, dangerously curious and adventurous nature surfaces most clearly when she persuades the good-natured Tam Gourlay to evade long bureaucratic struggles by simply snatching his stepson Jack from the clutches of the supposed villain Bruno Bernadini:

‘Tell me something, Tam. Supposing I find out where Jack is, what were you thinking of doing about it?’ Through the haze of smoke, she thought she detected a moment’s shiftiness.

‘Well, obviously, we’d have to go through the legal channels in whatever country he’s got him in.’

‘So you weren’t thinking about snatching him back?’ There was a long silence that Lindsay was determined not to break.

‘What if I was?’ Tam said eventually.

‘Well, it would be a bloody sight more interesting as a story than some long-drawn-out court battle,’ Lindsay said casually. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 132)

As the passage illustrates Lindsay has no qualms about employing dubious methods in order to help her clients. As a matter of fact, in the course of the novel Lindsay repeatedly acts against the law. For example, she resorts to using a fake police card to gain access to disclosed information and even blackmails the dangerous IRA man, Patrick Coughlan. In this respect McDermid’s heroine echoes the non-moralising stance towards right and wrong generally adopted by Tartan Noir heroes. It is noteworthy that like Mina’s Maureen O’Donnell, McDermid’s Lindsay Gordon is hard-boiled enough to take the law into her own hands in order to incapacitate the villain. Hence, in the novel’s violent climax Lindsay does not flinch from shooting the murderous Patrick Coughlan, with her father’s shotgun, in order to protect her colleague Rory: “The blast caught him full in the chest and he collapsed, blood pouring from a hole the size of a football” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 364). As the language of the cited scene illustrates, McDermid employs the fast-paced, laconic and graphically violent idiom of the hard-boiled genre. This tough and indeed traditionally very male manner of

expression is also reflected in Lindsay's dealings with lustful love. Thus, Lindsay initiates the passionate affair with her colleague Rory with a rather unromantic "So let's get it out of our system" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 181) and even resorts to imperialistic rhetoric for describing her feelings after her first sexual encounter with her new lover:

After eight years with the same woman, it felt strange to explore such alien territory. She'd thought the very exoticism of novelty would provoke guilt, but she'd been mistaken. Making love with Rory had taken her somewhere outside her past experience. Wild and dark, it had shown her a bewildering new side to her own sexuality, both scary and magical. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 184)

By comparing Rory's body to "alien territory", which is "wild and dark" McDermid blatantly appropriates the highly patriarchal and colonial body-as-territory analogy and in this way masterly subverts the hegemony of masculine subjectivity.

The character traits of McDermid's protagonist discussed so far all point to an adoption of the characteristics of the traditional American hard-boiled investigator. Yet, a closer inspection reveals subtler, more delicate sides, to Lindsay's personality. For example, despite being bold and tough, Lindsay knows "all about fear" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 326). Hence, she is "scared shitless" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 326) when the henchmen of the Irish murderer Patrick Coughlan beat her up and threaten to kill her:

She'd been on the receiving end of violence before, but that didn't make it any easier to deal with. Fear kept reverberating through her, as she knew it would for days, maybe weeks to come. A dark street would make her sweat until she managed to replace its connotations with something more powerful, more pleasurable. But that was in the future. For now, she had to cope with the flashbacks and the palpitations that came with them. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 329)

Moreover, McDermid expands on the idea of fear being gendered by having Rory remark on the behavioural role of the Scottish 'hardman' stereotype: "He's scared. And if there's one thing a macho Scottish male can't acknowledge, even to himself, it's being scared. So he's hiding it behind impatience" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 231).

Despite portraying Lindsay as a hard-boiled heroine, who is tough yet by no means fearless, McDermid also pictures her protagonist as a vulnerable, loving, considerate, mature and settled woman. These more tender sides of Lindsay surface most clearly in her long-term relationship with Sophie. Thus, right at the beginning of the novel the reader learns that the 39-year-old Lindsay has traded her career for love, giving up her prestigious post as a lecturer of journalism in California to move back to Glasgow with her partner Sophie, who “had been offered the chair of obstetrics at Glasgow University” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 4). Sophie, on the other hand shows her love by encouraging Lindsay to face up to new challenges in Glasgow. Indeed, despite Lindsay’s little infidelity, Lindsay’s and Sophie’s relationship is depicted as mature, understanding, highly supportive and most notably very loving. It is through their relationship that McDermid ostensibly examines and above all demystifies lesbian love. Without doubt, the fact that Lindsay leads a monogamous, more or less stable, long-term relationship which is shown to be rocked by the same problems as heterosexual ones assists this ‘demystification’. Sophie’s baby wish, for instance, unchains a series of arguments which strongly parallels those of heterosexual couples:

‘Yes. I know how you feel about that. But I don’t think you have the faintest idea how I feel about it. Lindsay, it’s all I think about,’ Sophie said, anguish unmistakable in her voice. ‘Everywhere I go, all I seem to see are pregnant women and women pushing babies in prams. ‘I’m so envious it makes me feel violent [...]’ Sophie blinked hard, and Lindsay couldn’t avoid seeing the sparkle of tears in her eyes. ‘Lindsay, I’m desperate. I’m nearly forty. Time’s running out for me. Already, the chances are that I’m not going to be able to conceive without some sort of clinical intervention. And there isn’t a fertility clinic in the whole of Scotland that will treat lesbian couples. Not even privately. If I’m going to have any possibility of a baby, I need to start doing something about it now.’

‘Look, you are broody, that’s all. It’ll pass. It always has before,’ Lindsay said wretchedly.

‘No. You’re wrong. It never passed [...] If I don’t have a child, there’s going to be a hole in my life that nothing else will fill’. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 31-32)

Through Sophie’s baby wish McDermid addresses various, highly topical gender-related themes: That is to say, with Sophie being a nearly forty-year-

old studied professional doctor desperately longing for a child and Lindsay being an adventurous, freedom-loving journalist happy without the ties of motherhood, McDermid thematises the postmodern female struggle between career and motherhood. Moreover, the fact that Sophie is a lesbian with an ardent desire to have children stresses Sophie's motherly side and again contributes to demystifying the lesbian experience. Yet, through Sophie's quest for motherhood McDermid not only examines the role of women and motherhood but also draws attention to the obstacles homosexual couples face in a homophobic society. For example, Sophie repeatedly addresses the impossibility for lesbian couples to receive in vitro fertilisation treatment in Scotland. Sophie eventually takes action and decides to get pregnant via donor insemination. At this point it is worth mentioning that McDermid does not shy away from explicitly depicting the insemination scene, involving Lindsay injecting the sperm of their gay friend Fraser into Sophie. Indeed, the authenticity, vivid detail and noir humour of the scene breaks last taboos on lesbian love:

Lindsay opened up and stared down in disbelief at the glass being proffered to her. A large gob of off-white mucus clung to the bottom of the Edinburgh crystal, as viscous and slimy as phlegm. Wordlessly, she took it and closed the door. 'You gave him one of my whisky tumblers,' she said plaintively. 'How can I ever drink out of them again?'

Sophie snorted with laughter. 'That bloody dishwasher's about as hot as an autoclave. Trust me, you're not going to catch anything.' (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 69)

Sophie's baby wish and the prospect of parenthood thrust Lindsay into emotional turmoil eventually causing her to have an affair with Rory. Torn between the warmth of a stable relationship and the adventure of a passionate love affair, Lindsay, like Maureen O'Donnell, epitomises a very human and round heroine who struggles with similar problems as her readers: "Was she letting herself down, or was she finding the road back to herself, a road that had been obscured by the forces of habit and affection? It was a question that had no easy answer" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 228). Moreover, Mary Hadley notes that "[h]aving an openly lesbian sleuth, who shows her lustful feelings for different women, attempts to normalize the

gay experience” (Hadley 79). However, through the character of Lindsay, McDermid not only attempts to familiarise the ‘gay experience’ but also tackles prevailing prejudices against lesbians. Thus, Lindsay is depicted as a celebrated gay rights activist who lectures on homosexual issues linked to the media. In this respect, Lindsay also has been a mentor for the younger generation of lesbians, epitomised in the novel by Rory McLaren:

You were talking about the ghetto mentality. How people think gays are completely different, completely separate from them. But we’re not. We’ve got more in common with the straight universe than we have dividing us. So I thought, what if I set myself up as the journalist that the gay community *can* trust? What a great way to get stories come to me (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 10).

It is further noteworthy that Lindsay defines herself neither through her private life nor through being a Scottish feminist lesbian but through her occupation:

Lindsay would never have described herself as someone who was defined by her job, but now that she had none, she had come to realize how much her identity had been bound up in what she did for a living. Without some sort of employment, she felt cast adrift. [...] There were few things she hated more than the sense of powerlessness that provoked in her. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 4-5)

Without doubt, McDermid’s eclectic heroine who wants “to feel passionate about something” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 28) can be said to reach out to a wide readership in that she is a proud socialist Scot yet also a cosmopolitan and studied feminist lesbian. Her many-sidedness enables McDermid to raise a whole panoply of ardent topics related to gender and above all to break with traditional representations of fictional female heroines.

## 6. Social Ills: Illuminating the Dark Corners of Society

“George Orwell says people have different reasons for writing, and one of them has to be political, [...] I think that’s very true” (Mina qtd. in Mansfield, “Crime does pay” 1).

### 6.1 Rilke and the Violence of Eros

“I’m twenty-five years at the auction house forty-three years of age. They call me Rilke to my face, behind my back the Cadaver, Corpse, Walking Dead. Aye, well, I may be gaunt of face and long of limb but I don’t smell and I never expect anything” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 2).

The gay dandy with a penchant for drink, drugs and casual sex arguably constitutes the most extraordinary protagonist-narrator to invade a contemporary Tartan Noir novel. Rilke is a complex, well-rounded character whose contrasting traits evoke the notion of duality thematised by Stevenson. Thus, he repeatedly indulges in quick, violent sex but rejects sexualised violence, he takes drugs but detests drug sellers and although he is cynical about love, he feels sentimental about it. Drifting between Eros and Thanatos, Rilke eventually reaches his moral limits as he unearths a hidden collection of highly disturbing pornography in the course of evaluating the property of the ‘supposedly’ deceased Glaswegian merchant Roderick McKindless. Using a magnetically beautiful yet revoltingly violent object of art as the trigger, Welsh sends the enigmatic auctioneer, himself no foe to follies, on an intriguing journey to his own moral boundaries, exploring the dividing line between lust and sheer violence. Hence, Rilke’s emotions towards the freshly discovered netsuke encapsulate the essence of the novel’s main theme, the violence of Eros, and point to the moral turmoil still to come:

At the very back was a small white object. I slid my hands in and retrieved it. It was an intricately carved netsuke. [...] At first I couldn’t

make out what it was meant to depict. There was a confusion of limbs, a complex jigsaw of bodies that formed a perfect sphere my eye found difficult to disentangle. Then, as puzzles do, it all came into focus and I dropped it on the bed. There were three bodies, two female, one male. The blade of the carver had rendered them round and chubby, but athletic nevertheless. They gripped each other in an erotic combination impossible in actual life, but that was not what had shocked me. What made me drop the ball was the look on the face of the carved man. A leer that pulled you in, a complicit stare that drew attention to the dagger in his hand, for as he penetrated one girl with his cock, he stabbed the other through the heart. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 17)

The ambivalent netsuke, however, merely presents the prelude to the darkest side of sexuality for the culminating object of McKindless personal collection which fully unchains Rilke's obsessive investigation into the violence of Eros is a set of pornographic photos from the fifties which exhibit the lifeless body of a young woman tortured to death for sexual gratification:

I'm not sure how long I sat there after that. I felt peaceful. A little boat on a calm ocean. My mind was completely empty [...] I was tired of people. I took my baccy and rolled myself another cigarette. My hands had a bit of a tremble on but they remembered what to do. I sat and smoked it in silence. Then, though I didn't feel like it, I looked at the photographs again. Were they real? (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 37)

Despite Leslie's advice, "Bad things happen. You're not responsible" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 112), Rilke feels responsible and decides to trace the origin of the unsavoury photos. Thus, a streetwise, hard-drinking and highly promiscuous homosexual constitutes the man to uncover the immorality of a heterosexual upper-class merchant. Indeed, by installing Rilke as the novel's moral benchmark, Welsh arrestingly takes stock of the values of postmodern, still violently patriarchal, society:

Using Rilke as the narrator and protagonist enables Welsh to look at pornography and female prostitution with a detachment that a male heterosexual or a woman wouldn't have. And that detachment enables him finally to see, with enormous clarity, the depth of the depravity at the heart of the sex industry. (Kirkus 1)

Although Rilke might be called 'detached' in that he does not directly gain sexual pleasure from subjugating women, he is very much implicated in the same sexualised and depersonalised culture of consumption and this arouses his feeling of responsibility towards the murdered girl. Sensing

similar moral abysses within him, it is not what separates, but what unites him with McKindless which instigates his wish to restore justice to the murdered girl. Hence, instead of depicting a morally superior hero, Welsh portrays the soul-searching of a postmodern man torn between Eros and Thanatos. Himself a product of an unrelenting throwaway society in which pleasure is gained as quickly as it is lost, the flawed hero is repeatedly “cautioned for lewd behaviour” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 29) as he habitually calls on rent boys for quick, anonymous sex in public places. Thus, sexual love is portrayed as an item of consumption rather than an act of supreme intimacy: “I’d done with him. The only cheeky banter I engage in comes before the act. I gave him a chill smile, then followed him up the stairs to the bar, noting the marks on his trousers: drink and spunk and sweat” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 106). Indeed, Rilke is no stranger to the seedy netherworld of Glasgow, as his contemplation on pornography reveals:

Pornography is a versatile industry, it moves with the times. When the first caveman discovered he could paint on walls, using dyes fashioned from earth and ash, another dirty little *Homo erectus* saw the chance to draw a bare naked lady. In the days before photography, etchings, drawings of every imaginable vice existed and, of course, as soon as the camera came on the scene the industry expanded with delight. The advent of the cinema inspired undulations viewed in porno picture palaces across the globe. Video, closed most cinemas, but who cared? There was money to be made. In every high street there is a video store where, for a couple of pounds, you can rent your own show. Of course, there are always some whose tastes are difficult to satisfy and for them there are quiet little shops away from the main drag, hidden palaces of strange delights. It’s as if the everyday shopper doesn’t see the dreary storefront, the unwashed window that displays nothing, nothing at all. But if you are sympathetic, if you have the motivation, you can be in any town, any city, in the world, a stranger on your first day, and it will sing to you. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 62-63)

Apart from intimating his ‘insider status’, Rilke also highlights the importance of the image for the propagation of pornography and the commodification of sex. The image as the powerful trigger for sexual arousal points to the theme of depersonalisation and objectification of the individual. That is to say, captured on film the subject becomes the inanimate object bereft of free will. Consequently, any subject is free to consume and take full possession of the

object. Moreover, objectifying the other inevitably leads to dehumanisation as it enables the trespassing of otherwise rigid moral boundaries. "They're all voyeurs", Rose comments on the taxi driver's voluptuous gaze, while playing with his fantasies by revealing "a glimpse of white flesh at the top of her lacy hold-ups", (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 98) and in this way powerfully alludes to the widespread acceptance of the sexual objectification of women. Choosing a gay man to do away with this reduced image of womanhood, Welsh unflinchingly demonstrates that the commodification of the female body has infested every corner of the capitalist patriarchal society: "I flicked through the glossed pages watching half-naked, skinny girls pass by, a starved parade" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 96). Through the character of Anne-Marie, who earns her living as a private model, Welsh further expands on the power relationship between female object and male subject: "I'm the muse, untouchable and silent. I'd lose my power over them if I spoke. I'm a fantasy object" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 89). The stance advocated by the attractive model mirrors a belief held by many women, namely that actively choosing to slip into the role of the female object of male desire bestows power over the male consumer. However, their reductions to images still serve "as signs of oppression" (Lambiase, Reichert 82), of objects without "self-defined desires" (Nead 107). In fact, as Welsh exposes, their implicit willingness to be subjugated merely mirrors the tenacity and indeed internalisation of prevailing gender roles. This surfaces most clearly in Anne-Marie's reaction towards McKindless's sadistic request to cut her with a knife in exchange for money:

I was tempted [...] I was disgusted with myself. I get like that sometimes. The posing, the way it makes me feel. It was almost as if I wanted some kind of punishment. A physical hurt to take away the hurt inside. I got a tingling feeling at the top of my arms where I felt he might begin. I remember every word. "A small cut, hardly a scar. Let the pain that cuts away the pain diffuse your senses." (Welsh, 220)

Apart from addressing the Christian concept of suffering as a means of transcendence, the passage also lays bare the masochistic stance women have come to adopt towards themselves throughout centuries of institutionalised oppression. In fact, Welsh interjects the passivity ascribed to

women in various domains of cultural life and in this way sublimely highlights the pervasiveness of the Christian patriarchal power structure. Thus, when Rilke presents the 'snuff pictures' to Derek he immediately links them to the Western aesthetic tradition of female beauty and death:

'There is something beautiful about these.' His words broke the spell [...] 'Ach, you know your art history—we're trained to enjoy these images. How many annunciations? The Virgin Mary waiting for Gabriel to fill her full of the seed of the Lord, the original *droit de seigneur*. How many wan, prone women laid out like death? This is a step further, [ . . . ] but it's right slap bang in the tradition of Western art. The innocent drained of blood. The victim of vampires. "The death of a beautiful woman is the most beautiful thing in the world." Edgar Allan Poe said that.' (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 79-80)

By referencing Poe's theory of aesthetics as expounded in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition" that "the death [...] of a beautiful woman" is "unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world" (Poe 165), Welsh masterly highlights the fact that the objectification of the female body is inextricably linked to the Western conception of art and aesthetics. In this context Elisabeth Bronfen notes that "[b]y dying, a beautiful Woman serves as the motive for the creation of an art work and as its object of representation. As a deanimated body, she can also become an art object or be compared with one" (77). Thus, the death of a woman is conceived of as beautiful because it presents the woman's ultimate reification. This concept certainly also applies to the sexual objectification of women, as Linda LeMoncheck explains: "[P]ornographic "snuff films", depicting the purportedly real torture and murder of women, are arousing precisely because of the slow and steady annihilation of a woman's will" (152). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that the objectification of women through the image is itself presented as death for "women in the novel are literally and figuratively 'killed' in the camera gaze, emptied of meaning, self and signified for the gratification of those empowered to control the image" (Bissett 62). In fact, the link between killing and taking pictures is established throughout the novel. Thus, Derek on filming a violent porn scene feels like a killer and Rilke on photographing Anne-Marie feels "like an assassin" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 87). However, despite being aware of the cruelty involved in sexual

objectification and subjugation, Rilke himself is corrupted by the power images of sexual repression appear to bestow:

I put a gentle hand on his shoulder, tightened my grip slowly, then took him by the hair at the nape of his neck and forced his head back. The boy's body tautened, panic welling with the change of tempo. His fear gave me an infusion of power. He trembled in my grasp and my cock hardened [...] I didn't want to hear any talking now, just to see the images flashing in my head. Memories of encounters honed into fuck-triggers. I imagined myself in a movie I'd seen ...raping this boy...taking him against his will... My climax was building ... Here it came...a wound, red and deep and longing ...the dark basement ...the slash of blood across her throat ...the reflection imposed on the inside of my retina as true as if I was looking at the photograph ...the girl, used and bound, lying dead on her pallet. I came[.] (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 150-153)

The fact that Rilke is conscious of the violence of Eros yet experiences himself the Eros of violence again highlights Rilke's implication in a patriarchal culture of consumption, in which male sexuality is equated with power. This balance of power is also reflected in language, as the following passage, in which Rilke overhears a conversation about a recent football match between Rangers and Celtic, strikingly reveals:

'We fucked you right up the arse, bent your lot over and gave them a right good shafting.'

'Ach, you were jammy, luck, pure luck. What about last time? Who took it up the arse then, eh? Our boys rammed you, really rammed it right in. You were truly fucked, my man'. [...]

I shook their hands, wished them well and moved on, wondering if they greeted orgasm with a shout of 'Goal!' (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 261)

Rilke's scornful comment intimates that in essence he does not approve of male chauvinism nor of sexualised violence. Implicated in that he senses the Eros of violence as well as the morbidity of sex in consumer culture, Rilke wants to draw the line before he himself turns into a lifeless object bereft of the ability to innocently feel:

My body seemed the repository of a dead man. I could think and smoke but all feeling was gone. Inside was nothing. Beneath my slack skin was a skeleton framed by blood and gore. I possessed the required internal organs but the soul was missing. I felt like taking the lit end of the joint and placing it against my arm, cauterising despair in one definite act of pain. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 154)

He is desperate above all because he does not know whose side he is on, or “who the real abusers” are (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 166). Welsh builds up this inner conflict to introduce her thirteenth chapter with the key statement of Dr. Jekyll’s confession:

Hence it came about that I concealed my pleasures; and that when I reached years of reflection, and began to look round me, and take stock of my progress and position in the world, I stood already committed to a profound duplicity of life (Stevenson qtd. in Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 167)

Unsurprisingly, Jekyll’s diremption cunningly reflects Rilke’s double-dealing as well as emotional divisiveness and, last but not least, points to his transformation:

The man of three days ago was gone, in his place a troubled spectre. The broken nights and drunkenness had taken their toll: every debauch was etched on my face. [...] I smoothed back my hair, put on my shades and practised smiling, one, two, three times. I was scaring myself. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 167)

The concept of duality also permeates the novel in many other ways as the novel revolves around powerful contrasts that constantly intertwine, attract and repel each other. Plunging deep into the postmodern Scottish psyche, love and hate, lust and disgust, pleasure and pain, Eros and Thanatos are masterly staged to raise questions in relation to sex, gender and moral values. However, as befits the genre, no clear-cut division between good and bad is offered. In this way, Welsh, as the reviewer Doug Johnstone notes, “does much more than tell a whodunnit story, employing the novel’s backdrop to examine society’s reaction to so-called sexual deviation, suggesting that what is and isn’t acceptable is never a black and white issue, but rather a spectrum of shades of grey” (par. 3). Thus, almost all of the characters are in one way or another morally questionable. Derek for one confesses to have been corrupted by the porn industry as he consented to filming a pornographic scene which to his horror turned out to be a real rape scene. Rose, on the other hand, considers keeping the money raised by the auction of the estate of the moribund Miss McKindless, and Leslie not only sells drugs but also uses violence in case his customers owe him money. Despite the novel’s moral darkness, Rilke adopts a very positive attitude towards the

state of the human race. Believing that “there are some bad individuals, but most people do their best to be good and everybody slips up sometimes” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 232), the flawed hero resumes his quest to uncover the identity of the girl brutally murdered and photographed by the sadistic Roderick McKindless. Through the mysterious photograph Welsh not only tackles the topic of sexualised violence but skilfully weaves another ardent issue into the narrative, namely that of sex trafficking into which McKindless is suspected to have been involved, as the policeman James Anderson explains:

Since the collapse in Eastern Europe there’s been a flourishing trade in the trafficking of young men and women for the purpose of prostitution. “White slaving” they called it when we were young. Not just in Glasgow but all over Britain. The powers that be decided they weren’t going to put up with it in Glasgow. An initiative was launched and essentially failed quite spectacularly [...] McKindless’s name had been mentioned by a few people over the years. Enough for there to be official interest in his activities. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 249-250)

Indeed, the author broaches a red-hot subject for ‘white slaving’ unfortunately still presents the sad truth, as the following excerpt from *The Herald* (6 February 2009) points up:

Up to 700 victims of human trafficking for sexual exploitation are living in Scotland but there have been no successful prosecutions, a confidential government report reveals. Details of the unpublished report emerged as part of a three-month Herald investigation into human trafficking, which has found that sex slavery of both women and children is just one part of a growing illegal trade in human beings. (Adams 1)

*The Cutting Room* draws attention not only to the fact that the war against “rape, abduction, even possible murder of the poor and the dispossessed” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 251) is tragically underfunded but also gives voice to the anonymous, depersonalised victims of sexual violence. Accordingly, Welsh’s cunning, somewhat unexpected, dénouement comprises amongst others the voice of Adia Kovalyova, a Ukrainian girl rescued from sexual slavery in Glasgow, who through her thought-provoking statement of evidence breathes life into numberless unknown victims:

I worked there with six other girls [...] We were slaves. Every day from eleven in the morning until twelve at night we were on call. Sometimes

the men would hurt us bad. We were not allowed out, but I would peer through the frosted windows and see people walking by, normal people. Then I began to think, in a world where such evil exists, are there normal people? Who were the men that used us? Did they go home and kiss their wives, cuddle their daughters, with the smell of our abuse still on their fingers? (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 282)

Justice is also administered in the penultimate chapter, tellingly headed "The Final Cut", in which Welsh boldly subverts the passive role of the female object by having Anne-Marie kill the evil McKindless who faked his death in order to pursue unimpeded his sadistic desires. To top it all, the dead body of the novel's chief villain is photographed: "We watched together as a police photographer bent his knee, focused his lens, and placed the body in the centre of the frame. There was a bright flash and Mr McKindless, the man I knew as Grieve, was captured for ever" (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 276).

Presenting sexuality as gendered exploitation, Welsh severely attacks regressive power relationships in patriarchal capitalist societies and in this way actively advocates female empowerment. Moreover, the novel is a powerful commentary on the tragic side effects of the commodification of sex in consumer culture. Concerning this matter, the image of the passive female body propagated in advertising constitutes the centre of Welsh's investigation, exhibiting the "idea that the woman is much better when she's naked and lying down, with a disengaged, glazed look, when she could be dead" (Welsh qtd. in Hamilos par. 23) as the root of female suppression. In the light of these considerations, it is all the more noteworthy that it is empathy which finally restores justice to the murdered female behind the photo, for Rilke in his own quest for redemption travels to the very Parisian brothel in which the horrid deed occurred:

'I cared', I whispered. 'I cared enough to try. I'm sorry I never knew your name.' And I found I wasn't crying for the girl in the photograph. I was crying for other victims, present and future. I looked once more at the images, then took out my lighter, touched flame to paper, dropped it on the earth floor, watched it curl into ash, then stamped on the embers. I sat for a moment longer wishing there was someone to pray to, then wiped my face and went back to the bar. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 293)

## 6.2 Dysfunctional Families: Domestic Violence against Women

“We may not tolerate violence per se, but every day, in a hundred nasty little ways, we tolerate violence against women” (Ramaswamy par. 7).

Heather Coady of Women's Aid Scotland informs that “many women do not come forward at all” and if they do, they “endure up to 35 attacks before even bothering to formally report them” (qtd. in Elias par. 3). This behaviour is hardly surprising, adds Ramaswamy in her spirited article on gender-based violence, for “the conviction rate for rape cases in Britain is less than 6%, the lowest of any major European country” (par. 5). In order to break the perpetual cycle of gendered violence, Nicola Harwin and Jackie Brown suggest to treat domestic violence not merely as a crime but as a “major social problem” (224) which calls to be challenged by confronting “the widespread attitudes and social structures which endorse men’s control over women’s lives in and out of the family, and which provide the foundation for violence and abuse” (224). Indebted to portraying authentic female Scottish experience, female Tartan Noirists assume an important role in illuminating the dark corners of Scottish family life. Thus, the family as the chief indicator as well as replicator of established cultural norms and roles of gender constitutes a central concern in most Tartan Noir novels written by women seeking to address violence against women at all levels of society. Indeed, all of the three novels in question deal with the state of the family in post-industrial and postmodern Glasgow in one way or another. Louise Welsh, for example, uses Rilke’s mysteriously dysfunctional family background to fuel speculations while also adding texture and depth to the protagonist’s motivations and emotional state. Interjecting glimpses of the noir hero’s sombre past, the reader is inclined to trace Rilke’s reluctance to establish close emotional bonds mainly to his traumatic upbringing as an orphan:

‘I tell you, Rilke, you crack me up. I look at you sometimes and still see that wee snoutnose in the school playground. The little boy that Santa Claus forgot, right enough.’ He put on a falsetto. ‘I feel sorry for that laddie, he didnae have a daddy...Nor a mammy, either, for very long.’ (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 162)

Although Rilke tries hard to present his choice to walk the path of life alone as the only sensible option, he clearly intimates a deep yearning for the warmth, closeness and safety of a caring home: “Mrs Balfour was the kind of mother every boy thought he might like. Neat, well dressed, a short practical woman [...] [S]he made me think of mince and tatties and stories at bedtime. I’m apt to be sentimental about other people’s mothers” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 44-45). The fact that the adult Rilke like any other child longs for a functional home not only makes his lonesome existence more tragic but also powerfully alludes to the emotional significance of a healthy family.

The impact of family dysfunction on the ability to form emotionally close adult relationships is also addressed in *Hostage to Murder*. That is to say, through the character of Rory, Lindsay’s young lesbian colleague, McDermid reveals the grave social repercussions of domestic abuse: “I’m crap at relationships. You grow up exposed to a marriage like that and you get really cynical. I don’t want to turn into my mother or my father, and the best way to avoid that is to avoid getting emotionally involved” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 168). Moreover, it is important to note that McDermid leaves no trace of doubt that domestic dysfunction is caused by rigid patriarchal structures, which are exposed to nurture virulent homophobia and ignorance toward gender equality, as Rory’s account reveals:

My father is a boil on the bum of the universe. He’s a drunk and a waster [...] I came out when I was at university. Well, when I say I came out, I only came out in Edinburgh. The last people I would ever have told were my parents. I knew what his homophobic wee soul would make of it. And I knew it would break my mother’s heart [...] She worked double shifts as a cleaner all her days to keep him in money for beer and bookies. She took the beatings he handed out when he’d lost on the horses – and he lost plenty, believe me. But she never complained [...] She always encouraged me to get an education, anything to avoid having a life like hers [...] [O]ne night my girlfriend persuaded me to go to Glasgow for some lesbian benefit [...] We were staggering down Argyle Street [...] And my father walked out of some shitty dive where he’d been knocking back the pints and the whiskies and practically fell over us [...] He was pissed, but not so pissed that he didn’t understand what he was seeing. He called me all the names under the sun [...] But he rang me the next day. He’d said he’d told my mother and she was broken-hearted. And because she

was a good Catholic, she wanted me never to darken her door again [...] I stayed away. And six months later, my mother was dead. Breast cancer. She never went to the doctor till her whole system was riddled with it. (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 165-168)

The idea that patriarchy breeds domestic violence is also expressed through the tragic female figure of Bernie who fled from the clutches of the violent Irish Patrick Coughlan because she did not want her child “growing up thinking the IRA was a fine and noble career for a man” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 318). Unfortunately her family bliss with the good-natured Scot Tam Gourlay is also short-lived as Patrick avenges her flight by killing Tam through a car bomb. In fact, family is the central theme in *Hostage to Murder*. Sophie desperately wants to start a family with Lindsay, Patrick resorts to the most violent measures in order to get his son back, Bernie longs for a peaceful, non-violent family life with Tam, and Lindsay’s functional highland family presents the antipode to Rory’s broken home. Thus, in striking contrast to Rory, Lindsay is on very good terms with her mother as well as her father, who has “always been there for [her]. Never criticizes, just accepts whatever daft thing [she does]” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 164-165). Moreover, one could argue that by juxtaposing Rory’s homophobic father with Lindsay’s traditional working-class yet highly tolerant father McDermid underpins her idea of Scottish family life and society. That is to say, Lindsay’s family, unlike Rory’s, represents the new, modern face of Scotland, which embraces its tradition and history while shedding its homophobic fears.

Denise Mina’s *Garnethill* arguably constitutes the profoundest and most evocative exploration of the themes of family and violence directed at women within the home. Examining the interrelationship between family and social structures in a patriarchal post-industrial society, Mina offers a shockingly undiluted taste of Glaswegian working-class family life. Indeed, a sense of hopelessness permeates the novel as the author uncovers the extent to which Maureen’s social status is linked to her family background:

The school had found out that Winnie was an alki when the headmistress phoned her about Liam’s disruptive behaviour in class. Winnie staggered up the school, told the school secretary she was a

wanker and fell asleep in the waiting room. [...] The teachers stopped giving them a hard time after that, they looked at them pityingly and made allowances when they didn't do homework. It was insulting the way they spoke to them, as if their lives were pathetic and always would be, as if they couldn't help themselves. Maureen would rather have been treated as a bad child than a sad one. (Mina, *Garnethill* 96)

Maureen's marginalisation and traumatising are to be traced not only to her mother's vice and the social attitude towards it but to her father's sexual abuse. Yearning for 'normality' and acceptance within and outside of her family, Mina's 'extra-ordinary' protagonist eventually confronts not only the disturbed relationship with her alcoholic mother but the demons of her father's harrowing betrayal. Without doubt, Mina unflinchingly fleshes out the lived realities of a child abuse victim for she engineers a very complex and tangible heroine who does not think in black and white absolutes. Thus, Maureen's version of the past is not fully tainted black but reveals glimpses of bright memories infused with a desperate longing for the warmth and stability of a functioning family which perpetually seethes underneath her tough, disillusioned surface:

She dreamed of breakfast served after Sunday mass. It always felt like a treat because they were hungry: they couldn't eat before taking communion. Hot, sweet tea, back in the days when everyone took sugar, bacon-egg rolls and the short-worded papers the children could read, the ones with the sex scandals in them. The family were sitting around the front room the way they used to, half dressed for mass with the fragile and uncomfortable bits of clothing taken off and put in their rooms: velvet jackets that would stain with the bacon fat, itchy tights and stiff shoes. (Mina, *Garnethill* 101)

Her longing, however, is repeatedly pierced by her father's traumatizing sexual abuse, as the horrifying end of the dream discloses:

They were all adults now, except for her father who was just as she remembered him, thirty-four years old [...] sitting in the best armchair next to the window. Maureen was lying on her back by the side of his chair. [...] She was wearing a prim flannelette nightie with a high neck, buttoned right up, tight around her throat. It had been rolled up carefully to the hem, leaving her naked from the waist down. She couldn't get up because her back was stuck to the floor. Without taking his eyes off the paper he reached down to touch her. She tried to get up, flailing her arms and legs wildly like a dying spider, but then her gut split open and a pain seared through her abdomen making her lie still and shut her eyes. (Mina, *Garnethill* 101-102)

To make things worse, her father's offence fills Maureen with an ever-present sense of shame: "It was being stuck on her back, it was the feeling of being so small and being trapped. She remembered the sensation and her eyes filled up" (Mina, *Garnethill* 105). Again, Maureen's reaction to the abuse contributes to a relentlessly honest portrayal of the behavioural pattern of child abuse victims. That is to say, Maureen, like most incest survivors, feels to some extent responsible and guilty of the offence committed to her. Thus, she tries to counter her father's cruelty towards her by being "adoring to him when other people were there and she knew he couldn't touch her. She thought if she was nicer to him he would stop hurting her when they were alone" (Mina, *Garnethill* 196). Exploring the troubling subject from different angles, Mina further expands on the theme of child abuse through characters like 'Skeletal Pauline', Maureen's anorexic friend from the Northern Psychiatric Hospital:

They had both been abused by their fathers, Pauline had been raped by her father and brother, but their responses were very different: Pauline couldn't get angry and Maureen couldn't get anything else. Pauline could never bring herself to tell: she said it would break her mother and that would be harder to bear than the abuse. (Mina, *Garnethill* 203)

It is also through Pauline that Mina grittily traces the worst possible outcome of sexual abuse:

Pauline was released a few months after Maureen [...] Within a week of her return to the family home she went to the woods near her house and took an overdose. [...] At the funeral a nurse told Maureen that, until they found a goodbye note in her bedroom, the police thought it was murder because they found dried semen on her back. Someone had wanked on her as she lay dead or dying. (Mina, *Garnethill* 203-204)

Essentially, it is Maureen's perception and sobering account of Pauline's fate which make the girl's story so compelling. Like Pauline, Maureen knows about the difficulties of telling her family about her father's abuse. Choosing to speak up for herself, Maureen is not only stigmatised by society but also by her own mother and her two sisters who are trapped in sheer denial of the appalling truth. Rejecting to believe that Maureen has been abused by her father, they also call into doubt Maureen's version of Douglas's death. Yet,

the novel does not offer binary oppositions of good and bad but provides authentically complex patterns of behaviour. After all, Maureen loves her histrionic mother and is drawn to her as much as her mother, in her own quirky way, does not break the bond between them. Sporadically yet repeatedly they seek to gain access to each other's hearts, with sometimes tremendously comic effect:

Maureen could feel the heat from the cooker before she got through the kitchen door. 'I've been baking all day,' said Winnie. With a great flourish she opened the oven and pulled out a loaf tin. She cut a thick slice of hot gingerbread, buttered it and gave it to Maureen along with a cup of coffee. The gingerbread tasted exactly the same as McCall's, a famous bakery in Rutherglen – they always overdid the cinnamon. But it was a kind lie, designed to make Maureen feel cared for. 'Thanks Mum,' she said. 'It's lovely.' [...] Maureen tried surreptitiously sniffing the air to work out what her mother was drinking. [...] She had drunk just enough to get morose but not enough to get aggressive. [...] Maureen guessed that she had at least half an hour before Winnie started to get difficult. (Mina, *Garnethill* 85-86)

In essence, Maureen stands by her family. Thus, she even defends the reputation of her family in front of the police: "We are as savoury as any other family in this city ..." (Mina, *Garnethill* 176). Nevertheless, the only two people Maureen gets real support and understanding from are her 'shady' brother Liam and her best friend Leslie, who works in a domestic violence shelter and provides further material for the novel's main theme: the culturally ingrained violence against women. It is through Leslie that Mina expounds her inside knowledge about battered women's shelters in Scotland:

The funding to the domestic violence shelter where Leslie worked had been cut and it might have to shut in a month. She was conducting a campaign to have the funding reinstated and was getting the rubber ear everywhere. 'God, it's depressing', she said. 'We got so desperate we even sent a mail-shot to the papers telling them that eighty per cent of battered women are turned away as it is, and not one of them phoned us. No one seems to give a shit.' (Mina, *Garnethill* 16)

Years of experience in the field of domestic violence have left Leslie cynical and frustrated. The feeling of impotence in the face of a perpetual cycle of apparently culturally sanctioned violence lead Leslie to contemplate a more aggressive approach to combating gendered violence, as the following passage illustrates:

‘I hate that, I hate it. [...] Just that when we act so powerless, like there’s nothing we can do, they smack us and we say, please stop, they smack us and we say, please stop. We should smack them fucking back.’

‘But if we use violence how are we different from them?’

‘Morally?’

‘Yeah, morally there’d be nothing to separate us.’

Leslie shook her head. ‘God A1-fucking-mighty, Maureen, have you thought about this at all?’ It’s all right for you and me to worry about our moral standing –neither of us are getting our faces kicked in every night in the week. These women are treated as if they were born on the end of a boot and we set up committees and worry about our moral standing. It’s a fucking joke, the movement’s turning into the WRVS, it pisses me off. We’re not fucking helpless, we’re fucking cowards.’ (Mina, *Garnethill* 311-312)

In fact, Leslie’s idea to ‘fight back’ turns out to be the only suitable measure to confront male violence as legal institutions fail to protect female victims. Thus, the novel takes a turn for the better with Maureen combating violence with violent measures. Put differently, *Garnethill* delivers a damning indictment on the state of gender equality within and outside of the family in contemporary Scotland.

Apart from ostensibly focusing on violence committed against women, Mina also incorporates a male incest survivor in the shape of the sympathetic policeman Hugh McAskill. In fact, McAskill and Maureen’s brother Liam are among the few male characters that are depicted not merely as violent perpetrators but as three-dimensional humans. On balance, one can safely assert that Mina, with powerful eloquence, offers a grittily bleak yet grippingly human account of Glaswegian family life, highlighting the omnipresence of male violence in Scottish culture:

She thought about the ships passing down the river many years ago, taking emigrants to America whole families of Scots lost to their own people for ever. Lost to drizzling rain and a fifty-year recession, to endemic domestic violence and armies of drunk men shouting about football. (Mina, *Garnethill* 224)

### 6.3 The Ill-treatment of the Mentally Ill

“I was doing a Ph.D. on mental illness and female offenders, and I realized that six people would read it. I thought if I could write a crime novel with the same stuff in it, hundreds of people would read it. I never realized that it would be, like, thousands” (Mina qtd. in Rochlin 1).

With her brilliant creation of a depressive yet rational heroine in the shape of Maureen O'Donnell, Denise Mina lays bare the brutality as well as insanity of the treatment of people experiencing mental disorders. Indeed, the author tackles a burning issue, as the public perception of diseases of the mind is still fear-driven rather than well-informed. In his report on prejudice and stigma surrounding schizophrenia, Cliff Prior attributes this misinformation largely to the representation of mental illness in the media, revealing that “[a] study sponsored by the Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) in Scotland showed that 66% of media coverage linked mental illness with violence” (57). Moreover, Prior emphasises that prejudices have a devastating impact on the treatment and reintegration of patients:

Poor attitudes lead to a feeling that it isn't worth trying very hard because the outcome will be poor anyway. Appalling conditions in hospitals are tolerated in a way that would be unthinkable in other fields of health care. New treatments are cold-shouldered. Users are done to, not worked with. After all, what's the point of listening to them? They are mad aren't they? (57)

Aiming to lift the fog of ignorance surrounding mental illness, Denise Mina explains that

[she] was very conscious of the fact [she] [is] bringing politics to it. [She] was sitting down and trying to make a sympathetic narrative out of political points about people with mental illnesses still being people. That someone can have a breakdown, get over it, then make rational decisions and deductions, the way a detective does. (Mina qtd. in Mansfield, “Crime does pay” 1)

In other words, Mina seeks to promote the rethinking of the downright negative public perception as well as the concept of mental illness by staging a female ex-mental patient as the chief consciousness of her novel. Thus, in

contrast to public opinion towards people with mental disorders, Mina's 'flawed' heroine is capable of self-reflection and, above all, asserts a will to live, actively feel and engage in the present, despite her traumatic experiences, as the following passage intimates:

Numbness is worse than pain: it's like a violent wasting disease when all connection with the outside world evaporates, nothing matters, nothing counts, nothing touches or entertains or surprises; even physical sensations feel distant and unreal. It's death without the paperwork. (Mina, *Garnethill* 190-191)

Granting access to Maureen's feelings, the noir author gives the reader an understanding not only of mental suffering, but also of what it means to be classified and treated as mentally ill:

The echoey corridors and smell of industrial disinfectant freaked her every time, reminding her of her stay in the Northern. The nurses there were kind but they fed her with food she didn't like and dressed her with the curtains open. The toilets didn't have locks on them so that the patients couldn't misuse the privilege of privacy for a suicide bid. When she first got out, each day was a trial: she was terrified that she might snap and again be a piece of meat to be dressed every morning in case of visitors. (Mina, *Garnethill* 13)

As the passage intimates, it is the total loss of dignity which lies at the heart of Maureen's downright negative experience with psychiatric hospitals. Piece by piece, Maureen's mordantly witty descriptions of Glasgow's supposedly curative institutions dismantle the credibility of the Scottish treatment of mental illness and in this way also restore sanity to the 'fallen' heroine: "The walls were painted yellow and covered in posters of puppies and kittens and monkeys. When it was full of patients the maniacally cheerful room looked like a sarcastic joke" (Mina, *Garnethill* 122). Unsurprisingly, Maureen perceives the treatment she is exposed to as an insult to her intelligence or as the quick-witted protagonist puts it herself "an empty gesture to medicalize a deep sadness" (Mina, *Garnethill* 13).

However, experiencing the loss of her reputation and credibility, Maureen suffers ill treatment not only within but also outside the confinements of mental institutions. Thus, the police and even her own mother fiercely distrust the 'ex-mental patient' and her version of the truth. As the novel unfolds,

Mina explores a whole panoply of tenacious prejudices directed against the mentally ill. For example, by introducing the character of 'Suicide Tanya', "an ageless, grizzled woman with, as her nickname suggested, a habit of attempting suicide" (Mina, *Garnethill* 133), the author vividly portrays the climate of fear that surrounds psychic disorders:

The lady realized that Tanya was a bit mental – it wouldn't have taken a hardened professional to spot it: she had a booming voice and the concentration span of a spliffed goldfish. The lady turned away and walked, as if casually, out of the shelter to stand in the drizzling rain. (Mina, *Garnethill* 133)

Yet, Mina does not stop at exposing the harsh social exclusion of people with mental health problems but sensitively reveals that people labelled as 'lunatics' are very well aware of and hurt by the fact that they are being cast aside as dangerous and incapable of rational thought. Thus, despite her mental dissonances, Tanya is well aware of the sheer ignorance of the police, as the following dialogue between her and Maureen demonstrates:

'I told the police. They don't listen. They asked me about Douglas but they don't listen.'  
 'How don't they listen?'  
 'They just don't. They think I'm daft. He said thank you but I saw him laughing at me. (Mina, *Garnethill* 135)

The blatant police misconduct in dealing with mental patients is also thematised through the character of the young depressive Siobhain McCloud, who in the course of police investigations into the murder of Douglas Brady and alleged rapes of mental patients, is questioned about her traumatic stay at the Northern Hospital without any appropriately trained personnel. Aware of the damage such insensitive interrogation might cause, Maureen tries to explain the insanity of such an interview. Her chivalry is, however, wasted on the glaringly ignorant Inspector Joe McEwan:

'You can't ask her about that, Joe.' [...] 'You just can't. She won't talk to you, will she? She can't talk about it. It'll make her sick.'  
 'Well, she seems to be talking. I'm not questioning her, Sergeant Harris is. Harris is a woman.'  
 'You don't understand. It doesn't matter that it's a woman.'  
 McEwan was impassive. 'Why don't you just leave it to us. [...]' (Mina, *Garnethill* 302)

In contrast to the poor public perception of depressives, Maureen perceives her fellow sufferers in a quite different light:

She had met many depressives in hospital. They were interesting company when she could coax them to talk: they seemed more in touch with reality than most people. Depressives, in full flight, can correctly estimate their chances getting cancer, being victim of a sexual attack or winning the lottery. They don't dilute to taste. (Mina, *Garnethill* 123)

Through Maureen, Mina not only mediates a more holistic image of mental illness but masterly subverts culturally ingrained stereotypes about female mental patients and male doctors, showing that 'mad' women are still capable of rational thought whereas doctors are not to be trusted. Thus, the doctor-patient relationship is exposed as an unequal balance of power in which doctors ruthlessly exploit their power over their patients. Accordingly, the sadistic rapes of the female mental patients and the murder of Douglas are traced to the cruel insanity of Maureen's former psychiatrist Dr. Angus Farrell. Ending on an ironic note, the author finally sends the abusive psychiatrist to a state mental hospital, which according to the sympathetic policeman Hugh McAskill is to be differentiated from private mental institutions in that "[t]he public gives a damn about people in mental hospitals" (Mina, *Garnethill* 439).

Mina's profound examination of the treatment of mentally ill women grippingly demonstrates that the violence against society's most defenceless group is grounded in the pernicious social perception of mental disorders as well as of women. Moreover, Mina calls attention to the fact that such poor attitudes infest all levels of society and lead to the institutional failure to protect these women. Demystifying mental illness, *Garnethill* advocates a moral treatment which restores women to their dignity as human beings. Without doubt, the following dialogue between Maureen and Siobhain wonderfully distils the heart of the novel's message:

'They say I'm sick but I'm not. My heart is broken.'

Maureen smiled warmly. 'You're living in the wrong time, Siobhain,' she said. 'Broken hearts are a bit too poetic for doctors to understand.'  
(Mina, *Garnethill* 164)

#### 6.4 Vices: Fags, Drugs and Alcohol

Men-poets are drowning in songs about drink  
 But for wumman it's most unbecoming,  
 When I look in your eyes, I can see that ye think:  
 'There's nothing se low's a drunk wumman'.  
 (Mina, *A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle* par. 3)

As befits the hard-boiled genre as well as Scotland, alcohol and its accompanying vices play a major part in all of the three novels. Mina's *Garnethill* is virtually drenched in whiskey and cheap 'booze' and steeped in the fumes of cigarettes and joints. Put differently, almost all of the characters inhabiting the tough world of the novel relieve their stress by excessive cigarette or drug consumption and drown their frustration in high-proof alcohol. In this respect, however, the hard-bitten protagonist Maureen O'Donnell exceeds them all. Accordingly, she cheekily opens the novel by lighting herself a cigarette and just a few pages afterwards she gladly accepts the invitation of her best friend Leslie, who generally opines that "alcohol abuse is [not] a bad way to cope with short-term traumas" (Mina, *Garnethill* 153), to "get really pissed" (Mina, *Garnethill* 18). Thus, just a few pages into the novel the reader witnesses Maureen's first hangover:

Maureen's head was fuzzy with red wine. She put on her softest T-shirt straight from the wash to make herself feel coddled and went to bed. She took more than the prescribed dose of an over-the counter liquid sleeping draught and fell asleep with her eye make up half off and her leg hanging out of the bed. (Mina, *Garnethill* 18)

It soon becomes apparent that the dissolute heroine is well-versed in the effects of alcohol abuse, not least because she has been exposed to her family's "Celtic melancholia" (Mina, *Garnethill* 111) from an early age. Thus, Maureen knows all about the different faces alcohol evokes in people:

Sober Winnie was almost as much work as Very Drunk Winnie and Very Drunk Winnie was a lot of work. She was angry and vindictive, shouting carefully personalized abuse at whoever happened to be in front of her, casting up any failure or humiliation, however petty, always going straight for the jugular. [...] George drank as much and as often as Winnie, but he was a dear, melancholic drunk whose greatest handicaps were falling asleep at odd moments and a

propensity to recite sentimental poetry about Ireland. (Mina, *Garnethill* 79-85)

Treading in her mother's footsteps, Maureen has come to cherish the soothing effect of Scotland's 'water of life': "The whisky slid down her oesophagus, kissed her stomach lining and sent a radiant wave rolling up her spine. The warm glow nestled in the nape of her neck" (Mina, *Garnethill* 108). In fact, for Maureen alcohol has come to stand for salvation from her troubled life, as the simile in the following passage illustrates: "[H]er mind kept wandering back to the bottle of Glenfiddich at the far end of the gantry. She could see it in her mind's eye, lit up from behind like a holy vision" (Mina, *Garnethill* 111). As the novel unfolds Maureen's chief vice takes a turn for the worse for she imbibes "far far too much" (Mina, *Garnethill* 393).

Indeed, drinking to numb rather than to taste, Mina's characters are not to be confused with the alcohol connoisseurs of Agatha Christie's fiction. Thus, "Winnie [likes] to drink whisky from a coffee-cup first thing in the morning" (Mina, *Garnethill* 21), her daughter, Maureen, habitually downs whisky "like ginger" (Mina, *Garnethill* 393) and sometimes even resorts to drowning her sadness in "peach schnapps" (Mina, *Garnethill* 352) and ever so often the main characters "[settle] down in the living room to watch television and get pissed" (Mina, *Garnethill* 354). Essentially, the novel highlights the fact that binge drinking forms an indispensable part of the 'Scottish way of life'. Together with fags and other intoxicating substances, preferably marijuana, alcohol presents the perfect vehicle for escaping the grim reality of Glaswegian life. More importantly, however, Mina boldly reveals that women partake in this licentious cultural practice as much as their male counterparts. In fact, "with the country's women now at a greater risk of dying from drink-related diseases than men in England" (Watson 1), Scottish women are catching up with their hard-drinking male compatriots in excessive alcohol consumption. In view of these facts, it can be argued that Mina portrays her female characters to be hard-drinking not in order to endow them with as much fictional toughness as their male hard-boiled antecedents but to picture her Tartan heroines as realistically as possible.

The fact that Scottish women are part of an entrenched drinking culture also surfaces in McDermid's *Hostage to Murder*. Justifying her female colleague's drinking habits in front of her lover Sophie, McDermid's astute protagonist explicitly references that the Scottish attitude to drinking applies to both women and men equally: "Come on, you know how drinking still goes with the territory here in Scotland. Rory's perfectly capable of doing what she needs to do, regardless of how much she's had to drink or how little sleep she's had" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 275). Just as in Mina's *Garnethill*, McDermid's characters frequently seek comfort in the excessive consumption of fags, drugs and alcohol. Thus, Bernie's recipe to combat fear and misery consists of "whisky and fags" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 170-171) to which she resorts frequently throughout the novel: "Nine o'clock in Glasgow, and Bernie Gourlay was alone with a glass of Johnnie Walker and a half-smoked cigarette" (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 186). Whisky it is also for Lindsay after a rough encounter with Patrick Coughlan's henchmen. Generally speaking, Scotland's national beverage is used as a universal remedy for bad days. Rory, however, representing the young generation of Scottish women, prefers a mixture of cocktails and alcopops to drown her affection for Lindsay:

Rory herself appeared, looking hangdog and hungover. What the fuck was I drinking last night? She groaned as she eased herself into the booth. 'You ended up on tequila slammers with wee Ian Harvey', Sandra said. 'That was after five gin and tonics, two Zombies, several bottles of that disgusting lemon alcopop and a rum and Coke.' (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 266)

As the passage illustrates the excessive consumption of alcohol as a form of escapism also occupies a central place in *Hostage to Murder*. Alluding to the fact that intoxicating substances other than alcohol also play a major part in the form of abusive indulgence practiced in Scotland's metropolis, McDermid tellingly calls Rory's and her friend Sandra's favourite dance club 'E-scape'. As a matter of fact, Rory and Sandra are no strangers to binge-drinking nor to taking designer drugs such as ecstasy: "They'd split a tab of ecstasy earlier in the evening, they'd danced like dervishes and now they were both

starting the gradual descent to the point where sleep might be possible at some time in the not too distant future” (McDermid, *Hostage to Murder* 72).

Scotland’s national vice also receives its share of attention in Welsh’s *Cutting Room*. Thus, Rilke is no abstainer but enjoys his drink more than often throughout the novel. Consistent with her style of writing, Welsh adds that ‘extra wee bit of gothic chic’ by having her extravagant, hard-drinking protagonist appreciate high-quality whisky:

In the centre were a plain office desk and chair, to their left a high-backed armchair, [...] beside it a bottle of malt, Lagavulin. [...] I unscrewed the cap and inhaled a scent of iodine and peat which caught the back of my throat. It was the good stuff, right enough. There was no cup so I took the end of my shirt and rubbed it along the mouth of the bottle before taking a good slug. (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 18)

Yet, Rilke is no disciplined connoisseur but an uncontrolled hedonist, as the protagonist-narrator intimates: “It was the whisky that drew me back. [...] I should know myself: that bottle was too full and I was too empty” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 20). Moreover, it is interesting to note that Welsh plays with the idea that the amber spirit of Scotland has come to bear greater social significance than religion, as Rilke’s pointed remark reflects: “I’d offer to swear on the Bible but I’m not a believer. I’ll swear on a bottle of malt if you’ve got one” (Welsh, *The Cutting Room* 210). Besides alcohol, Rilke enjoys his roll-ups and consumes other intoxicating substances such as speed as well as marijuana, which he frequently smokes with his drug-dealing acquaintance Leslie. Without doubt, the other characters are no less dissolute. Thus, the violent transvestite Leslie is known to have had a strong liking for heroin and the chain-smoking vamp Rose savours a bottle of red wine a day for which she even carries a corkscrew in her handbag.

In essence, all of the three novels tackle the subject of drug abuse with bold candour. Eschewing any overt moralising, they present their characters three dimensionally in socially realistic settings and expose the consumption of fags, drugs and alcohol as a deeply ingrained cultural practice.

## Conclusion

The founding father of the Tartan Noir genre, William McIlvanney, once remarked that “[a] book is like a foreign country. You take your identity with you, like a passport, but you have to give the author the chance to ratify it or question it to some extent on his or her terms” (Introduction *Laidlaw* vi). Without doubt, the female Tartan Noir authors discussed in this thesis tackle the issue of identity in remarkable ways. At first glance, Denise Mina’s *Garnethill* may seem to be a hard-boiled feminist crime novel seeking to manifest that toughness is not a male monopoly. Yet, behind its pulpy façade it reveals itself as a highly challenging, certainly radical and indeed transgressive text. With her unflinching exploration of female subjectivity, identity and rigid cultural systems of thought she transcends the formulaic pattern of the hard-boiled genre as well as the masculinity of traditional Scottish working-class literature to project a new form of social novel. Literary socialism with public appeal also constitutes Val McDermid’s terrain. In her *Hostage to Murder* she cunningly fuses suspenseful crime fiction with social realism steeped in Scotland to examine explosive socio-political, in particular feminist and lesbian, issues. Louise Welsh’s innovative noir novel *The Cutting Room* proves to be no less radical in its form as well as its content. Blurring the boundaries between ‘literary’ and ‘popular’ fiction, it features a bold mixture of traditional gothic and racy hard-boiled elements which combine to form a coherent, aesthetically appealing text to critique Scotland’s postmodern capitalist and gender-conditioned culture.

Despite embedding in their narratives recognisably Scottish as well as hard-boiled elements, amongst others the hard-drinking private investigator, they all masterly transcend literary conventions and deftly subvert cultural commonplaces. Thematically, the novels are anchored in Scotland but not confined to it as they re-imagine Glasgow within a gendered, multicultural and globalized context. In fact, in his examination of contemporary Scottish

literature Matt McGuire attributes this invigorating engagement with identity and nation primarily to the female scribes of Scotland:

Questions of nationalism and the Anglo-Scots relationship, whilst they remain relevant, have been incorporated within a broader theoretical discussion. This increasingly includes a host of other issues like the nature of post-industrial society, the politics of sexual and ethnic minorities, and the advent of globalisation with its attendant late capitalist consumer culture. Nowhere is this sea change more clearly demonstrated than in the visibility and the critical profile afforded to women's writing. (4)

Essentially, the novels discussed share an unswerving social commitment to Scotland and its cultural innovation, propagating a brave new Scotland which stands assured of its existence, gets above its patriarchal nationalism and embraces its plurality to include women as well as other marginalised groups in its contemporary national narrative. Without question, these authors manifest that the assertion of Scottishness is no longer a masculine domain. Elaine Fulton, director of the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland, couldn't have expressed it better when she poignantly observed that "[t]here certainly seems to be something about the way the crime novel is written now; it reaches across age and gender [...] You can pass something from husband to wife, maybe, in a way you didn't in the past." (qtd. in Cornwell 1).

Put differently, these female noir writers have successfully tackled "those sacred thistles of Scot Lit – masculinity and class" (Strachan 55) as well as gender and identity and have taken their space among a powerful current of cutting-edge female scribes who transform Scotland's literary and cultural landscape. Despite asserting themselves as postmodern Scottish females, Mina, McDermid and Welsh call for a radical rethinking of outdated notions of national, racial, gender as well as sexual identities. Thus, entrenched, rigidly narrow, cultural labels are exposed to have pernicious effects on the individual as well as Scotland. In fact, many contemporary female Tartan writers, such as the award-winning, Scottish author Zoe Strachan, are postulating their wish for Scotland to rise above her incarcerating cultural stereotypes:

In the future, I hope the labels I mentioned above will disappear. How nice it would be to be known not as a 'woman writer' or a 'lesbian writer' or even a 'Scottish writer', but simply as a writer! You cannot deny the factors that influence your work, or that sometimes labels can indeed give you a leg up. As Scottish writers we are coming from a place – an intellectual and emotional place – that is not English, and of course we want review coverage in the Scottish press (while it still exists as a significant presence at a national level). We need it because we start out at a disadvantage; we are far from London and not born with silver pens in our hands. That for such a small nation we have one of the most exciting and varied literary scenes in the world is something of which to be proud of. Who knows, soon we might be ready not only to figure out who we think we are, but to get above ourselves. (Strachan 55)

In the end, however, it is nobody else but Denise Mina who masterly gets to the heart of the contemporary Scottish artist's main concern:

We've had a thousand years of lies  
 Let's start again.  
 Clean slate.  
 The Thistle is-  
 Stop!  
 No!  
 No new definitions!

[...]

Our greatest possible ambition  
 Should be to set no definition.  
 But watch and tend  
 And kindly see  
 What spring  
 Will bring.

(*A Drunk Woman Looks at the Thistle* par. 135-140 )

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## German Abstract

Die Eingliederung Schottlands in das Königreich Großbritanniens im Jahre 1707 legte den Grundstein für Schottlands sozialpolitische und kulturelle Haltung. Denn obgleich die Fusion mit dem dominanten südlichen Nachbarn keine vollständige Aufgabe der Selbstadministration bedeutete, zog der Zusammenschluss der ungleichen Mächte doch eine politische sowie kulturelle Vereinnahmung mit sich. Es begann ein fast 300 jahrelanger kultureller Überlebenskampf, in dem vor allem die Literatur als Sprachrohr für die Behauptung eigener, von England unterscheidbarer, schottischer Werte diente. Wie eng die Entwicklung Schottlands mit seiner nationalen Literatur verbunden ist zeigt sich in der Analyse der kurz vor der Wiedereinrichtung des Edinburgher Parlaments im Jahre 1999 entstandenen literarischen Strömungen, die sich an Stelle einer wirklichkeitsfernen Romantik nun eines höchst kritischen Sozialrealismus bedienten, um Schottland neu und vor allem authentisch zu inszenieren. In dieser kritischen Zeit wurde das Genre des Krimis als Spiegel gesellschaftlicher Entwicklungen wiederentdeckt und adaptiert. Diese in Schottland geschmiedete literarische Gattung mit dem marketingträchtigen Namen ‚Tartan Noir‘ geht auf die ‚härteste‘ aller Krimi Untergattungen, auf den amerikanischen ‚hard-boiled‘ Roman, zurück und erwies sich damit als perfektes Medium um tief verwurzelten Symbolen schottischer Kultur, wie dem hartgesottenen, männlichen Arbeiterklasse-Helden, Ausdruck zu verleihen. Letztendlich ist es jedoch die weibliche Seite Schottlands, die den in den 80iger Jahren begonnenen sozial-kritischen Diskurs erfolgreich weiterführt. Im Bestreben die verhärteten Identitäten Schottlands aufzuweichen, behandeln die Schottinnen in ihren tiefschwarzen Krimis zeitgemäße sozialpolitische Themen aus der Sicht der Frauen und fechten auf diese Weise gekonnt die traditionell männliche Subjektivität an. Anhand der thematischen Analyse dreier Romane der innovativsten Vertreterinnen des Genres, Denise Minns *Garnethill*, Val McDermids *Hostage to Murder* und Louise Welshs *The Cutting Room*, erörtert die vorliegende Arbeit die soziale Funktion des Krimis und untersucht den Diskurs dieser Texte im Bezug auf Schottlands sozialpolitische Landschaft.

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