



University
of Glasgow

Elliot, Robert David (1977) *The Glasgow novel*. PhD thesis.

<http://theses.gla.ac.uk/5058/>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given

THE GLASGOW NOVEL

ROBERT DAVID ELLIOT

A Thesis submitted to the Arts Faculty
of the University of Glasgow
for the Degree of Ph.D.

July, 1977.

BEST COPY

AVAILABLE

Variable print quality

Text cut off in original

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the various people who have aided me in the preparation of this thesis: my supervisor Mr. Alexander Scott of the Department of Scottish Literature, Glasgow University for his advice and assistance; the staff of the Glasgow Room of the Mitchell Library for their help over a number of years; the staff of Baillie's Library and in particular Mrs. Manchester for her assistance and invaluable knowledge; and finally my wife Helen and my mother for their encouragement.

SUMMARY

This thesis is a study of the Glasgow novel from its beginnings in the early nineteenth century till the present day. After a brief look at the issues raised by Scottish industrial fiction in general we go on to approach the Glasgow genre in the light of the themes and groupings it has thrown up, and in doing so a chronological history emerges indirectly. We find no all embracing theory, but a number of significant points are raised. Foremost stands a continuing split between a vision of the city as an industrial centre and, conversely, as a centre of culture. Chapter One shows the novelist's view of materialism and ambition in the Victorian city and how this changes as we enter the twentieth century. The next Chapter examines the Glasgow examples of kailyard fiction. Chapter Three then traces the increasing awareness of lower life in the novel and the technical approaches it involves, and the next Chapter looks in detail at an offshoot of this - the gang novel. Chapter Five, on politics, gives the lie to the myth of Red Clydeside, and confirms the split approach to the city. Chapter Six views the Glasgow novel through its apprehension of religion and its replacement as the genre ages by an interest in the individual. Chapter Seven looks at the many different manifestations of pride associated with the city, while Eight and Nine deal with the peculiar contributions of respectively women and children. Chapter

Ten shows how the city's past has evoked various responses - some superficial others strongly felt - and Chapters Eleven and Twelve give a detailed look at the two most important writers to have worked on the city. Finally the Glasgow genre is set in context - against the wider background of both Scottish and English regional fiction.

CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE Ambition And Success	27
CHAPTER TWO The Kailyard Novel In Glasgow	74
CHAPTER THREE Realism And Working Class Life	105
CHAPTER FOUR The Gang Novel	158
CHAPTER FIVE Politics And The Glasgow Novel	171
CHAPTER SIX Religion And The Individual	226
CHAPTER SEVEN Local Pride And Nationalism	300
CHAPTER EIGHT Women And The Glasgow Novel	334
CHAPTER NINE Childhood And Adolescence	377
CHAPTER TEN The Historical Novel In Glasgow	404
CHAPTER ELEVEN Sarah Tytler And <u>St. Mungo's City</u>	440
CHAPTER TWELVE Frederick Niven	453
CONCLUSION	468
APPENDICES	

INTRODUCTION

I

In Literature And Location (1963) John Freeman outlines the literary history of Britain area by area. His Scottish section contains only a brief note on Glasgow mentioning its tenuous associations with Adam Smith, Smollet and Thomas Campbell, and the fact that De Quincey once lodged there. He is unable to name a single major work that sprang directly from the place, and its heritage seems very doubtful to say the least. Freeman's assumptions sum up the typical view of the city as far as observers of the mainstream of English literature are concerned: it is barren and not worth a second glance. While this response is understandable it is also, however, unfair. No writing of the first rank has yet been produced, but there has been a steady growth of novels about the city since the early nineteenth century and they form a body of work that is not only very entertaining at times, but which provides a valuable insight into Glasgow life and society. Indeed it goes far beyond this for the ethos of Glasgow is to a significant extent the ethos of urban and industrial Scotland in general.

I have taken a fairly simple geographical definition of what constitutes a "Glasgow novel". It will be set largely, though not necessarily completely, within the boundaries of what constitutes greater Glasgow today.

2

This limit is necessary to keep the material within manageable proportions. I have however used a certain amount of discretion so that novels set substantially outwith the city, but in some way meaningfully associated with Glasgow, have been included. This applies for example to The Changeling by Robin Jenkins where a slum boy is temporarily removed to a rural setting. How will he react to the different environment? On the other hand John Buchan's Mr. Standfast has been omitted since only one chapter is set in the city and it is unimportant in the novel's overall conception. I have not followed scrupulously Moira Burgess's The Glasgow Novel: A Bibliography 1870-1970¹ since, although it is invaluable as a basic checklist, it is far from satisfactory in terms of accuracy and completeness. Her annotations are often misleading and many books have been included unread. Neither have I disregarded any novels on qualitative grounds and in fact it will be seen that while the genre is a mixture of good and bad the latter by far predominates. The single exception to this rule has been with detective or crime novels many of which have not been considered since they are generally held to be outside normal literary canons. They have characteristics peculiar to themselves that set them apart. They lack seriousness; many are written to a strict formula, are puzzles and exercises in logic with little or no psychological or emotional interest.

¹Burgess, Moira. The Glasgow Novel 1870-1970 1972.

More important however is the fact that Glasgow does not matter. Julian Symons has pointed out one of the main precepts of this type of fiction:

"the idea that the setting of a story should not be too intrusive, since its function was simply to serve as background for the puzzle and not to provide a distracting interest in itself."²

I do however supply a list of works of this kind that are set in the city.*

Little has been written about the Glasgow novel. No critical history exists and in works about Scottish literature in general it is rare to find even the odd comment or footnote. There are a few articles which touch superficially on the subject but none that deal with it in depth or at length. There are also a handful of articles on individual novelists; otherwise the scene is empty. This study then will be concerned as much with information, with sifting and arranging a diverse body of material, as with interpretation and analysis.

II

Glasgow is unique in Britain as it has been not only a major industrial conurbation but a city in the

²Symons, Julian. The Detective Story In Britain 1962 p.27.

*See Appendix A.

more traditional sense of an advanced centre of civilization.^a While its nineteenth century experience is comparable with places like Leeds and Manchester unlike them its importance is not based entirely on manufacturing. The first History of Glasgow^b, published in 1736, was followed over the years by a plethora of studies yet it is only recently that these have laid any great stress on economic aspects. Early commentators found enough to write about in other features of Glasgow. The city was long a major European seat of learning. The university was founded in 1451 and all the histories catalogue the great (and lesser) names in science and philosophy associated with it. Similarly Glasgow played a significant role in the ecclesiastical history of Scotland and the cathedral is the only one in the country untouched by the reformation. Again, long before Clydeside was to assert itself in industry Glasgow became, due to the tobacco trade, one of the world's foremost commercial centres. Thus it possessed the institutions which service industry - banks, insurance concerns - long before industrialism itself set in. This is not to underestimate the importance of the industrial revolution. It was this which caused the city's most dramatic expansion and which financed

^aIn The Culture of Cities (1936) Lewis Mumford outlines this quality. "The city is the form and symbol of an integrated social relationship: it is the seat of the temple, the market, the hall of justice, the academy of learning. Here in the city the goods of civilization are manifolded; here is where human experience is transformed into viable signs, symbols, patterns of conduct, systems of order." (P.3).

^bBy John McUre.

5

the building that left it largely as we know it today. Yet it should be understood that Glasgow was not merely a child of the machine age. It had deeper roots, and as the works of contemporary writers show it felt itself to be of consequence in much more than factory production - indeed it still does.** What also contributed to this sense was the fact that since the early nineteenth century Glasgow has had something of the status of a capital. Legal and political influence have rested in Edinburgh but the economic power of Scotland has been concentrated in Glasgow. It has also been a magnet for population in a way the official capital has not. The respective figures for the last century and a half show a dramatic turn about. In 1801 Edinburgh's population exceeded Glasgow's by about 14,000. By 1851 however the figure was 111,000 in Glasgow's favour; by 1951 the latter with a population of about 1,089,000 was more than double Edinburgh's size. Moreover Glasgow's importance in relation to the total population of Scotland continually increased, and by 1951 held more than a fifth of the people of the country within its bounds. The large English cities, with of course the exception of London, have only been the main centres in a region, but Glasgow has come to be the first city in a nation. Indeed by the 1890s as well as being acknowledged as the Second City in the Empire as C.A. Oakley points out "it was said to be the sixth city of Europe, only

**See Appendix B.

London, Paris, Berlin, Vienna and St. Petersburg had larger populations."³ It is important to emphasise these facts - the deep roots, the commercial profile arising independently of the industrial side, the national role - for they emphasise the metropolitan face of Glasgow: Glasgow as a city. On the other hand things like the cotton mills, the shipyards and steel works, however much they contributed to Glasgow's rise as a whole, represent a different image: Glasgow as an industrial environment. While the two things are interrelated it is meaningful nevertheless to think in terms of a split - of two different strands of experience - for it is something which the Glasgow novel itself expressed.

In The Country And The City (1973) Raymond Williams points to two ways of looking at the city that have characterised English literature as it developed. The first appears essentially before the late nineteenth century and sees the city as a place of variety, randomness and excitement. The second belongs to the more recent world and involves a vision of the city as a depressing enslaving force: the home of huddled masses. The different views are well illustrated for example in quotations from respectively Wordsworth and George Gissing:

Wordsworth: "Thou endless stream of men and moving things! the quick dance of colours, lights and forms; the

³Oakly, C.A. The Second City 1973 (3rd Ed.) p.149.

7

the deepening din; Face
after face; the string of dazzling⁴
wares, shop after shop "

Gissing: "It was the hour of the unyoking of men. In the highways and byways of Clerkenwell there was a thronging of released toilers of young and old, of male and female. Forth they streamed from factories and workrooms, anxious to make the most of a few hours during which they might live for themselves. Great numbers were still bent over their labour, and would be for hours to come but the majority had leave to wend stablewards. Along the main throughfares" ⁵

Gissing's world is still London but there is an unmistakable disillusionment in his attitude. He belongs to an age whose consciousness has been marked by the development of industrial capitalism. From these observations we see that what was to appear in Glasgow - a fiction of industrialism and a fiction of metropolitanism, which at times coincided but often remained distinct - was a version of a national phenomenon. Indeed in this respect the Glasgow novel, in broad general thought, if not in detail, is something of a microcosm of how English literature has reacted to nineteenth and twentieth century urban industrialism. The timescales do not correspond. Glasgow remained "a city" well into the twentieth century while in England the other attitude appeared much earlier. It was not really until the 1930s that the industrial face began to assert itself, although urban and commercial life began

⁴Wordsworth, William. The Prelude VII: Residence In London.

⁵Gissing, George. The Nether World 1889 p.234.

to appear much sooner. Yet Scottish literature as a whole was later in reacting to industrial capitalism than the English. The nineteenth century Glasgow novel stressed the commercial city; it looked at architecture, coffee houses, theatres, the university, the varied social life, and this strand continues to the present day. The hero of Jericho Sleep Alone (1964) is as conscious of the diversions Glasgow has to offer as Martin Moir in Justice Of The Peace (1914) is of restaurants and artists' studios, or the boy in The Beggar's Benison (1866) is of offices and cake shops. On the other hand novels which concentrated on industrialism, like The Shipbuilders (1935) or Major Operation (1936) have not appeared so often since the last war.

There is an element of class consciousness connected with the different attitudes to the city which is very easy to understand. The development of industrial society in Britain was bound up absolutely with the development of capitalism. The new society was often harsh and unpleasant. To present it honestly was an implicit criticism, so writers who had no impulse to seek reform or revolution chose to write about the other side of the coin - Glasgow as a city. This is of course a crude assessment but the experience of the nineteenth century Glasgow novel backs it up. The writers were almost wholly middle class in background and they accepted society as it stood. They would criticise certain evils, but never questioned the system itself. Indeed many of them went out of their way to champion

Laissez Faire economics. They celebrated what were middle class achievements - imposing buildings — all the paraphernalia of a major centre of civilization. Industrial life, which in the novel really means working class life had to wait for the left wing novelists of the twentieth century to be presented in an honest unpatronising fashion. This is not to suggest that only the politically committed have tackled it, but that as a general rule any extensive treatment of this facet of Glasgow was accompanied by leftward leanings.

III

It is frequently held that nineteenth century Scotland did not produce novels set in urban or industrial environments, but it is a contention that cannot validly be upheld without qualification. There were novels about this. What it did not do was to produce a significant body of fiction which looked at contemporary Scotland in the way English novelists had been doing from the 1840s. The scene in Scotland, while not blank, is fragmented and disappointing and as late as 1924 a critic could with justification write thus:

"In this country the novel is only becoming conscious of the town. It is surprising that the metaphysical Scotsman with his love of moralising and the tendency to introspection has not produced work of the realistic and problematic kind found in France and Russia. The crowding of our

highland and lowland populations into busy commercial centres with the introduction of an Irish element, has created conditions which should lend themselves to dramatic treatment."⁶

Explaining this neglect is one of the most complex problems that faces the student of Scottish literature, and ultimately there are perhaps no conclusive answers. A number of factors present themselves, some more tenable than others. George Blake for example suggests that there is something in the Scottish spirit which draws it to the picturesque. "There is no doubt at all that a basic Scottish instinct is towards romance. It may be the pervasive celtic blood, in the traditional way of putting it."⁷ This is so questionable however as to be meaningless. Again it has been argued that the ascendancy of Edinburgh in purely literary culture mitigated against a treatment of Glasgow and industrialism. Yet there are few novels about Edinburgh life.

Similarly Edwin Morgan writes seductively:

"In Scotland the step from a more or less documentary realism to a developed novelistic realism has proved particularly hard to take partly because documentary writers - in reminiscences, autobiographies, diaries etc. - have been so excellent as to make fiction seem an indulgence and a delusion The deep thrilling imaginative realism of the novel, which is found sporadically in Scott and Stevenson, and flared up grandly but isolatedly in L.G. Gibbon has never established a lasting tradition in Scotland." 8

⁶ Stewart, Agnes. The Northern Review. May 1924 p.41.

⁷ Blake, George. Barrie And The Kailyard School 1951 p.12.

⁸ Morgan, Edwin. The Beatnik In The Kailyard in New Saltire No. 3, Spring 1962 p.68.

At first this seems fair enough: novelists felt they could not compete with factual works so they did not bother trying. But we realise that this view is based on the very doubtful assumption that the creative impulse is likely to be inhibited by what exists in another medium; that the artist will bow to the journalist.

More promising are theories that language, religion and emigration, though they will not in themselves suffice as explanations, played crucial roles. David Craig has voiced these most effectively. The dearth of literary production between 1825 and 1880 coincided with a period of massive emigration from Scotland. This had two consequences. It "affected literature directly in depriving the country of writer after writer. It also worked more insidiously and pervasively by helping to foster the nostalgia which has unmanned much of Scottish writing since the eighteenth century."⁹ Modern industrial Scotland was ignored then, because the talent was not there to observe it, and those who did write pandered to the emigr  with the kailyards. Calvinism has been the bogey dragged up to account for a hundred and one positives and negatives in Scottish life. It remains a slogan that it blighted the imaginative literature of the country although its exact effects are arguable. There is little doubt however that it did have an adverse effect as far as a serious portrayal of

⁹Craig, David. Scottish Literature And The Scottish People 1680-1830 1961 pp.275-6.

modern Scotland was concerned. Fiction was liable to be regarded as frivolous, so serious minds hesitated at embracing it. There are numerous accounts of the suspicion with which the novel was viewed in many Presbyterian homes.¹⁰ Language is another problem. The progressive decline of Scots over the last three centuries "has demonstrably accompanied not only difficulties in using that speech seriously but lack of general intelligent interest in this part of the world."¹¹ The Scots that survived did so largely as an oral language and when it came to writing, English was the expected medium, so we have a situation where two languages exist neither of which encompasses the whole range of experience. Briefly, this is where the trouble arises. Edwin Muir suggests that "the curse of Scottish literature is the lack of a whole language, which finally means the lack of a whole mind."¹² Emotions are expressed in Scots, the workings of the intellect in English. The novel calls for both. This is further complicated by the fact that when the Scot did use English, although he might do so perfectly correctly, very often he lacked the ease and naturalness of one who used it for all purposes of expression. The Scottish novelists then, lacking the literary equipment to confidently tackle the contemporary world tended to avoid it.

¹⁰ See Craig Chapter VII. Carlyle's parents strongly disapproved of fiction as did Macaulay's father.

¹¹ Scottish Literature And The Scottish People 1680-1830
op. cit. p.269.

¹² Muir, Edwin. Scott And Scotland 1936 p.22.

Yet as important as any of the above points is the realisation that there is generally a considerable lag between social cause and literary effect. Henry James held that "the flower of art blooms only when the soil is deep, that it takes a great deal of history to produce a little literature, that it needs a complex social machinery to set a writer in motion."¹³ In The Industrial Muse (1974) Martha Vicinus studied nineteenth century working class literature of all types, from street ballads and chartist fiction to music hall routines. She found that the transition from the old order to a modern industrialism was not immediately accompanied by a corresponding literary response. "A full generation of an industry was necessary before customs grew up. A new culture, albeit unsettled and fragmentary, only came out of settled living patterns."¹⁴ This is crucial for it confirms the Scottish experience. In England the industrial revolution was well under way by the mid eighteenth century yet Mary Barton did not appear until 1848 and Hard Times until 1854. The Scottish industrial revolution took place about a generation later than in England. The process was one of importing techniques already operating in the south.^c

¹³James, Henry. Hawthorn 1879 p.3.

¹⁴Vicinus, Martha. The Industrial Muse 1974 p.39.

^cFor example the iron industry in Scotland "unlike that of England made comparatively slow progress during the Napoleonic War and it was not until 1828 that it entered on a period of intense activity." - Henry Hamilton The Industrial Revolution In Scotland (1932) p.173

So it is not all that surprising that a fiction based on it and the towns it developed did not appear until very late. In addition when industrialism did come in Scotland it was more suddenly and violently than in England, and this has led to the feeling that perhaps Scotsmen were too involved in the actual process to write about it, that they spent their time making money instead of observing and painting society. This seems rather a simplistic hypothesis however, for the artist is usually a different type of person from the businessman, and the urge to write is unlikely in most cases to be forsaken for material opportunities. What is more probable is that the country's intellectual atmosphere was not conducive to a reflection of the contemporary scene. When we look at Scottish culture and education in the nineteenth century we find a complex background marked by the controversy over the curriculum of the universities. We have the supporters of the Scottish tradition of a general education - which meant an all round training in the arts as opposed to specialisation, and a humanistic bias in the teaching of science - fighting a rearguard action against Anglicisation and the introduction of the Southern practice of concentrating on a few subjects to a deep level. Followers of the latter pointed among other things to the low state of classical studies in Scotland - an approach to Latin which emphasised general appreciation instead of close textual study and an absence of Greek in favour of philosophy. As far as we are concerned the consequences of the Scottish tradition appear paradoxical. At first

sight the very breadth of interest would seem to favour the production of literature more than the narrowness of the English tradition, and the Scottish universities indeed pioneered English literature as a subject in its own right. In The Democratic Intellect (1961) George E. Davie points out that "the humanistic spirit in fact perpetuated itself in the Scottish classrooms in the form of literary appreciation and aesthetic standards,"¹⁵ and he reminds us that the question of the relationship between Scots language and literature was keenly debated at university level during the mid Victorian era. How then do we explain the conspicuous lack of literary achievement in nineteenth century Scotland? The philosophy question is important. Agnes Stewart, we remember, wondered why the metaphysical Scotsman did not channel his learning into fiction, but the key may lie in the peculiar nature of Scottish philosophy in the nineteenth century, bearing as it did the stamp of the common sense philosophers. They propounded a system of sophisticated common sense which had become abstract and remote. It is worth noting the observations of English critics who saw it as sterile and academic. F.D. Maurice for example writing in the early 1840s, expressed the argument:

"Scotch teachers laboured to keep their speculation free from any allusion to the actual life and business of men. They were philosophers and philosophers only. What had they to do with laws governments and religions?"¹⁶

¹⁵Davie, George Elder. The Democratic Intellect 1961 p.205

¹⁶The Democratic Intellect op. cit. p.260.

Philosophy then which is divorced from life did not furnish a good starting point for fiction. Moreover Scottish intellectual life during the nineteenth century was unsettled both by the crisis in the Scottish universities and by the controversies surrounding the Disruption in the Church of Scotland. The country's educated classes thus may have found their energies hived off to an extent into religious and educational debate instead of literature.

Finally the literary background requires comment. A good deal of emphasis must be placed on the influence of Scott. It seems to me that this is perhaps the most important consideration of all. His age was turbulent and saw great upheavals. In the Preface to Waverley he wrote that "there is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland."¹⁷ Yet the contemporary world rarely enters into his fiction. We may well ask why? One of the staple explanations is that Scotland presented something of a vacuum at that time. The old covenanting and Jacobite days were past, superseded by a dull conformity. But what we have already noted underlines that this is nonsense. It is to misunderstand the way in which Scott's works were affected by his society. Rather it would seem that Scott was all too aware of contemporary trends.

¹⁷ Scott, Walter. Waverley 1815 - Preface.

For example Lockhart records his alarm at the radical unrest of the time. In a letter to Thomas Scott (23rd December 1819) he wrote "our neighbours in Northumberland are in a deplorable state. Upwards of 50,000 blackguards are ready to rise between Tyne and Weir. On the other hand the Scottish frontiers are steady and loyal and arming fast."¹⁸ However affable and humane he was on a personal level he shared the prejudices of his class. He feared and distrusted what was happening in his society so he did not write about that society. Yet he was tuned into the consciousness of his age and his genius understood the spirit of change, if he did not sympathise with the actual details as he saw them in his own world. He is obsessed with one social order replacing another - but he keeps it at a safe distance by writing about the past. This consideration may be as important as his famous antiquarian and romantic interests. It is worth understanding Scott for his success was massive. He outshone all his contemporaries and it is not unnatural that he should set the trend for the Scottish novelists that came after him.

Moreover in Rob Roy (1817) he did predict what was to become a major theme in the Glasgow genre. This novel in no way evokes industrial Scotland but it does capture the ethos of trade and commercialism that was to be of crucial significance in nineteenth century Glasgow fiction.

¹⁸Lockhart, John Gibson. Life Of Scott 1837 p.335 Vol.4.

In Nicol Jarvie Scott distils one side of the city's character; the sensible well-doing side, which takes a deserved pride in its achievements. "But I maun hear naething about honour - we ken naething here but credit. Honour is a homicide and a bloodspiller, that gangs about making frays in the street; but credit is a decent honest man that sits at hame and makes fat play."¹⁹

There is nothing in Rob Roy that approaches the gross materialism that will become a feature of the city's fiction in the Victorian era. Not only because it is set in a pre-industrial Glasgow but because Scott was concerned to show that the new order that replaced the old romantic Scotland was not only inevitable, but was right and admirable. Scott's was only a tentative look at the city and a fuller expression of what the place was like required a greater attendance to the contemporary world than Scott was prepared to give. (This is not to suggest however that he wanted to examine Glasgow - it was only a side issue.)

It is not Scott but John Galt who can be seen as in some ways the father of the Glasgow novel, and the history of the genre may have been very different had the balance of literary influence in early nineteenth century Scotland been in his and not the former's favour. It is meaningful to see the period as something of a crossroads at which the future path of the Scottish novel

¹⁹Scott, Walter, Rob Roy 1817 (Everyman Edit. 1973 p.231)

was chosen. The two different impulses - one towards romance the other towards realism and the consideration of the urban scene - sprang up at the same time and apparently independently. Galt tells of how he conceived Annals Of The Parish (1821) well before Scottish novels were popularised by the publication of Waverley and this suggests that a fiction that took a serious look at the contemporary scene was about to develop here as it did in England. However, the overwhelming success of Scott killed it off by creating the notion that a "Scotch novel" had to be in Scott's mould. A brief look at Galt is useful for not only is he a direct ancestor of the Glasgow novel, being the earliest and most significant reflector of the urban world, but much of his approach and his themes and attitudes were taken up by Glasgow writers as the century progressed. Galt gives the lie to the frequent assertion that there was no Scottish industrial fiction before the twentieth century. Annals Of The Parish can validly be taken as an example. This point of view is perhaps best summed up by quoting Walter Allen in The English Novel:

"We can see in considerable detail and year by year, the change from a small, static country community existing in isolation, to a busy industrial town in the mainstream of the social and economic history of its time, with cotton mills, Irish labourers, Jacobin workmen, a dissenting chapel and even an Irish Catholic priest saying mass. It is the first novel I know in English of the impact of the industrial revolution on a village community written more or less at the time it was happening. Dalmailing is a living village, with

vigorous inhabitants: Annals Of
The Parish cannot fail to impress
as an authentic rendering of 20
the life of its time."

This is however only a partial assessment of the book, for what Allen fails to stress is that it is very limited fiction, notwithstanding the human touches it is really raw facts dressed up, rather than an imaginative treatment of social change. Blackwood's mother for example was convinced from its format that it was true. Even these facts however hardly give us a whole look at a community because of the way Galt organises them, on the basis of strict chronology instead of on subjects. Apart from the idiosyncrasies of Balwhidder it is of little interest as a human document, and it fails in particular to present the lives of the working men who are most affected by urban and industrial development. When they do appear in his works it is generally as an expression of his suspicions of radicalism. However, more akin than this novel to the Glasgow genre are The Provost, Sir Andrew Wylie and particularly The Entail. In these Galt works on the themes of ambition, self interest and rising fortunes which are to be the great concerns of the Victorian Glasgow novel. We are to meet figures in the mould of Claud Walkinshaw time and time again as the genre develops.

²⁰Allen, Walter. The English Novel 1954 p.122.

Galt's background was middle class and commercial as opposed to industrial. It was of the people of this world that he wrote - the world of trade and municipal affairs. It is this world that most of the nineteenth century Glasgow writers looked at.

IV

Rob Roy and The Entail have sections set in Glasgow but the principal action in each takes place outside and they cannot really be regarded as part of the genre. To a large extent the history of the Glasgow novel is the history of urban fiction in Scotland. There was no early overnight appearance of novels set there but Scottish writers eased their way gradually into a treatment of the city. Eventually we get books that contain sections about Glasgow which are large enough to place the novels in the genre. The formula was at first to encounter Glasgow as part of a traveller's itinerary. This is really just a fuller version of what we find in Rob Roy. (We may disregard the few unimportant pages of Humphrey Clinker.) The earliest are works by two of the Blackwood group John Gibson Lockhart and Thomas Hamilton, who looked at Glasgow in respectively Peter's Letters To His Kinsfolk (1819) and The Youth And Manhood of Cyril Thornton (1827). Although Lockhart's work is not strictly a novel I have considered it as part of the movement since in form and content it is

remarkably similar to most of its fictional counterparts. However, as Peter's position is that of the voyeur who only gets an impression and a few facts about city life, the author is not able to give an imaginative expression of what he finds in Glasgow. It is the tourist's view of a place. However, we do see a deliberate determination on Lockhart's part to view Glasgow as a city in the traditional sense rather than as an industrial centre:

" "I spent the whole morning" says Peter
 "in company with my excellent cicerone,
 in taking a survey of a few of the most
 extensive manufacturies of this place.
 As these however must be in all respects
 quite similar to those of other towns
 which you have often seen I shall not
 trouble you with any particular description 21
 of what I saw." "

So he dismisses completely then this side of Glasgow and focuses his attention on the other aspects - with long descriptions of things like the Glasgow College, The Royal Infirmary, The Exchange, Glasgow Green. Glasgow writers for the rest of the century will follow this lead. Industry, social problems, the working classes, are steadfastly ignored until very late on.

Cyril Thornton is a long winded first person narrative about a young Englishman sent to Glasgow University to take his mind off troubles at home. We do get a picture of Glasgow as a place of bustling commercial activity, as

²¹Lockhart, John Gibson. Peter's Letters To His Kinsfolk 1819 Vol. 3 p.199.

the author looks at some of the merchant life of the place, but there is little more to it. Hamilton's descriptions are flat and undigested; he lacks imagination; his character drawing is weak; and the novel only really comes to life in snatches, when we leave Glasgow altogether to follow the hero's army adventures abroad. Hamilton was himself a soldier and could write tolerably well when using his own memories of military life.^d

A third early excursion into Glasgow fiction appeared in 1821 in Henry Duncan's The Young South Country Weaver, or A Journey To Glasgow. In a way it is typical of much of the Glasgow school as a whole, while at the same time untypical of the rest of the nineteenth century. It is a didactic work (right wing in its philosophy) but unlike those that followed in the Victorian era it is openly and aggressively political. Apart from an anonymous science fiction work warning of the dangers of defence cuts - How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish (1884) - politics was not a concern of the nineteenth century novelist. It is not until the 1930s and Barke's Major Operation we get anything like it - political propaganda of a partisan sort. The nineteenth century scene as a whole is fragmented and uninspiring. After the 1820s we have to wait some time before the next Glasgow novel appears - two decades in fact. The plot of Craiglutha: A Tale Of Old Glasgow (1849) by George Mills, owes a lot to

^dA fuller account of Hamilton's career will be found in The Blackwood Group (1897) by Sir George Douglas.

The Entail. It deals with the legal wrangles that surround the inheritance of estates. It is a historical novel set in some unspecified period in the past and only part of it takes place in the city. As the genre developed it threw up a number of historical novels about Glasgow; they are however mainly products of the twentieth century. They represent a significant contribution to the tradition, dealing with many aspects of the city's past, so I have allocated a chapter specifically to them. George Mills was to produce a second novel in 1866, The Beggar's Benison, a completely different type of work from the somewhat tedious Craiglutha. It is about contemporary Glasgow and its commercial middle classes, is well written and interesting: a major nineteenth century Scottish novel.

Victorian Glasgow produced three distinct types of novel. Firstly the traditional kind with a conventional, often complicated plot, many characters and a straightforward narrative style. The Beggar's Benison and St. Mungo's City (1884) are in this category; they are also the only two in the nineteenth century with any literary merit. As the latter seems to me particularly important I will later deal with it at length. Less accomplished works are Sir Colin Cut Up And Co. (1857) and Alfred Leslie (1856). There are others but it is not my purpose at this point to give a comprehensive list. By and large their literary influences are more English than Scottish. Secondly, we have the Victorian moral tracts, Glasgow examples of a nationwide phenomenon. Working on

the assumption that poverty is the result of moral weakness they present salutary examples of slum dwellers raised to comfort and respectability by hard work, temperance, and religious observance. Their philosophy is really the same as what lies at the heart of the kailyard tradition: the belief that piety, self help and limited ambition are the way to happiness for the common man. The works of R.W. Campbell perhaps illustrate the connection most clearly. They are a mixture of pure kailyard and religious evangelicalism.

The collections of kailyard sketches themselves are the third type of work thrown up by the period. They are direct descendants of Galt (particularly his parochial and episodic works like The Provost). Generalship (1858) was the first. More appeared in the 1870s and 1880s but the early years of this century was their heyday. When we come into the next decades of the twentieth century the picture becomes much more complex and from then on variety dominates. Since it is more meaningful to approach the novels in terms of theme and subject matter I do not intend to provide a formal chronological history, although this in effect will emerge in the ordering of the chapters. Certain characteristics are more common in some periods than others and the chapters dealing with them emphasise those periods.

The theme of ambition and prosperity occurs throughout the genre but as the emphasis is in particularly the Victorian era it is an appropriate subject with which to commence. The kailyard novel is largely an Edwardian

phenomenon and follows naturally in Chapter Two. The third chapter - on realism - emphasises the years 1900 to 1940 and the fourth, on the gang novels, the Thirties. Chapter Five deals with politics and spans the genre although in many ways it compliments the consideration of realism. We move on then to religion and individualism which takes us essentially into the mid twentieth century - present day period. Chapter Seven considers how local pride and nationalism have continued to manifest themselves throughout the genre's history while the succeeding chapters dealing with women, childhood and historical novels again draw on the whole period. Finally two writers of particular interest, Sarah Tytler and Frederick Niven, get chapters to themselves.

CHAPTER ONE

AMBITION AND SUCCESS

CHAPTER ONE

AMBITION AND SUCCESS

In a study covering such a variety of novels united only by their setting it is to be expected that there are few common subjects or themes. Ambition however, the drive to better oneself and to rise in the world, is the exception. It is the great theme of Glasgow fiction; the only one to be found extensively throughout the genre. It is much more than the inevitable detailed accounts of the hopes and fortunes of a number of particular characters occurring in any collection of novels, where many are biographical in form, but a significantly persistent expression of the impulse to "get on." Both nineteenth and twentieth century Glasgow Novels embody it. We meet people who wilfully pursue success, others to whom it comes easily, and also those sad figures for whom it is an unfulfilled dream. In some books the theme dominates the plot as well as the spirit of the book, in others it is only of incidental importance. Moreover it is not a theme which remains the same from the beginnings to the present day. It is strongest in the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth, becoming less apparent as time passes. It also undergoes a change in outlook. To the Victorian hero the prosperous businessman will epitomise success, whereas his modern counterpart is more likely to envy the artist or scholar. Also, with the increasing appearance of the working man in the Glasgow novel we find naturally that ambitions become much more

moderate. Visions of a house with a bathroom tend to replace those of the country estate.

Examinations of the cult of success started early in Glasgow fiction, inspired by the ethos of the nineteenth century city, and have continued ever since. Victorian Glasgow was a city of change. With the impact of the industrial revolution it underwent a remarkable expansion within a relatively short period of time. The population rose from 42,000 in 1780 to 101,000 in 1811 and to more than double this number within the next twenty years.¹ The great era of the Tobacco Lords was superseded by the development of manufacturing industry - first linen, then cotton, then the heavy coal and iron related industries. In 1860 for example, a peak year, there were sixty steam powered mills in operation in Glasgow, running twenty thousand looms. The city's expansion of course had its ugly side but great fortunes were made and there was a considerable degree of social mobility. The great hero of the Victorian era, the self made man, was a real recognisable figure in the city, and to be found in a variety of trades. W.H. Marwick points to one example:

"In the Handloom Weaver's Report it is affirmed that some forty or fifty hand loom weavers including two Lord Provosts.... had risen to prominence² as 'Men of Capital and Character.'" ²

The ethos of the city was of course moulded by these developments. The spirit of materialism was

¹Third Statistical Account: Glasgow.

²Marwick, W.H. Economic Development In Victorian Scotland 1936 p.50.

everywhere apparent, and the jingling of silver sounded in the ears of a great many of St. Mungo's sons, as they too pursued the kind of riches they saw being made close at hand by the lucky and the enterprising. This was nothing new. Since the days of the Tobacco Lords this had been the spirit of Glasgow, but now we see it amplified far beyond anything in the past. Of course this was not a feature solely of Glasgow. British life in general moved under the same impulses and literature reflected the trend. Writing on George Eliot V.S. Pritchett sums up some of the essential characteristics:

"One might generalise without great danger and say that in all the mid-Victorian novels the characters are either going up in the world in which case they are good; or they are going down in the world in which case they are bad.... a novelist like George Eliot writes at a time when Fortune has been torn down, when the earned increment of industry (and not the accidental coup of the gambler) has taken Fortune's place; and when character is tested not by hazard, but like the funds by a measurable tendency to rise and fall." 3

Yet more was involved than merely a reflection of the ethos of the time for as J.H. Buckley outlines in The Victorian Temper there was a definite vein of hostility and criticism towards Laissez Faire economics and the aggressive individualism of the time. "Throughout the fifties and sixties the literary war against capitalism continued to draw support for zealous intellectuals sympathetic to the cause of reform."⁴

³Pritchett, V.S. The Living Novel 1946 p.89 (1960 paperback ed.)

⁴Buckley, J.H. The Victorian Temper 1952 p.112.

Pritchett and Buckley emphasise the mid-Victorian era but in Glasgow the mood was apparent in the city's writings till the end of the century. Moreover Glasgow writers were in agreement that it was in their city that the trend was to be found at its most extreme. The Victorians perhaps experienced capitalism in its most naked form and thus reacted to the idea of success most strongly. The theme of ambition in the nineteenth century Glasgow novel is inextricably bound up then with an expression of commercialism as characters' aims are forged in a prevailing atmosphere of greed. The best and fullest treatment is to be found in George Mills' The Beggar's Benison (1866). Mills was the son of a self made Lord Provost of Glasgow and was himself deeply involved in commercial life - among other things as a stockbroker, steamship owner and the proprietor of a chemical works. Like John Galt literature took second place in his life to business.^a His novel is a long entertaining affair which traces the rise of an unnamed hero from the abject poverty of a slum childhood to his attainment of wealth and position. As the story unfolds Mills gives us a picture of several levels of Glasgow society showing for instance both the deprivations of the very poor and the sins of the rich. The latter however is his real concern. He expresses the theme of success both in the figure of the hero and in the

^aHis correspondence shows him as a many sided individual interested in all aspects of human affairs, moving in the society not only of businessmen but artists and writers. The Mitchell Library holds a collection of fifty unpublished letters sent by the author to George and Mrs. Cruickshank dated between June 1848 and December 1875 where we see his concern for diverse topics like the effects of a new bill about Limited Liability, illustrations for Craiglutha and hold ups in the supply of The Beggar's Benison to booksellers.

experiences of subsidiary characters. His attitude is mixed. On the one hand he approves of those qualities which in his eyes make for success - industry, ability and attention to duty. Hard work pays. It gets the hero promotion and into a position from which he is able to launch out into business for himself. From then on his quick wits and commercial instinct ensure his prosperity.

The picture however has its grimmer side for this rise is accompanied by an unsavoury change in the hero's character. He becomes selfish and hard hearted, forsaking his humble relations in his fight to the top. As the author comments:

"In commercial communities where men spring up to greatness - that is wealth - like tall saplings they are always grieved to be claimed by the lower copse." 5

Mills was writing as an ardent moralist, and he questions and condemns the rapacious instincts of Glasgow both in his characterisation and in straight invective. The majority of his people are unattractive, like the Rev. Nahum who cares not for the souls of his flock but for the gold in their pockets, or Mr. Jackson, ostensibly a lawyer but in reality a grasping moneylender. As Mr. Garnethill says:

"It does not signify in Glasgow a button, how he makes money, IF he makes money." 6

⁵Mills, George. The Beggar's Benison 1886 Vol. I p.272.

⁶Ibid. Vol. 2 p.56.

Mills himself observes "To business! To business! That is now the modern cry even as To arms! To arms! used to be the ancient one."⁷

Even a dance is not all it seems: "Every maiden here has a ticket pinned to her gown stating her market value, though your uninitiated vision may not recognise it."⁸ Greed, he says, is "an element peculiarly possessive of the Scottish mind" and points out that "what in London may be called the exception is in Scottish commercial towns invariably the rule."⁹

Yet it must be stressed that it is neither the desire to better oneself, nor the idea of commercial activity as such which he condemns (not surprisingly as he was himself so involved) but the attendant vices - the excessive desire for wealth in Glasgow and the consequent ruination of men's characters. He has little patience with pretension or hypocrisy, and hopes by exposing these, along with the other sins of wealthy Glasgow society, to effect a change in the hearts of the rich. He deplores for example the pompous pride of the nouveau riche. "I had fought" says the hero, "through life 'as the architect of my own fortune' - to use a favourite cant phrase of the snobocracy to which I belong."¹⁰

Again, the hero's rise is not a straightforward tale of business success but involves a gradual corruption of

⁷Ibid. Vol. I p.280.

⁸Ibid Vol. 2 p.148.

⁹Ibid. Vol. I p.158.

¹⁰Ibid. Vol. I p.285.

his values as he gets entangled in a number of shady deals and cases of commercial malpractice. Mills also equates financial greed with physical greed and shows the Glasgow upper classes as vulgar, ill-mannered gluttons. It is a criticism of the nastier social trimmings of capitalism rather than an attack on the system itself.^b

Prosperity however need not always mean unpleasantness, and Mills is fair enough to admit that a man may drastically improve his lot other than by wilfully pursuing riches. The hero's schoolmaster for example starts off as an ill tempered bully, his nature aggravated by the poverty of his worldly circumstances. After a sudden change of character however things start to improve. As he becomes gentler and more humane so his school prospers.

Mills really hammers his message home, keeping materialism and the often corruptive nature of the competitive instinct continually before the reader. Yet he never becomes merely a preacher. Indeed The Beggar's Benison is a major work of nineteenth century Scottish fiction and has been undeservedly neglected. Mills has a considerable narrative ability and succeeds in maintaining in the reader an unflagging interest

^bIndeed Mills' tales of drunkenness and gluttony are not far off the mark. "When the Highland and Agricultural Show was held in Glasgow in 1884, the show Dinner in the City Hall was such a great repast that it began at half-past five. This was followed next morning by a public breakfast in the Black Bull Hotel at eight and by another dinner at two." - Charles Oakley The Second City p.100. Earlier in the century J.G. Lockhart visiting Glasgow observed that "dinner was excellent, although calculated apparently for forty people rather than for sixteen, which last number sat down." - Peter's Letters, Vol. 3 p.172.

through some six hundred pages. His writing is not subtle in any way but he has a keen sense of humour and farce and delights in giving sharply detailed descriptions of the absurd. The influence of Dickens is very obvious^c in the grotesque and unusual characters which pack his book. Mr. Pull for example who cannot bear to speak, or be spoken to at lunch, and who dispenses charity according to a cold mathematical code of his own, or the Rev. Nahum declaiming on the evils of drink, while himself under the influence:

" "Above everything keep free from the vice of drunkenness (sip, sip, sip) for drunkenness (sip) is the root of all evil, and when the drink is in the brains are out, thereby leading to destruction. (sip.) Oh! then my dear brethern resist the devil¹¹ and he will flee from you." " ¹¹

Mills has faults however, some personal, some typically Victorian. Apart from a tendency to wander off the point at times there are also inconsistencies in plot and style. On our first meeting with the hero's mother for example she is speaking ordinary English but on our next encounter it is broad Scots, for no apparent reason.

If The Beggar's Benison is the fullest expression of the theme of "getting on" in the world it is not alone in the Victorian era. Other Glasgow novelists, in particular Annie S. Swan, take it up. The Guinea Stamp (1892) like

^cLike Dickens Mills was also enlightened, for his time, in his social thinking. See The Beggar's Benison: Vol. I p.66 - Against Capital Punishment; Vol. I p.141 - For better social provisions for the poor. Indeed in 1841 Mills stood at the election as a chartist candidate.

¹¹Ibid. Vol. I p.262.

The Beggar's Benison charts the increasing prosperity of the poor child, in this case a girl. Unlike Mills' hero, Gladys does not actively pursue wealth, although they both end up with a country estate and a lot of money. She is in no way materialistic, in fact her nature is characterised by a deep spirituality, an aura of sweetness and light apparently following her wherever she goes. It is clear that her sudden elevation to wealth comes as a reward for her purity of heart and her trust in God. This is a much more idealistic attitude than that of Mills, who is totally hard and unromantic in his perception of the world. Swan's other characters contribute to the theme. Walter, who eventually marries Gladys, is noble-hearted and able, and raises himself from a humble apprentice to the proprietor of a thriving business through his hard work and firmness of purpose. Significantly, as befits the husband of such a pure heroine, this is not out of any real desire for money itself, but in order to place himself on a social par with the, by now, rich Gladys, of whom he feels unworthy. In contrast to this self made man we meet Liz who would love to attain a higher place in society than the humble one she occupies but who is denied it by the author, because of moral flaws in her character. Swan is very much the moral judge and jury in the novel, apportioning worldly goods to her characters according to their purity of heart. Unlike The Beggar's Benison however the treatment of the success theme is complicated by other elements, by a romantic love interest, a mystery, and a good deal of sentimentality and religious moralising.

Yet we do still see criticism of the unattractive material aspects of Glasgow life. "Most women in your position" the wealthy Gladys is told "would have made a point of ignoring the past. That is what half of Glasgow is trying to do all the time - forget where they spring from."¹² Similarly the business of marrying for money comes under fire, in the machinations of Mrs. Fordyce trying to get Gladys as a wife for her son.

In many ways very similar to The Guinea Stamp is J.J. Bell's Thou Fool (1907), which despite the date is in tone, attitude, and execution, a Victorian novel. The plot is complicated - a mixture of business intrigue and romantic entanglements - but the main strand shows the hard destructive materialism involved in the rise of shop assistant Robert Barker to riches and a knighthood. It is a tale with a moral, for in his cruel pursuit of wealth Barker forfeits the possibilities of happiness. As an old man prophesies he will know, despite "A' the riches in creation - Neither wife, nor weans, nor a firesaid o' yer ain."¹³ Thou Fool is a dull heavy book full of the hectoring uplift, sentimentality and compulsory piety we find in Swan. Bell is able to conceive his subject and characters only in the crudest of terms. For example: "Robert Barker's heart in those days was merely a pump."¹⁴

¹²Swan, Annie S. The Guinea Stamp 1892 p.217.

¹³Bell, John Joy. Thou Fool 1907 p.408.

¹⁴Ibid. p. 23.

Sir-Colin-Cut-Up-And Co. or As it is Now-A-Days (1857)

by "Teaddy" is along the same lines but is a less thoughtful novel. In place of Bell's ponderous didacticism characters and action are approached with a wooden superficiality. In terms of its immediate society the book is a reaction to developments in the retail trades - when powerful department stores were beginning to challenge the small shopkeeper. In this case the millinery department of a large firm drives dozens of independent milliners in Glasgow out of business. The novel's larger aim however is an emphatic denunciation of commercial greed. The materialism of the owner of the firm is questioned and opposed by his son, and the shabby business practices of its manager are exposed as merely one facet of his moral corruption - another is his villainous attempts at seducing helpless young females. As the action suggests, the novel is difficult to take seriously, and the standard of writing is too low to enable the author's moral views to come over with any weight.

Elsewhere in the nineteenth century Glasgow novel these subjects are found less extensively. Rather than a full treatment of ambition and materialism as such, we get a more incidental and unconscious expression of the existence of these forces in Glasgow. A.J. Weyman's The Dangerous Man (1888) for example, a badly written pot-boiler, has nothing serious to say on these matters, but significantly the author structures the plot around the business intrigues of a spectacularly ambitious rogue. The Factory Girl (1885) is only slightly better. Daniel

Dexter however, the villain whose actions set the improbable plot in motion, and who plays an important part in the subsequent action, is motivated by ambitious greed.

In his own words:

"To be a great man in the City of Glasgow, to become powerful and influential, to be bowed to and followed after in the Exchange and to have the power and privileges which wealth confers."¹⁵

One of the earliest comments on the subject came in Cyril Thornton (1827) in the person of Glasgow merchant David Spreull. Although he had:

"entered life peniless and friendless
 In all the arts of moneymaking
 he had overtopped his instructors;
 and though rigid in his adherence
 to the established code of mercantile
 morality, had left no means of
 acquisition unemployed in advancing
 the one great object of his life
 to amass wealth continued
 the sole object of his age,
 as it had been of his youth."¹⁶

We can see then the way that this theme stretches over the century.^d

Sarah Tytler's St. Mungo's City (1885) is a far superior piece of work, the best Glasgow novel of the

¹⁵Pae, David. The Factory Girl 1885 p.45.

¹⁶Hamilton, Thomas. The Youth And Manhood of Cyril Thornton 1827 pp.133-4.

^dIt is worth noting that when G.M. Dawson produced a volume of moral tales he saw fit to set the one on materialism specifically in Glasgow. (His other setting was Russia.) See Ivan Ludovic and The Race for Wealth, A Glasgow Story. 1891.

nineteenth century and one of the few to date with real literary value.* The theme of the book is money, but the treatment is far more moderate than that of Mills. Instead of his rampant rapacity Tytler gives us a restrained and more balanced criticism of the cult of prosperity. Again the self made man looms large, in the figure of the hero Tam Drysdale, in this case a man of integrity and worth. The book does not chart his rise to the top but confronts us with him in his successful state, showing us how it affects his personality and comparing his position to that of a variety of acquaintances. Drysdale is proud of his prosperity and the author smiles approvingly on him, and on the ability and hard work which guaranteed his success. Tytler does not point her moral through direct authorial intrusions, but through character and incident. Like Mills she sees Glasgow as a city under the shadow of commerce where the prevailing spirit is one of greed and envy. Thus Tam Drysdale, although a good man, when he discovers that through a legal technicality he has no right to his fortune, finds himself unable to take the morally proper course of action and allow this wealth to pass to its owner in law. He determines instead to conceal the fact. It is only when he leaves Glasgow for a Highland trip and is removed from the influence of materialism that he can judge what is correct.

The relationships of other characters with money are also shown; most of them are unhappy due to the lack of

* See also Chapter 11 below.

it. One however provides a contrasting point of view. This is Dr. Peter Murry, a man who values riches not at all, and who is the moral centre of the book. He expresses above all Tytler's thesis that the good things in life cannot be bought. To her the nineteenth century industrial expansion brought a general moral degeneration in Glasgow society. Heightened ambitions and a quickened pace of life left unpleasant results:

"Men and woman in all grades who had been modest contented domestic temperate before the period of inordinate activity and prosperity received from it the fatal bias which left them after long years perhaps arrogant, dissatisfied, unable to remain quietly at home, gluttons, drunkards in secret or openly."¹⁷

Tom Drysdale's moral lapse is only part of this trend. (Note that Tytler like Mills places emphasis on the physical excess of the Glaswegian.)

Two other works Alfred Leslie by Frederick Arnold (1856) and the anonymous How Glasgow Ceased to Flourish (1884) also evince an acute awareness of the materialistic ethos of Glasgow. Although not dealing with it directly in either plot or character they cannot refrain from frequently digressing on the subject, Thus in Alfred Leslie, a conventional romance, the author points out that:

"The people of Glasgow have a peculiarly pleasant and amicable code of their own 'How much is it worth?' Assuredly the worship of the golden image is as much set up in Glasgow as it was upon the plain of Dura." 18

¹⁷Tytler, Sarah. St. Mungo's City 1884 p.139.

¹⁸Arnold, Frederick. Alfred Leslie 1856 p.66.

Similarly the second book, a work of political propaganda in the form of a science fiction story, comments:

"This sort of teaching I must tell you was especially popular in Glasgow and in towns in the banks of the Clyde, where anything which tended to check production, or to hinder the rapid accumulation of wealth was¹⁹ regarded with disfavour."

It is significant that while we get a great number of accounts of people prospering and rising in the world, it is very rarely however that we are allowed to see anyone travel in the opposite direction. It would appear that the writers themselves were so steeped in the spirit of the city that even they did not find it easy to admit the facts of failure. For these Victorian novelists the idea of success was a thing to be criticised not for itself, but for the vices it occasioned. There is never any criticism, implied or otherwise, of the actual system under which they lived. Like Dickens all they wanted was a change in men's hearts.

Appearing around the same time however was a very different kind of work - the moral tract. Jet Ford (1880) and City Echoes (1884) by C.M. Gordon and William Naismith respectively, are Glasgow examples. Unlike the other books which were written largely for a middle class readership and deal only occasionally with lower life, the tracts were written for and about the working class. The theme of ambition is absolutely central to them.

¹⁹Anon. How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish. 1884 p.15.

Again there is a moral purpose, but in this case a religious one. More important however is their practical aim, deliberately using ambition to try and improve the lot of the poor. However, although they represent a genuine desire to help the slum-dweller they largely misunderstood the reasons for poverty, and were guilty of the Victorian habit of ascribing it to moral failings (particularly drunkenness) rather than to economic circumstances. Moreover, a religious purpose is of prime importance. Any prosperity which the poor may gain is directly linked to their faith in God. Janet Ford, for example, lives in squalor with her two drunken parents until after the death of her father. Her mother however, receiving a tract from a door to door missionary, decides to send Janet to Sunday School. From this point things start to improve. Janet, won to Christianity, becomes a converting influence on other people. She gets into domestic service, makes a good marriage and becomes a missionary abroad. Her mother too, forsaking her old ways, "had been going regularly to Church lately and was going to move into a more comfortable room in a better street as she had got a rise in her weekly pay at the factory."²⁰ Gordon we see here equates moral worth with social and economic prosperity, but is noticeably vague as to the actual mechanics of improvement. Good things start to happen when you turn to God, but how or why they happen is left unexplained. City Echoes is similar. The thought is simplistic again and the characters wooden.

²⁰Gordon, C.M. Jet Ford. 1880 p.41.

The two central figures in a group of slum boys are completely contrasting personalities. Jim is a guileless spiritual creature, too good for this world. Jock however "though better clad without than Jim, his inner self was in a wretched moral state of tatters."²¹ Jim's death shocks Jock into repentance and from then on his material lot improves, until he finally becomes a successful Christian reformer. Naismith however goes further than to just set an example for the poor but also criticises the attitudes of the rich, in particular the worship of wealth and position.

"Be prosperous - or at least sham prosperity. Be anything and everything except poor and unfortunate and there will always be a vacant chair reserved for your accommodation."²²

Like the kailyard novelist, the tract writer looks at the poor from a patronising standpoint. They are sheep in need of guidance from their intellectual and moral superiors. Thus Jet Ford propagates the stupid middle class notion that Scots is the language of the gutter: "Jet had learnt to talk very well and seldom used the broad dialect which was her earliest, now."²³

Though their actual appearances differ, the moral tract and the kailyard novel are brothers, similar in their essential thought. The one shows the horrors caused by drink, the other presents characters who are tea-total.

²¹Naismith, William. City Echoes. 1884 p.17.

²²Ibid. p.34.

²³Jet Ford. op. cit. p.42.

Similarly, hard work, thrift, the ideals of self help are common to both types of work. So also is a religious note. The tract serves it up hot and aggressive, while in the kailyard it is a low key conventional piety. But the implications are the same. Yet the kailyard attitude to ambition is paradoxical. On the one hand, as we shall see,[‡] the kailyard novels preach an anti-ambitious doctrine of submission and acceptance. On the other they have a profound respect for success. Not only are those who have got on in the world always looked up to, but we very often see the kailyard hero himself gain a certain elevation, despite his apparent contentment with being humble. Macgregor's father is promoted, Jeems Kaye is able to open another depot for his coal business and becomes a local dignitary, while Spud Tamson is raised from a private to a sergeant. There is something of the suggestion in the kailyard novel that the fact people are humble, that they do not actively pursue success, actually favours their worldly fortunes - as in The Guinea Stamp - that they get rewarded for their modesty. This both satisfies the ambitious urges in the reader and ties in usefully with the political thought of the kailyarders. Moreover it is difficult for the kailyard writer to deride worldly success for the very reason that his own books are directed towards it.^e

In the kailyard scene it is the McFlannels which

‡

See below Chapter 2.

^eIt is not frivolous to note the consistency with which the success-money ethic is played on in one of the most prominent modern survivors of the kailyard - the "Oor Willie" cartoon in The Sunday Post.

place the greatest emphasis on "getting" on in the world, markedly more so than in any of the earlier works. This can be interpreted in a sense as a reflection of the changing face of political thinking. In a more modern, less authoritarian, society, where the old values of obedience and duty have less relevance, those who wish to see the continuance of capitalism have to change accordingly. Thus an emphasis on active involvement, in having a stake in society, is more appropriate than in merely advising an acceptance of one's lot.

Viewed in political terms the tracts are like the kailyard novels in seeking to preserve the established order of society. To many Victorian tract writers improving the lives of the poor was not only a moral consideration but one of practical politics, an alternative to revolution.

That there is a very definite link between the tracts and the kailyard novel is seen by looking at the writings of R.W. Campbell. From his pen came both kailyard works - Snooker Tam, Pr. Spud Tamson - and novels which are little more than early twentieth century examples of the Victorian moral tract. Winnie McLeod (1920) and Jimmy McCallum (1921) unlike his more kailyard works confront the squalor of Glasgow and suggest a way out. They are directed largely at the urban poor providing uplifting examples of slum-dwellers who achieve a better life through adherence to the proper moral code. They are however more fully developed both in plot and characterisation than the tracts, although the standard of writing is as abysmal as

ever. Again the hero and heroine derive their strength from religion, and by strong implication their success in life comes from the same source. Winnie McLeod sins, repents and is forgiven: "She knelt and was purified by God." She then goes on to get a good job, finally marrying her well-to-do boss. Campbell has no reproach for the fallen woman; he does not make Winnie carry her shame for ever; it is enough that she truly trusts in God. Jimmy McCallum's success story stems from his involvement with The Boy's Brigade, and indeed much of the book is a eulogy to both the moral and practical good done by this organisation. Again everything hinges on religious conversion, and the hero here even hears heavenly music in his head: "Jimmy was enchanted. Something sweet came swirling into his soul and he began to develop a mighty reverence for this man of God."²⁴ From the Boy's Brigade he proceeds to a heroic army career, winning the V.C. and being presented to the king. His mother too, in the best traditions of the tract, is miraculously transformed from a lethargic slut into a prosperous shopkeeper. "She realised the gospel of self help, the need of fighting on."²⁵ The virtuous are rewarded in this world as well as the next.

Central to both books is the impulse to better oneself. To Jimmy McCallum the Boy's Brigade offers a means of achieving his ambitions. "Being one of the hunted and despised, he saw in it an avenue for 'getting on' a dream ever present in the Scots boy's heart."²⁶

²⁴Campbell, R.W. Jimmy McCallum. 1921 p.149.

²⁵Ibid. p.127.

²⁶Ibid. p.86.

In a chapter entitled Wanted To Get On Winnie McLeod expresses her philosophy: "I've got to work and I want to get on."²⁷

They also place a great emphasis on clean living, on healthy outdoor pursuits and on the avoidance of drink and sex:

"The happiest time in our lives is when we are communing with bonnie clean boys in the Boy's Brigade, for the pure boy is the very image of God. Look at the faces of the demoralised and debauched, then swiftly turn to the faces of the Boy's Brigade."²⁸

Ronnie, the ideal figure in Winnie McLeod:

"unlike many youths of nineteen he had not been initiated into the perplexities of sexual indulgence, or the nauseous aroma of filthy Chaff. Games had kept him proud and high, while ambition spurred him on."²⁹

Physical cleanliness is as important as the moral brand. A scene in Jimmy McCallum gives us a practical tip on the efficacy of carbolic soap for keeping away nits. Similarly, of Winnie we are told, "like a sensible girl, she depended on good soap, fresh air and exercise."³⁰ The puritan streak in Campbell is typical of the kail-yarder in him. His view of life is simplistic but it is not materialistic. There is no temptation with riches, all he offers is a decent standard of living and a morally worthwhile existence. His politics are right wing, but of an old fashioned high Tory kind, and he is as quick

²⁷Campbell, R.W. Winnie McLeod. 1920 p.19.

²⁸Jimmy McCallum. op. cit. p.19.

²⁹Winnie McLeod. op. cit. p.36.

³⁰Ibid. p.33.

to chastise the vices of the rich as he is to point out the sins of the poor. In Winnie McLeod he expounds a creed of his own which he calls "Workalism,"³¹ advocating a capitalist system with a caring heart, where neither party exploits the other, and each gets a fair return for his labour. The benevolent paternalistic employer stands at the centre of the plan. It is a creed of economic restraint matching his views on moral and physical restraint. In his emphasis on athletics and character building Campbell is reminiscent of the traditions of the English public schools. However, the way he adopts them into Glasgow slum life produces a somewhat ridiculous effect. The stiff upper lip language is incongruous in the mouths of Glaswegians. "Somehow I hate lies" says Ronnie "even little white lies. I'm not a sappy sammy, but I like a straight bat."³² If this dialogue (and the frequent talk of "bounders" and of being "ragged") seems to have escaped from the pages of an old fashioned boy's comic it is completely in keeping with Campbell's outlook as a whole. There is an element of Kipling without the talent in Campbell. The heroics of Spud Tamson and Jimmy McCallum could have been transferred from the front page of The Hotspur, as they smash the yellow livered Hun with hearty vigour.

"Longlegs had just got in when he saw his captain fall. Jumping forward he clubbed the man's brains out."³³

³¹Ibid. p.165.

³²Ibid. p.39.

³³Campbell, R.W. Private Spud Tamson. 1916 p.241.

The Germans however were "tearfully muttering "Don't hurt me - Don't hurt me", for like all Germans they speak English well."³⁴

In a way it is meaningful to look at the Glasgow novel in class terms, to see the genre as novels differentiated by the social class of the authors and the characters they present. It is useful then to examine how ambition is treated in these different types of books. R.W. Campbell's nonsense brings us up to the early 1920s, by which time a very obvious change has been taking place in the theme. For the Victorians it was a grandiose thing. They tended to talk in terms of vast fortunes and to deal with middle class life. As the century wore on the tracts focused on the opposite end of the scale, trying to raise the lowest out of the gutters. Again however the impetus was middle class. From then on things became much more moderate. In 1906 right in the middle of the spate of kailyard books came the publication of John Blair's Jean, the earliest example of true industrial realism in the Glasgow novel. This book, important as the earliest honest and unpatronising view of working class life, also comments on the impulse to raise oneself. As a rule it is true to say that the working classes in Glasgow fiction are far less ambitious than their middle class counterparts (perhaps reflecting real life). John Blair noted that "while Jean had the characteristic traits of her class she yet had aspirations above them, and a strong desire to raise herself somewhat in the social scale."³⁵ Ambition in Jean's

³⁴Ibid. p.254.

³⁵Blair, John. Jean. 1906 p.66.

environment is an exceptional quality. Moreover when ambition raises its head in novels about working class life it is a far less egocentric trait than to be found in those looking at higher life. The drive to get on is more likely to mean an understandable desire to obtain better food, housing and clothing, than to satisfy a notion of one's own importance. The trend towards greater realism has also ended the Victorian practice of describing only success, we now find the hopes of more and more characters left unfulfilled. Jean does not get the better existence she wants, but due partly to circumstances and partly to her own personality, is completely defeated by life.

Jean is a proletarian novel, dealing exclusively with the interests of the working class and articulating some sort of protest against society. Ambition like everything else in this kind of work is used to make a political point. Samuel McKechnie's Prisoners Of Circumstance (1934) is the next novel like this to deal with the desire to "get on." Frazer, the hero, has had a hard life and has little ambition left for himself; all his hopes are focused on his children. "If he was spared he would see that they obtained a better chance of life than had come his own way."³⁶ As the novel progresses this becomes a distinct possibility. At first life is difficult for them all, but with Frazer in a steady job and his wife installed in a tiny shop things begin to improve, particularly when the children become old enough to earn. Again, World War I

³⁶ McKechnie, Samuel. Prisoners Of Circumstance 1934 p.21.

brings increased prosperity. Young Stuart, Frazer's son, with the prospects of a civil service career, reflects on his past, and his future, in a passage that sums up not only much of the content of this book but much of the thoughts and attitudes behind the whole theme of ambition:

"He enjoyed for instance thinking about the future and then remembering that he had eaten stuff from a midden. He fairly chuckled with delight at the amusing idea. It was great fun remembering that he had got a farthing a week pocket money when things were normal, and for two years got no pocket money, and had to put up his hand in the classroom before all the others and admit that he was qualified to receive poverty books, and now he got as many sweeties as he could eat and could have more pocket money than he needed. It just showed you what could be done; and when you saw what had been done from low beginnings, well looking at your present position, you were encouraged to work hard; and you recognised it was unnecessary justification for your optimism.

The family was moving upwards, and he would continue the line of progress, and reach heights of which his father and mother had never dreamed until he told them of the career that he had planned for himself. Steady job, great wages, short hours, long holidays, easy work, clean clothes and among other advantages a good pension. His parents would not have dared to dream of these things for him."³⁷

Note that his relatively modest desires are things the middle classes take for granted. Despite this however they are not to be realised, and physical unfitness, the result of early poverty, keeps him out of his chosen career. The rest of the family too find their

³⁷Ibid. pp.157-8.

relative comfort to be only temporary, and with the onset of the Depression they are gradually stripped of everything they so laboriously came by. The end of the novel shows the family's fortunes having come full circle with Stuart's son playing in a slum street as his father had once done, and Stuart like his own father living in a single end. The book's message is clear: for the ordinary man hard work and the will to succeed are just not enough. There is something unmistakably wrong with the economic system; as the book's title implies, it leaves no real hope of improvement for the working class.

Another perspective on this is given by Edward Shiels in Gael Over Glasgow (1937). Again the depression of the Thirties comes between a group of individuals and the kind of lives they have planned for themselves. For one it is a university career, for another the status of a skilled tradesman in the shipyards that is replaced by unemployment and the dole queue. It is not so much material deprivation that matters but the spiritual malaise of enforced idleness and the frustration of ambition. They feel their lives wasted. The book uses the idea of the "Might-Have-Been" to express their plight, a motif for what they have lost. Unbearably empty days are relieved by periods of camping at Loch Lomond where with few resources Shiels' characters make the best of things. On one of these trips Nicky reflects on the situation:

"He recalled the first time he had met Alec on the moors and realised that the sacrifice he had made in giving up his career at the university had left its

mark on him. Many a time in the quiet hours the remorse and sorrow of it would be as much as the poor fellow could bear. Nicky didn't realise all that. Couldn't see that sitting in the canoe watching all those happy students, their careers assured, carefree with a mighty adventure before them, and him crouching there a derelict pauper with nothing of the earth's goods, spending a night hidden under a rock and a day of hunger before them, and Clydebank with the bitterness of unemployment again. He must have seen and heard the Might-Have-Been there tonight."³⁸

Gael Over Glasgow like Prisoners of Circumstance has an ulterior political end. Not in this case revolutionary, but reformist, pleading for society to recognise the hardships suffered by those most hit by the Depression. Not all Glasgow novels dealing with working class life and hopes however have this aim. Most notable is Edward Gaitens' The Dance of the Apprentices, a superb expression of the quality of life in the Glasgow slums. Gaitens is a fine artist and among other things shows with a good deal of poignancy the gap between the high hopes and ideals of youth and the drab reality of adult life. In the early sections of the book for example we meet Donald, aspiring working class intellectual, and dreamer. As he vigorously discusses philosophy, art and literature, while walking the gaslit streets we see him completely unbowed by his environment. He is ready and willing to reach for the stars. Here we find him discoursing on the art of writing:

"Och, Ah never find essays difficult once Ah get past the start" said Donald nonchalantly, "it's the first sentence that jiggers me, once Ah've wrote that

³⁸ Shiels, Edward. Gael Over Glasgow. 1937 p.325.

that Ah carry oan like a hoose oan fire. Noo Ah remember when Ah wrote ma study o' Milton; Ah began it at twelve o'clock at night efter tryin' for three hoors tae get the op'nin words an' Ah feenished it at three o'clock in the moarnin' an' was up at six fresh as a daisy." He took a gratified puff at his pipe, drawing himself up while Neil frowned, nettled by his cocksureness." ³⁹

Compare this to the picture of Donald in later life, a washed out defeated hulk:

"Donald was eager to return to the Gorbals where he had spent his boyhood and youth, but Annie said the Gorbals was common, so they had to move up north. Donald was growing fat and disinclined to argue. "Och, wan hoose is jist the same as another. Ah don't care what part we stay in," he compromised lazily. But he sighed for his swaggering youthful days when he could dominate women and pick and choose among the beauties of the tenements. . . But he saw that Annie would always have her own way and he accepted the fact as he was accepting most things. Mental and physical comfort had become the ruling ambition of his life."⁴⁰

So much for the ambition of youth. Gaitens pointed out the same elsewhere. In Growing Up a boy looks at a family photograph:

"Very few of them had realised the aims of their youth; the majority had ended like his parents, in a wasteland of weak resignation but in the faces of those few who had risen out of the back streets he had never discovered more courage and determination than was in his father's youthful face, and he always puzzled over why they had succeeded where his father had failed."⁴¹

³⁹Gaitens, Edward. The Dance of the Apprentices 1948 p.105.

⁴⁰Ibid. p.215.

⁴¹Gaitens, Edward. Growing Up 1942 p.73.

The world of The Dance of the Apprentices is not one in which more than a few can get on. In this environment you are stuck with your lot. Attempts at breaking out generally come to nothing. Jimmy McDonnel comes home from sea with money saved, determined to marry a respectable girl and leave behind the squalid life of his family and friends. However he is not long home before he is once more involved in the drunken revelry of the gutters, all thoughts of a new decency abandoned. Jimmy and his family are the typical non-ambitious slum-dwellers which Jean is a cut above.

These novels have all dealt with the bad times of pre-war Glasgow and have unanimously seen unfulfilled ambition and minimal material progress as the lot of the working class. In The Clydesiders (1961) however Hugh Munro paints a different picture. Hardship and disappointment are still there, but with one qualification - things get better, and continue to get better. The Haig family never become well off but at least as the years pass every member achieves a degree of comfort and security unknown at the start. The Clydesiders (apart from the kailyard McFlannel stories) is perhaps the only optimistic view of working class life. It is understandable how Munro, writing in the relative security of Welfare State Britain was more inclined to adopt this attitude than his counterparts of the '30s and early '40s.

Glasgow has also produced works which use a working class background to explore the effects of ambition on

personality. Two deal with women, J.M. Reid's Homeward Journey (1934) and Robert Craig's Lucy Flockhart (1931)

The situation in both books is remarkably similar, presenting heroines who are profoundly dissatisfied with their lives. There is no material want or discomfort, but the drabness of their respective working class homes creates a ruthless desire to get something better. Both are supremely selfish and egotistical, both are ashamed of, and thus disown, their parents, and both try to use young men to attain their ends. Craig outlines their style of thinking:

"Her father would never rise farther than he had risen. She had no appropriate talent that would raise herself. Lacking such, there was left discretion in matrimony. And Lucy felt capable of avoiding mistakes."⁴²

Lucy Flockhart is the better novel of the two, if also the more melodramatic. Craig tells a diverting story as Lucy schemes and lies her way to near success - before she gets her come-uppance.

Considerably better books on the same theme are Robin Jenkins' Guests of War (1956), The Changeling (1958) and A Very Scotch Affair (1968). In the latter the hero's son, Andrew, knows what he wants and intends to get it. Again there is the realisation (in 1968 as with Mills in 1866) that "once escape from the ghetto of social inferiority was determined on you had to be without scruple."⁴³ Andrew has

⁴²Craig, Robert. Lucy Flockhart 1931 p.31.

⁴³Jenkins, Robin. A Very Scotch Affair 1968 p.34.

this ruthlessness. He is in love with a girl on whom he also leans for support in his climb upwards, but "always however in a part of his mind kept veiled he was conscious that if ever he gained enough self confidence not to need her red-lipped yellow haired soft bosomed flattery then, if it was not too late, he would be able to find the callousness to forsake her and marry instead some teaching colleague. Two teachers' salaries would mean, very quickly, a bungalow and a car."⁴⁴ Andrew is a secondary character in the novel and is handled with little subtlety, but he does show a continuing obsession in Jenkins with the ruthless pursuit of success. Jenkins first took up the subject in Guests of War where among the evacuees billeted in the country is a slum schoolboy named Gordon Aldersyde. He quickly realises how much more pleasant is this new environment and decides never to return to Gowburgh (Glasgow). So, with callous disregard for the feelings of his affectionate mother, he begins ingratiating himself with the family with whom he is staying in the hope that they will adopt him. Aldersyde is however a rehearsal for a far more sustained look at the subject in The Changeling, where a slum child is taken on holiday by a schoolteacher and his family. The boy proves a disruptive and corruptive element in the usually harmonious family. More important than the varied reactions to this alien being however, is Jenkins' delineation of the boy's character. Tom Curdie, as he is called, is a strange child, typical of the climbing slum-dweller

⁴⁴Ibid. p.35.

only in his determination to escape, for his struggle is not with destiny, nor society, but with himself. To him the only way to win out of his circumstances is to keep himself emotionally aloof from the world he inhabits, to build up a total self sufficiency. "He knew that if ever he were to be grateful to anybody, his confidence in himself would be destroyed."⁴⁵ Part of Tom's problem is that he is torn between two worlds; he is no longer completely of the slums, but is only partially integrated into the new middle class world of the teacher's family. His philosophical position will not allow any reconciliation. On the one hand he rejects his parents and his home (like Gordon Aldersyde) but is unable however to respond to the kindness shown him by his new friends. (It is tempting to see some allegorical significance in this split - but in fact Jenkins does not exploit it in this way.) His ambitions are not directed at any identifiable end, but involve more of a notion of spiritual independence.

"Tom knew very well that the majority of children were far more fortunate than he, but he never envied them. Envy like pity was not his creed. What he hoped to do or become was apart altogether from what others did or became. To have been envious would have been to become involved, and so weakened. His success, if ever it came, must owe nothing to anyone."⁴⁶

That the exact form this success will take remains vague is entirely appropriate however, for despite his hard

⁴⁵Jenkins, Robin. The Changeling 1958 p.37.

⁴⁶Ibid. p.37.

head and apparent fixity of purpose Tom is an uncertain, bewildered individual. He wants something better than he's got but is not really sure what it is. As the pressures on him increase from both sides (he has enough trouble coping with life in the teacher's family, especially since he is under the threat of being sent home, without his own people arriving on the scene) he cracks - and hangs himself. At this point we become aware of serious flaws in the book. Throughout Jenkins treads a thin line between psychological plausibility and the incredible - on the whole with success. Certainly we may wonder occasionally about the subtlety and ingenuity shown in the scheming of this twelve year old boy, but it requires little goodwill on the reader's part to suspend any doubts. Tom's suicide however is going too far. Not only is such an event too melodramatic for the world we are in here, but it is out of character. Tom is too selfish and too level headed to kill himself, even when under considerable tension, and that he does so owes more to Jenkins' desire for a striking climax to the novel than to any approximation to reality. His handling of Charlie the teacher, however, weak, idealistic, a bit of a failure, is perfect.

Nevertheless The Changeling is an important novel as far as the theme of ambition is concerned, for it marks something of a culmination in its development. As the years pass we can see an increasing complexity in the way the cult of success is used. We move from the straightforward frowns of disapproval shown by the Victorians, to the ulterior motives of the tract writers and the

proletarians, then taking it from a social to a personal level, to those writers who look at its effects on character. The Changeling is the most subtle and complicated of these. It involves a different attitude to life from the more society orientated books. What is important now is not the question of prosperity, nor its attendant vices, nor even the problem of unequal prosperity. For the whole idea of success is now dubious. It is something which has a poisonous effect on personality, reflecting a more mature response to the competitive spirit, which is now a questionable thing - provoked by a maturing capitalism.

Before leaving working class ambition however one should take note of the Gang Novels. There are only a few of these, all low on literary merit and high on sensation - shallow repetitions of mindless violence and immorality. Without exception their authors make no attempt at analysing the roots of the gang phenomenon, but content themselves with describing it as it exists. The motives of the gang as a group are largely ignored, but we are, however, shown what motivates the individual gang leader. This is generally ambition. While his cronies may fight from a liking for violence itself this is only part of the hero's make up (except in Cut And Run where Ben is a psychopath). More important is the desire to become a celebrity, to attain a kind of success in his own very limited world. To wield the most feared razor gives a primitive expression to the egotism that underlies every impulse to succeed. In No Mean City (1935) McArthur

writes that everyone in the slums "wanted above everything to escape; to live a little more cleanly and more spaci-ously, to dress better, to have more money to spend and to earn the consideration of their own world as being "out of common," a cut above the crowd."⁴⁷ There are plenty of ways of achieving this. In the same novel Peter Stark takes the path of working hard in a respectable job, while Bobby Hurley and Lily McKay see a career as professional dancers as the way up. The gang leader however is often, through intellect, disposition or circumstances, not equipped for conventional success. McArthur's Johnnie Stark is none too bright for example. Yet they do have qualities which are out of the ordinary, a greater daring perhaps, or cunning, or viciousness. The rewards need not necessarily be financial, as McGhee points out "the majority of the most hardened of them in pre-war years made scarcely a penny out of their crimes";⁴⁸ and Johnnie Stark benefits only negligibly from his reign of terror. It is enough that he is the "Razor King." It is worth noting some of the observations of Sir Percy Silletoe in the mid 1950s, looking back on his days as Chief Constable of Glasgow:

"It is natural for all young people to be ambitious and to feel confident that they are worthy of rising above their fellows. But there are some young men - and women - who, finding themselves in an apparently inferior position in society, as a result of poverty, lack of opportunity, poor intelligence, or poor appearance (or

⁴⁷McArthur, A & Long K.H. No Mean City 1935 (1969 edition) p.67.

⁴⁸McGhee, Bill. Cut And Run 1962 - Preface.

possibly a combination of these disadvantages) have not the good sense or strength of character to seek to make something of themselves by constructive effort, but try instead to hoist themselves onto the limelight by the flamboyant violence of wrongdoing." 49

The gang author however generally does give his hero a more mercenary motive. Jimmy Lunn in Glasgow Keelie (1940), "had plans. Hundreds of plans and soon they would be rolling in money. One day they might even go up to Hillside and live in one of the fancy new villas with the tiled roofs and garages at the sides, like the folk with more money. Imagine him living next door to the foreman at the yard! Him with his own house, and maybe a car as well...."50

Notice the respectability implied in this vision. It is something again articulated by Bob Leyland in Peter Watt's No Bad Money:

"Gradually he became aware of his aim. It was not just to make a living off Norah and her two daughters, it was to rise in the world..... He saw that this was only the beginning. He wanted respectability. He wanted to rise like a phoenix from the ashes of his Glasgow and to have the respect not only of his own tenement bound world, but that of the polite respectable world outside." 51

These two, and Leyland in particular, are different from Johnnie Stark, are more intelligent and further seeing, yet the same basic impulse lies behind them all.

⁴⁹Sillitoe, Percy. Cloak Without Dagger 1955 p.122.

⁵⁰McNeillie, John. Glasgow Keelie 1940 p.275.

⁵¹McArthur, A.e Watts, P. No Bad Money 1969 p.26.

That they get money from their activities, despite the opposite being the case in real life, is only partly due, one suspects, to authorial urges to express the success drive seen in society. Technical considerations are important. Mere violence is boring in itself (witness Cut And Run); some larger struggle is necessary to keep the plot going satisfactorily. The world of the gang novel is amoral but the reader becomes as involved with the fortunes of the central character as in any other type of book. The gang leader gets as much sympathy and applause as would the middle class youth struggling to become a doctor, in another novel. No criticism of society is involved.

At the other end of the scale from these books are the more genteel works dealing with middle class life, or the respectable working class on its fringe. Here we find that frequent Scottish figure the 'lad o' pairts.' Several novels deal with his vision of success, the trials on his way, and his ultimate triumph. It is almost a convention. Almost always money is of little importance, it is the challenge, or the prestige of the job that counts. Moreover it never involves anything grubbily commercial, but generally something highly civilized, often with a touch of mystery to it. Doctors, scientists and artists are favourites. A.J. Cronin in particular has a penchant for the lad o' pairts - perhaps since he was one himself. Shannon's Way (1948), a Glasgow example, is a classic version of this type of novel. Robert Shannon is a brilliant young doctor. He is doing medical research

under the supervision of a pompous and less able man. He decides for the sake of science to go it alone, and overcoming a series of obstacles - lack of money and facilities, and a romantic entanglement - succeeds in pulling off a brilliant piece of scientific work, discovering the cause of brucellosis in milk. Yet, not content with just this, he goes on to find a cure. However, just when a shower of accolades seems inevitable he is stunned to find that his researches have been duplicated in America and that his rival has published a few days before him. He will get no recognition for his years of toil. But everything works out fine in the end. An exceptionally good medical post comes his way, and he also marries the heroine. The story is told in Cronin's characteristically overwritten style, full of excessive emotion and sentimentality. Science for example takes on heroic tones: "Hugo Usher seemed lacking in inspiration of creative force, unprepared to make the sacrifice of blood and tears demanded by research."⁵² Similarly Shannon's ambition becomes selflessly noble:

"The inner compulsion - call it, if you choose, the inspiration - which motivated my research. How could I abandon it without betraying my scientific conscience, without in fact selling myself? The desire to find out the truth concerning this epidemic, this strange bacillus was irresistible. I would not let it go."⁵³

This atmosphere of strained fervour is kept up throughout, and among the peppering of scientific facts included to

⁵²Cronin, A.J. Shannon's Way 1948 p.22.

⁵³Ibid. p.59.

give authenticity, we get a number of the cliches of popular fiction. The worst perhaps is the miraculous life or death operation Shannon makes against the odds, typical of a third rate hospital drama.

Very similar is George Blake's Young Malcolm (1926) featuring another young man involved in scientific research. Again there is the love interest, and again the financial obstacles in his path. Yet "there was before him always that wonderful mirage of knowledge, and beyond that again, a clever boy's high dream of the Career."⁵⁴ Malcolm's success however is much more moderate than Shannon's, and eventually he compromises and gives up his scientific aspirations, taking a job that provides security and financial reward. There is no criticism of this however, for Malcolm we are shown is not cut out for real greatness. The important thing is that he tried. Ironically his brother - the family fool, expected to go nowhere except perhaps^p jail - achieves^h fame and fortune eclipsing Malcolm's, as a professional footballer.

Another two books dealing with similar subjects - in this case the artist - are Justice Of The Peace (1914) by Frederick Niven, and Stewart Hunter's This Good Company (1946). In story line, if not in treatment, they are alike, centering on the well worn situation of the boy who wants to become a painter despite parental opposition,

⁵⁴Blake, George. Young Malcolm 1926 p.55.

and who goes on to justify his choice by his success. Both describe the artistic agony, the slow, but ever-increasing progress. "He had to struggle to sharpen a facile talent into an accurate and disciplined instrument of the imagination fitted to convey to others through the medium of canvas and paper, the central realities which he beheld."⁵⁵

Hunter's book is superficial, ponderously written and full of pseudo mysticism about art. It is really only an ordinary success story with complications, while Justice Of The Peace is a really fine work, imaginative and excellently written. Niven's main concern is not with his hero's ambition itself, but with how it affects his relationship with his parents. (Niven will be dealt with fully in a separate chapter). A less exalted youthful ambition is to be found in The Sea Road (1959) by Thomas Muir. Here the ambition is to become an engineer. After the death of his mother young Gavin comes under the guardianship of his uncle, a harsh Free Kirk elder, who wants Gavin to enter his profession of boatbuilding, and who will countenance no other ambition. Driven on, however, by a love of craftsmanship and technical knowledge he defies his uncle by studying in secret, then running away to work in the Glasgow shipyards. "He wanted to be an engineer, a MARINE engineer, so that he could combine his love of ships with the fascination of machinery. Clearly he saw that it was the one and only possible job for him in the world."⁵⁶ The Sea Road is an expression of one of

⁵⁵Hunter, Stewart. This Good Company 1946 p.97.

⁵⁶Muir, Thomas. The Sea Road 1959 p.32.

the more laudable characteristics of the industrialised Scot, his admiration for technical skill and ingenuity. It is the James Watt tradition, as opposed to the Samuel Smiles tradition we find in the Victorian novels. For Gavin, becoming an engineer is more important than anything else, and this gives him a certain ruthless determination. When a temporary period of economic depression forces him out of the shipyards he takes a job on a farm where he falls in love with a girl. He likes the life there and could stay, but at the first opportunity he makes the break, to return and finish his apprenticeship.

The 'lad o' pairts' in the Glasgow novel is a twentieth century thing. He's a sign of changing times. The Victorian hero's quest for riches has turned sour in a century whose middle years so far have been dominated by a major economic depression. But he is only partly a manifestation of the spirit behind The Changeling. It is no accident that the idea in these books tends to be 'worthwhile' rather than materialistic. The emphasis is on the solid citizen, and not the rich one. And while they are escapist the puritanical note removes them from the kind of cheap romantic fiction whose heroes rise in 'smart' society. They are comforting, providing a sort of affirmation that worth will triumph; there is also a note of patriotism in all these young Scots doing work that will benefit mankind as a whole. Although not necessarily middle class in subject, they are in concept. The whole idea of a quality of life depending on something more than money is alien to a Prisoner of Circumstance. That

they are fundamentally pro-capitalist in outlook is seen in the centrality of the competitive spirit.

There are also however a host of novels genuinely about middle class life where the theme of getting on in the world is a primary factor, particularly the works of Guy McCrone and George Woden. McCrone's An Independent Young Man (1961) and James And Charlotte (1955) are to the 'lad o' pairts' formula, but his most notable look at worldly progress is in his Moorehouse saga - Wax Fruit (1947), Aunt Bel (1949) and The Hayburn Family (1952). The family of a modest Ayrshire farmer go to Glasgow, prosper, marry and rise in the city's society. Financial details are kept very much in the background. We know that Arthur is in business as a cheese merchant, obviously successfully as he is able to move house from the city centre to the new fashionable West End, but we are told almost nothing about these commercial activities. Again, when his brother David marries the daughter of a shipping magnate and inherits the crown of an empire, the business side of this remains vague. The focus is on social climbing, and money is merely the key to the fashionable world where this goes on, rather than an end in itself. McCrone shows us with sympathy, humour and sharp observation the snobbery, pretension and aspiring gentility of the Glasgow nouveau-riche, in particular Arthur's wife Bel. The whole idea of the saga is the active pursuit of social success. "Like all middle class Glasgow at this time Bel - like a thousand other Bels and Arthurs in the city - was on the up-grade."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ McCrone, Guy. Wax Fruit 1947 p.35.

To be looked up to, and to mingle on equal terms with the city's aristocracy is the great aim, and the Moorehouses manage this magnificently. Even the stay-at-home brother marries the laird's daughter and falls heir to his father-in-law's estate. McCrone makes no moral comments on these ambitions but just presents them as part of Glasgow's past experience.* This accent on the social side of things is not one which the Victorian writers themselves made, nor is it the concern of those who deal with working class life. (With the exception of a few comments of the type that "her husband was a shipyard labourer; she called him a boiler-maker's assistant. It sounded better.")⁵⁸

Another type of middle class novel highlighting the desire to get on are those produced by George Woden. Apart from Mungo (1932) which is his best work, Woden's books are all the same. Like Wax Fruit, Mungo is a historical novel, but is much less of a genteel costume piece, and more, in the early part anyway, of a serious look at the sort of spirit on which Glasgow's nineteenth century expansion was based. John Mungo is the epitome of the self made man, a poor collier who entirely through his own efforts becomes a wealthy businessman. He is ruthlessly materialistic: "Books be damned" he says "they only gie ye advice like schoolmasters who hae nae money - must blether. Naebody heeds. I'm tellin' ye it's money I'm wantin'. Aye I'm going to dae things."⁵⁹

*See below Chapter 10 for further comment.

⁵⁸ McCulloch, D.M. The Swinging Tub 1917 p.69.

⁵⁹ Woden, George. Mungo 1930 p.48.

And he does, because of his iron will and single minded determination. For example on his wedding day we get an insight into his character, when he is almost late for the ceremony because he first tried to settle a deal concerning the sale of some shawls. "Aye. It was business not to be missed oh a wonderful day"⁶⁰ Mungo is a powerful figure who in the hands of a better novelist could have become an outstanding fictional creation. Even with Woden manipulating however, Mungo although not attractive, compels our admiration. As the book progresses Woden subjects him to a lot of criticism. He becomes hard and grasping, and his wife, who figures as a sort of moral touchstone in the book, looks on with unease. "Mary good soul that she was didnae understand - how a man must strive and calculate and harden his heart to become rich and respected."⁶¹ And looking back in old age, on his life Mungo himself reflects: "Ach! It was a dirty business, even the effort to do good in the world - pulling this wire and that, seeing one man in order to be introduced to another whose influence could be bought, or cajoled, flattering rogues and fools, tempting honest men - Ach."⁶²

Woden echoes Mungo's story in the figures of some other self made men, and there is an element of lament in the book that the qualities typified by Mungo and so important in building Glasgow as a centre of business,

⁶⁰Ibid. p.129.

⁶¹Ibid. p.129.

⁶²Ibid. p.247.

should be disappearing. He belongs to the old school whereas the new type of successful man is seen in the person of Alexander Narrowbridge, cunning, underhand, and hypocritical. He has the greed of Mungo but not the grit, nor the crude vitality, that makes the latter such a strong personality.

Woden's other novels are less interesting. The scene is always a stale middle class environment dominated by decayed gentility, where a host of very similar characters act out the same sort of situations in book after book. Money is of recurring importance but it is infused with a strain of pettiness that marks all his novels. Greed, then, is not the grand avarice of Mungo, but the half formed hope that some relative may die and leave a few hundred pounds, or that perhaps the boss can be cajoled into giving a rise in salary. Time and time again we see these kind of hopes being played out. Petty discontent over financial matters is a common theme: "He understood that Elizabeth lived with a recurrent dread of poverty. She believed that her grandfather had been wealthy and had squandered his riches in riotous living. Her father ought to have been rich, could have been rich, had been rich, but his second wife had squandered what should have been left to his children."⁶³

Ambitions in this world are unfulfilled, leaving regret and sourness. His middle-aged characters in particular are shown as failures. As Hamilton Deans

⁶³Woden, George. Happiness Has No Story 1938 p.81.

says: "I work and work to make money. I want to rebel, but I feel that I'm driven. Most of the men of my age are the same, slogging away, tired and worried and - what's it all for? Our wives? Our children? What the hell?"⁶⁴

Nothing very profound lies at the back of Woden's continual working on these themes. He is content merely to assert the existence of these forces in society and to make no attempt at analysing their implications. Like McCrone and other even lesser novelists of their type (Dot Allan, Mary Cleland) he accepts without question the rightness of the competitive spirit. The tone of his books, the sympathy, mild humour, and superficial questioning of unimportant details suggests that the economic system is basically sound and that any problems are the inevitable features of life itself.

It would be quite possible to go through many more Glasgow novels isolating the theme of ambition and giving illustrations. We could for example regard William Henderson's boxing story, King Of the Gorbals (1973), as a 'lad o' pairts' tale and review it as such. Moreover in Chapter 10 below we will see that the theme has been a major concern for writers producing historical novels about the city. What is important is not so much the individual expressions (nor even the differences between these), but the fact that the theme has been so persistent in the genre. That one cannot escape it in one form or another in most novels about Glasgow shows it to be a major element in the city's psyche.

⁶⁴Ibid. p.327.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GLASGOW KAILYARD NOVEL

CHAPTER TWO

THE GLASGOW KAILYARD NOVEL

In his book on the kailyard tradition George Blake¹ gives the misleading impression that it is specifically concerned with rural life. Certainly its roots lie there, but urban Scotland also produced many examples, and it is a writer's attitude rather than his setting that places his work in this category. Another misconception is that the appearance of George Douglas Brown's The House With The Green Shutters (1902) effectively put an end to the movement, for the kailyard work has been a stubborn survivor. Indeed that very year was to see the publication of the most popular Glasgow example, J.J. Bell's Wee Macgregor, and from then till the end of World War I kailyard works flourished in the city as never before.

The general characteristics are well known - the trivia, the sentimentality, and the narrow vision - but I will illustrate in some detail from the Glasgow sources. It is important to note that not only are the qualities of urban and rural works essentially the same but that there are no real changes in attitude, values, or style over about a fifty year period.^a

The first elements are to be found in Henry Duncan's

¹Blake, George. Barrie And The Kailyard School 1951.

^aIt is easy to understand why Burgess in The Glasgow Novel 1870-1970: A Bibliography wrongly places the undated Bill Broon Territorial in the 1890s rather than some twenty years later, its more probable date.

The Young South Country Weaver or A Journey To Glasgow (1821), but Generalship (1858) is really the earliest example proper of the kailyard school. The Weaver has a prominent and uncharacteristic element of political debate. In Generalship Glasgow housewife Mrs. Young holds forth in a humorous manner on a variety of domestic topics. It is an episodic work, a collection of sketches loosely hung together on a central character. Jeems Kaye which appeared in the late 1870s and early 1880s, and Martha Spreull (1884) are the same, and structurally typical of this type of fiction as a whole. There is never any sustained treatment of theme or subject, perhaps because it is difficult to sustain unreality without a degree of imagination which these writers obviously do not have. Thus a typical book will touch superficially on a variety of subjects. Wee Macgregor starts with a walk in Argyle Street, proceeds in the second chapter with a visit to the zoo, in the third to a tea party and in subsequent chapters we are shown the hero's antics with a lump of putty, the buying of a new toorie, and a visit to Rothesay. No overall design is apparent.

There is a wide difference in quality between individual works. The best are competently written and in small doses entertaining, others however are barely readable today. Three works stand noticeably above the rest; Jeems Kaye, Wee Macgregor, and to a lesser degree the McFlannel books. Jeems Kaye originally appeared in the pages of the humorous magazine The Bailie before being published in book form. It features a Glasgow coal merchant describing

his adventures in the vernacular. Much of it is genuinely funny, and although crude, has a freshness and vitality rarely found in later works. It is also notably free from excessive sentimentality and patronage. Jeems emerges as a well established character, and as he reacts to his environment we get not only a wide and varied picture of the social life of the time, but also a reflection of certain changes taking place in Scottish society. Bill Broon, Territorial, Martha Spreull and Erchie, my droll friend (1904) are closely modelled on Jeems Kaye but are considerably inferior. The first two are less sharp in their observations and have less sparkle, while Erchie is dripping with sentiment.

Wee Macgreegor first saw the light of day in the pages of the Glasgow Evening Times and was an instant success. In book form its popularity was even greater, selling in the region of 250,000 copies in paper covered form alone, as well as Canadian and American editions. In this novel, and its sequel Wee Macgreegor Again (1904) Bell's writing was of a quality he was never able to repeat. Although not great writing, like Jeems Kaye, and again the McFlannels, there is real humour in it, which does much to make up for the frequent lapses into sickly sentimentality, and the triviality of the situations. Moreover, although idealised, there is a basic honesty in the presentation of family relationships that make them always convincing. However, the exploits of a mischievous small boy within a very confined social sphere become at times annoyingly mawkish, particularly in the way Macgreegor's transgressions are

always lovingly forgiven. It obviously annoyed Edinburgh artist J.W. Simpson, for he parodies this sort of reconciliation in his book Mair Macjigger (1903). Macjigger's mother hits him:

"The blow was so violent that the boy staggered against his own bedroom door and fell into the room. As he fell a circular disc dropped out from under his coat and rolled below the bed. He lay on the mat, half dazed, his mother towering over him.

Mr. Dobinson rose from his chair in alarm.

"Come Leeby woman" he said coaxingly.

His wife pushed Macjigger's legs out of the way with her foot, and slammed the door.

"That'll learn him," she said."²

After the two Macgreegor books Bell was to produce a miserable series of kailyard novels based on similar ideas, but very much inferior in quality. He created a female counterpart to Macgreegor, who eventually becomes his girlfriend, and her adventures are traced in Oh! Christina (1909) and Courtin' Christina (1913). These books are flimsy and stale however, lacking any sort of sparkle. A grown up Macgreegor makes his appearance in Wee Macgreegor Enlists (1915), but the charm has gone and the cute child has become a clown set in the same patronising mould as R.W. Campbell's Spud Tamson. Ethel (1903) is the boring conversations of a young middle class couple, and Bell here, trying to be smart and facetious, fails utterly. In The Braw Bailie (1925) we see traces of the warmth which

²Simpson, W. Mair Macjigger 1903 p.10-11.

infected the Macgregor stories but the plot is creaky, and he overplays the emotional aspects.

Helen Pryde's McFlannel family and the Robinson family of the Macgregor books are very alike. They come from the same social sphere and enjoy the same interests. There is however an emphasis on going up in the world in Pryde's books which we do not find in Bell's. The best quality of the McFlannel books is their dramatic aspect. Characters and situation come over sharp and distinct, and the dialogue is vigorous and authentic. Indeed it is their resemblance to the radio scripts, from which they are derived, that saves them from many of the common kailyard faults. Nevertheless the stories are trivial. The rest of the scene is very poor. Falconer's Droll Glasgow, a collection of sketches featuring gossiping housewives, is heavy and without originality, only the petty malice of the characters distinguishes it from the worst of Bell's work. R.W. Campbell had a close connection with, and a great admiration for the Boy's Brigade, and something of its spirit is obvious in his works. Snooker Tam of The Cathcart Railway (1919), Private Spud Tamson (1916), and Sergt. Spud Tamson V.C. (1918) are a mixture of athletics and moralising. His comedy is crude and generally handled without any skill. His heroes, although cocky and gallus, are clean in mind and body. There is an emphasis on honour and duty which at times becomes the sort of heroism associated with boys' comics: "It was a dangerous job, yet Spud was not alarmed. It suited his nature and whetted his ardour for the all precious D.C.M."³ To Campbell's King

³Campbell, R.W. Private Spud Tamson 1916 p.251.

and Country mind, war is devoid of pain or horror and is merely the stage for idealised deeds of valour. "They felt it a pleasure to serve and deemed it an honour to die."⁴ His great sin however is the overbearingly patronising attitude which steeps everything he writes.

However, when we look at the range of kailyard works we are confronted not so much by a number of individual apprehensions of life but by a single unreal world which is more or less the same to every writer, and to which they all subscribe. Each of them makes a contribution to its continuation by setting his very similar characters and action within it. None ever admits it is a fiction nor allows his vision to become divorced to any significant degree from those of his colleagues. When we look at the kailyard then it is more meaningful to describe the characteristics of this world as a whole, than to look at length at the individual books. There are of course slight differences in attitude, emphasis, and treatment between works, but nothing significant.

The most obvious feature of the kailyard environment is that it is a limited world. It is very strictly confined within the horizons of a cosy domestic setting, a soft cocoon where "yer ain fireside" becomes the centre of the universe and harsh reality is kept stoutly at bay. People are at their happiest in these books when they are enjoying the innocent pleasures of a comfortable home,

⁴Ibid. p.113 - This work in fact owes a lot to Ian Hay's The First Hundred Thousand 1915.

Macgregor's father for example, reading his newspaper or "enjoying an evening pipe before the kitchen fire,"⁵ Bailie Blue eating his wife's roly poly pudding or dozing at the hearth. Similarly, the McFlannels: "Wullie and Sarah were in the house by themselves, Wullie sitting puffing contentedly on his pipe and nursing the dog at the same time."⁶

Detailed descriptions of homely comfort abound. In The Braw Bailie for example:

"The room as usual seemed to be waiting for him. His easy chair was turned at just the right angle to the cheerful fire. On the convenient little table lay the evening paper, some letters, his silver cigarette box with matches and tray; on the hearth his slippers were toasting - under a wire gauze meat-cover to protect them from a chance raid by Peter the puppy. Mrs. Blue was not without the faculty of invention or adaption."⁷

Bailie Blue's house is the home of a wealthy man but the same sort of circumstances prevail in the homes of the humblest people. Erchie is only a waiter but has a "kitchen more snug and clean and warm than any palace."⁸ The kailyard writer then sees his hero materially well provided for, but he also ensures that this is matched by harmony in his personal relationships, and the families which inhabit these comfortable homes are contented and at one with one another. In this he is in direct contrast to those working in the more reputable areas of the Scottish tradition at this time, where talented and serious writers

⁵Bell, John Joy. Wee Macgregor 1902 p.33.

⁶Pryde, Helen. The McFlannels See It Through 1948 p.106.

⁷Bell, John Joy. The Braw Bailie 1925 p.110.

⁸Foulis, Hugh (Neil Munro). Erchie My Droll Friend 1904 p.27.

were focusing on strife and disunity within the family circle as a means of expressing some of the forces they saw in Scottish society. Kailyard families live harmoniously; love, respect, and affection flow easily between individuals. There are no Gourlays and no Durie brothers. Marriages are always successful, and while wives may nag a little they always have hearts of gold. Erchie, Jeems Kaye, Bill Broon and Wullie McFlannel have all reached middle age without a rift in their marriages, and are as likely to take a mistress as Wee Macgregor is to kill his mother.

Sarah McFlannel looks at her marriage:

" "Another twenty five years would be all right - if we were spared to one another. And - there's the family too. Right enough Willie we've been awful lucky with them haven't we!"

"Och ay, they've turned oot no' bad - conseederin'."

"Considering what?"

"Conseederin' the wey you've worried over them. Look hoo often in the last twenty five year ah've had tae tell ye tae cheer up - ye never died a winter yet!"

Sarah made a gesture of exasperation.

"Here - come on!" ordered Willie. "Gie's a wee cheeper."

He got his wee cheeper. ⁹

Quarrels are short lived and easily resolved. Usually they are humorous. The McFlannels' Uncle Mattha for example occasions a series of mishaps, but he is always forgiven.

⁹The McFlannels See It Through op. cit. p.142.

It is useful to note the close similarities between the McFlannel stories and the most popular modern example of the genre, the strip cartoon The Broons, which appears weekly in The Sunday Post. The world is entirely the same. The focal point is again the adventures of a happy family, but the idealisation of family life is even more apparent. We are asked to believe that ten people can live in an ordinary tenement home completely free from the tensions of overcrowding. One expects at least a few problems that cannot be resolved satisfactorily in the inevitable laughing family group that closes most stories. The Broons indeed epitomise so many of the attitudes and illusions that lie at the centre of the kailyard tradition - the humble origins, the respectability, the thrift, and the freedom from material want.

Earlier in the century however, family life was just as ideal. The Robinsons enjoy the same warm relationship. When Macgregor gets paint on his trousers for instance, he is upset not because his mother is angry with him, but because she is angry with his father for trying to help him conceal what has happened. It is significant that when Henry Duncan wrote The Weaver (1821) as a work of political propaganda, he chose to use a family setting to express his views. He presents us with two contrasting family groups. On the one hand we have a typical kailyard household presided over by a wise and temperate father, and united in respect and affection for one another. These people are poor but contented. They are pious, non-political, respectful towards authority, and have only

very limited ambitions. On the other hand, as a warning about the dangers of radicalism, we are confronted with a family in less happy circumstances. In the household of a radical weaver chaos reigns. The father is a ranting irreligious drunkard, the son an ungrateful, undutiful thief. Family life is unstable and unpleasant. This, Duncan would have us believe, is a direct result of espousing radicalism. The assumption is that no more need be looked for in life than the former family's domestic bliss.

It is natural that the concentration on domesticity should be trivialising. In reality day to day family life holds little that is dramatic. The consequences for fiction are summed up by a quick glance through the contents pages of the urban kailyard novels, where we see the lack of scope in the way the same subjects come up time and time again, in particular "shopping", "visiting" and "trips to the seaside". Gossip looms large. In an enclosed environment it assumes an importance beyond its merits and it becomes one of the premier kailyard concerns. Indeed a whole novel, Droll Glasgow (1905), is built around it.

Most commonly then these books concern themselves with domestic or small scale social affairs and not with people at work or in formal situations. Where a potentially uncomfortable situation exists the kailyard writer contrives to rob it of its stiffness and present it in homely terms. Life as an employee on the railway is, in the eyes of R.W. Campbell, easy and pleasurable, a good humoured

routine of innocent practical jokes and slapstick fun. Boredom, worry, and industrial strife do not exist. The work situation becomes as near as possible a domestic one:

"Beneath his fun (the stationmaster's) there was always a moral 'getting on' and achieving sound success. In short Kirkbride Station was another Cotter's Saturday Night, the father and sage presiding over his family of lassies and boys. It was good to keek into the booking office between trains and see him smoking his cutty at the fire, Snooker at the one side, Maggie at the other, and wee Puddin' Broon the latest apprentice sitting high up on 'the coonter'. The scene was a sermon on Faith, Hope and Charity, and in striking contrast with those industrial parts where anger and anarchy are rampant. There was no Bolshevism in this booking office."¹⁰

This kind of vision extends into a parochialism that resists the intrusion of a wider environment. The narrow attitudes, and the illusions at the basis of the tradition are never put at risk. A more expansive physical world may necessitate a wider mental one, so the scene is restricted. The kailyard mind is unable to appreciate beauty, grandeur or strangeness. It cannot risk trying. The wonders of the East for example it will dismiss with a shake of the head and quickly strip of their glory. Jeems Kaye visits Cairo:

"Some go into great rhapsodies about the Nile and its crocodiles! I say gie me the Clyde wi' its patrons. Some talk o' mosques and the palaces wi' the domes on the tap. They may be very gran', but for me the Hydropathic doon at Kilma'colm, or the Govan Parish Pooors' House are as gran' buildings as I have ony wish tae see."¹¹

¹⁰Campbell, R.W. Snooker Tam Of the Cathcart Railway 1919 p.23.

¹¹McMillan, Archibald. Jeems Kaye (188-) Second Series p.62.

No doubt this is partly an affirmation of Jeems' patriotism, a quality we are always aware of throughout his sketches, but it also points to an element of fear in the consciousness of the kailyard writer. Like a savage he will destroy what he cannot understand. The kailyarder very often speaks in a reductive idiom, in a voice which narrows everything down to the comfortable and comprehensible. Smallness becomes a virtue. Note how in this typical domestic scene the stature of Teen, the seamstress, is matched by the size of her mirror:

"In an incredibly short space of time the little seamstress had the kettle singing on the cherry hob and toasted the bread while Liz was washing her face and brushing her red locks at the little looking glass hanging at the window."¹²

Teen lives humbly, aspires to little, but works hard and is thrifty. Liz on the other hand comes from the same environment but cherishes hopes of the grand life. While Teen is happy, Liz knows only misery and pain. A.S. Swan makes it clear that had Liz limited her ambitions and been content to live the humble life of Teen she too could have been happy. Her sin is not to be content with little things. Indeed it is a feature of the genre that the celebration of domesticity has a counterpart in the personality of the characters. The ideal figures are people of limited hopes and ambitions. Like Teen, Snooker Tam does not look to the mountain top. "I want a nice wee hoose on the line, an' at the end o' fifty years to get a marble knock for our jubilee - jist like Maister McMuckle."¹³ The

¹² Swan, Annie S. The Guinea Stamp 1892 p. 271

¹³ Snooker Tam op. cit. p.241.

kailyard mind sees nothing unhealthy in the fact that a young boy's vision should be so blinkered. Tam has only started on life but already he wants it circumscribed. It is difficult to find a character who wants more than he has got. Those rare figures who do are unsympathetic individuals. The discontented radicals in The Weaver are always seen unfavourably. Their crime is that in demanding a greater involvement in affairs of state they are aspiring above their station. The proper course is to remain humble. As William, the hero, explains:

"In our part o' the country we never fash oursel's with thae matters. We just gang quietly aboot our ain business and are glad we have nought to do wi' sic high things. They wadna do for our handling." 14

Erchie's philosophy is similar:

"If ye hae yer health and yer work and the weans is weel ye can be as happy as a Lord and far happier. It's the folk that live in the terraces where the nae stairs is, and sittin' in their parlours readin' as hard's onything to keep up wi' the times and naething to see oot the window but a plot o' grass that's no richt green that gets tired o' everything. The like o' us that stay up closes and hae nae servants, an' can come oot for a daunder efter turnin' the key on the door hae the best o't." 15

This kind of attitude has of course political implications which we will go into later.

Virtues in this world are the domestic ones. Good

¹⁴Duncan Henry. The Young South Country Weaver: or A Journey to Glasgow 1821 p.25.

¹⁵Erchie op. cit. p.28.

housekeeping, thrift, and industry, are the things most worthy of esteem. Maisie McFlannel comments on her upbringing: "Ever since I was a kid I've had it dinned into me that the Savings Bank was the gateway to Utopia."¹⁶

(It is significant that the Rev. Henry Duncan, author of The Weaver, was the founder of the world's first savings bank, and a ceaseless campaigner for the extension of the movement.)

Again the stature of Mr. McCrepe, the minister, is increased immensely when, in the absence of the females of the McFlannel family, he is able to take charge of the kitchen and prepare a meal for the struggling menfolk. A genius would be laughed at, not revered, in a kailyard novel.

Behind the restriction of setting and the stultification of ambition lies a cult of humility that has had a certain effect on characterisation. This has tended to the picturesque and, as Blake remarked, the kailyard scene is peopled by a collection of quaint figures, "pawky" and "nippy" characters who are not far from being clowns. Snooker Tam is full of them. "You will readily understand that everybody on the Cathcart Circle is a personality."¹⁷ There is Mr. McMuckle who "like all station masters with small salaries he had a sense of humour",¹⁸ Snooker Tam himself (so called because of the size of his nose), "had always wanted to be a station master and 'blaw a whustle'.

¹⁶Pryde, Helen W. Maisie McFlannel's Romance 1951 p.43.

¹⁷Snooker Tam op. cit. p.2.

¹⁸Ibid. p.7.

As his father was alleged to be a 'polisman' the 'whustle' instinct can be understood."¹⁹

Jeems Kaye, Bill Broon, and Erchie are similar characters, middle aged, patriotic, anti-feminist and a bit vulgar. They speak a broad Glasgow dialect and are never loath to comment, often caustically, on a variety of subjects. They are 'fly' yet good natured. Erchie's description of himself fits them all, "a flet fit but a warm hert." Martha Spreull and Mrs. Balbirnie of Droll Glasgow are female counterparts. All of them are marked by streaks of ignorance, prejudice and philistinism. Jeems believes The Charge Of The Light Brigade to be Shakespeare's, and Bill Broon misquotes Burns. Similarly Willie Thomson, a soldier friend of Macgreegor's, is incapable of writing a literate letter to his girlfriend:

"If you are wanting a perfeck man, by yourself a statute from the muesum. Then you can treat him cold. and he will not nottice other girls when you leav him for to enjoy yourself..."²⁰

Yet in the kailyard this does not matter. Erchie's 'warm hert' is the important thing about him. The appeal in these books is to the simple human heart, and not the intellect; to our sentimentality and our sense of humour. A person who knows too much is dangerous in this narrow environment. This is of course a patronising picture of the ordinary person, but it is a picture deliberately created. At times it goes further than merely a lack of knowledge and extends into a depiction of characters as

¹⁹Ibid. p.5.

²⁰Bell, John Joy. Wee Macgreegor Enlists 1915 p.183.

nothing more than clowns. Spud Tamson is cocky, illiterate and shrewd. He has no serious side. By the biographical details we are given Campbell ensures that he can only be taken lightly. He was "heir male to a balloon and candy merchant." "I blaw the trumpet and the auld chap gies oot the balloons and candy."²¹ Everything about him is ridiculous, (Campbell mocks his 'spurtle legs and somewhat comical face',²²) both personal appearance and antics:

" "Where did you get that broken nose?"

"In a fish shop."

"A fight?"

"Aye an Italian hit me wi' a bottle for pinchin' a plate." " 23

If many of these characters remind one of the typical music hall idea of the Scot it is not surprising, for the type of world they inhabit is much the same. Indeed Neil Munro's Earchie was brought to life on the Glasgow stage. It is interesting to compare the kailyard hero with the image Harry Lauder projected of himself in both theatrical performance and in print. There is little difference. His Wee Drappies (1931), a book of reminiscences, is a classical expose of the kailyard mentality.

The kailyard writer is often unwilling to allow real feelings to ordinary people. Even serious emotions are made fun of. Love is never passionate, nor is it idealised. Generally it is quaint. The novelist is always smirking

²¹Private Spud Tamson op. cit. p.5.

²²Ibid. p.5.

²³Ibid. p.27.

in the background. A grown-up Macgreegor inquires about a friend's night out:

"Did ye cuddle her?" Macgreegor asked with an interest indifferently concealed."²⁴

Similarly the stationmaster leaves Snooker Tam and Maggie alone for a time:

"As the door closed Snooker winked at Maggie and said "He's no' a bad auld chap. Wud ye like a cookie?"

"Aye."

They munched cookies till the maister returned. BETWEEN BITES THEY KISSED."²⁵ (Campbell's Italics)

If love then is unreal, tragedy is non existent. Death occurs rarely and when it does it is painless. Big Macphee in Erchie My Droll Friend dies alone and in sorry circumstances, but in Munro's hands this becomes an occasion not for pity but for making facetious comments at his funeral reception. This however is due less to a lack of feeling on Munro's part than to the inevitable distortions demanded by the milieu in which he has chosen to work.

Not only is it a restricted world but it is an unreal world. This is true in two ways. Firstly in the way in which so much is missed out; the unpleasant, the serious, the intellectual. Secondly in the way in which what is left in will be distorted, or altered, to make it blend in

²⁴Wee Macgreegor Enlists op. cit. p.74.

²⁵Snooker Tam op. cit p.12.

with the rest of the environment. Edwardian Glasgow like Glasgow today was an unpleasant place for a great many people. W. Bolitho writing in 1924 produced figures that give a dismal picture of the city's housing conditions during the first two decades of the century.

"Out of a population of 1,081,983, 600,000 people, that is two thirds, live in houses inferior to the minimum standard of the Board of Health. 40,591 families live in one roomed homes, 112,424 families live in homes made up of a room and kitchen."²⁶

Nothing like this ever appears in these novels. When on rare occasions a drop of dirt is allowed to show itself, it will always be verbally sterilised so no one need be upset. This is seen best and most typically in Munro's Erchie My Droll Friend, where a glimpse of the city's social problems is very briefly introduced only to be dismissed more effectively than if they had been ignored altogether. Taking a walk in the streets Erchie and his wife encounter a slum child:

" "Oh Erchie! See that pair wee lame yin! God peety him! - I maun gie him a penny," whispered Jinnet, as a child in rags stopped before a jeweller's window to look in on a magic world of silver cruet stands and diamond rings and gold watches.

"Ye'll dae naething o' the kind!" said Erchie. "It wad just be wastin' yer money; I'll bate ye onything his mither drinks." He pushed his wife on her way past the boy and unobserved by her, slipped twopence in the latter's hand."²⁷

Munro is satisfied to leave the incident like this. Even in such a short extract however we can see a good

²⁶ Bolitho, William. Cancer Of Empire 1924 p.17.

²⁷ Erchie op. cit. p.30.

deal about the kailyard attitude. What matters is not the implications of the child's position but the pathos and spurious sentiment derived from its ignorance of the 'magic world', and the demonstration of Erchie's kindness. Any discomfort aroused by the sight of the ragged urchin is immediately dispelled by the warm glow spreading from Erchie's secret charity. Very similar is the incident in The Braw Bailie where the Bailie stuffs two ten shilling notes wrapped over corks into his old boots, so that when his wife gives them to a beggar he'll get the money as well, without the knowledge of the Bailie's wife. Again the important thing is the hero's generosity and not the plight of the object of charity. On other occasions Munro dispels any potentially disturbing thoughts with a quick platitude. A child blue with cold in the night air arouses Erchie to comment that:

"The nicht air's no waur nor the day air: maybe when they're oot here they'll no' mind they're hungry."²⁸

The whole kailyard position is summed up by Erchie when he says, "the slums'll no' touch ye if ye don't gang near them."²⁹

R.W. Campbell strips the potentially sordid of its unpleasant face in a different way from Munro, though the final effect is the same. Instead of sentiment and the glib comment he uses jocularly. For example the ugly fact of wife beating becomes a joke with Spud Tamson:

²⁸Ibid. p.30.

²⁹Ibid. p.50.

"Weel then what's your age?"

"Age! I dinna ken!"

"Don't know your age?"

"Naw but I was born the year that the auld chap wis sent tae Peterheid."

"Oh, what was that for?"

"Knockin' lumps aff the auld wife's heid wi' a poker." 30

The kailyard world is also without a true economic basis in reality. How do all these comfortable people derive their incomes? Ethel's fiancé for example is apparently without employment as he can traipse about the city unhindered on weekdays. While a private income is just conceivable in this case, it is difficult to explain how an ordinary coal merchant like Jeems Kaye can finance a trip to the Middle East. Similarly the industrial facts of life, like low wages and unemployment never appear, and while the 1930s was marked by a general economic depression the story of the McFlannels in this period is completely oblivious to it. Financial problems when they do arise are always easily solved, very often by a fortuitous windfall. Bailie Blue is in line for the post of Lord Provost but is unable to afford the honour. However the monetary barrier is no sooner raised than it is removed by an unexpected communication from his lawyer, advising him that some land he had forgotten he owned is now worth £70,000. Again the Robinson family decide to give Macgregor a party, but the expense may prove a stumbling

³⁰Private Spud Tamson. op. cit. p.4.

block. By sheer coincidence however Mr. Robinson conveniently gets promotion at work and a higher wage.

Like the Marxist, the kailyard writer is acutely aware of class and social status, although the implications are not the same. Rarely is this openly admitted, indeed the opposite impression is aimed at. Yet behind the pose of a man who judges his fellows by their hearts, the kailyarder always has an eye on his neighbour's social position. This has mixed results. On the one hand it leads to one of the few occasions where the reductive idiom is beneficial; where the narrow vision extends into a ridicule of pretension and affectation. Time and again snobs are punished by deflation and ridicule, and in the process they provide some of the rare instances of genuine humour in the kailyard genre. Macgregor's Aunt Purdie for example fancies herself superior to her humble relations. Explaining a point at tea her speech unfortunately gives her away:

"It was recommended to me by Mrs. McCluny the doctor's wife. Mrs. McCluny is very highly connected, quite autocratic in fact. Her and me is great friends. I expect to meet her at the Carmunock conversonie on Monday night - a very select gathering. Her and me" 31

Mrs. McCotton is her equivalent in the McFlannel stories:

" "Dear me, Mrs. McFlehnnel" she said "you're very narrow minded surely. Eh always think an electric fehr is such a convenience. Meh friend Mrs. McVelvet's got a new one - oh a marvellous thing it is - it's a

fehr-screen when it's not in use.
 Most artistic. But of course all her
 furniture's modern. It would look
 odd in an old-fashioned room like this." "32

At the other side of the class barrier however the position is different. Authority and genuine breeding are never mocked. A policy of strict deference is observed. The rich, the titled, and the clergy, are presented with sympathy and respect. Mr. McMuckle voices the ideal: "Be awfu' ceevil and mind and open the carriage door. That's hoo ye get the superintendent's jobs."33
 They are generally shown as benevolent individuals interested in the welfare of those less well-off. Bailie Blue for example (known affectionately as 'the Braw Bailie') is adored by the populace of Glasgow for his wise dispensation of justice and his warm hearted financial help to the unfortunate. The officers commanding Spud Tamson are kindly and well intentioned. Royalty is human and approachable. Jeems Kaye is able to meet the Queen personally and chat about the coal trade. Erchie passes the time of day with the King, who reacts to Glasgow in homely terms:

" "The Hielenman's cross" says he "man aye! I've heard o't. Kamershashendoo. If I had thocht o't I wad hae brocht my kilts and my pibroch an' a' that." "34

Erchie gives his verdict: "Talk aboot it bein' a fine job bein' a king! I can tell ye the money's gey hard

³²Pryde, Helen W. McFlannels United 1949 p.95.

³³Snooker Tam. op. cit. p.24.

³⁴Erchie. op. cit. p.64.

earned."³⁵ b

We have seen that the kailyard tradition involves a peculiar world and we may ask why? Why for instance does it narrow and limit not only the settings but the intellectual framework? Why does it distort reality? Why does it ridicule and patronise the ordinary man and propound a cult of humility? The answers I believe are to be found in religion and politics. It should be understood that while the main body of urban kailyard works appeared later than the rural ones they were identical in thought and feeling. They copied the latter's success and adopted their characteristics, so it is meaningful to consider the politics not only of the Glasgow school but of the other kailyard writers. By this stage it will be clear from all our illustrations that there is a definite right-wing philosophy underlying it all. This however is not to say that the kailyarders were the servants of any particular political party. Their allegiances differed. W. Robertson Nicoll for example was a Liberal and friend of Gladstone. Ian McLaren was an ardent Tory while Annie S. Swan stood as an Independent Liberal Candidate for Maryhill in 1922. Rather their efforts were directed to maintaining a general

³⁵Ibid. p.61.

^bThe kailyarders were often people from a relatively lowly background who, having achieved literary success, came into contact with the wealthy and aristocratic. The experience seems in some cases to have gone to their heads. This may explain much of the sycophancy implicit in their attitudes. For example the letters of A.S. Swan (1945) edited by M.R. Nicoll, are marked by a compulsion to name-drop.

notion of the status quo, which involved what was really a backward-looking adherence to the old traditions of Toryism forged in a pre-industrial world: the idea of a paternalistic state where master and men knew their places and their respective duties. Indeed the Glasgow of the kailyard world is not recognisably an industrial city. In essence there is little to distinguish it from the countryside. To an industrial age with many unpleasant faces the idea of a rural past was appealing. R.W. Campbell in particular expresses this notion. As Spud Tamson's commanding officer says: "I wish to God we could get them back to the land. The old days were the best."³⁶ Characteristically Campbell couples this with the semi-fascist idea of shipping slum boys to a rural life in the dominions. In another novel he takes up the idea again: "For God's sake let us back to our but-and-bens of clods, heather for our beds and meal for our fare."³⁷ The hardships of rural life are ignored, and how the countryside can possibly provide a living for the masses is not explained. Campbell merely sees it as an idyllic playground: "There were deer on the mountain, pheasants on the moor, rabbits below the hedges, crows, mavis and cock sparrows in the trees. Wood could be had for making the camp fire...." ³⁸

This sort of illusion survives today. One need only turn to the pages of The Sunday Post where we see The Broons (cartoon family) holidaying in their country cottage and hunting and fishing with the laird. This

³⁶ Private Spud Tamson op. cit. p.270.

³⁷ Campbell, Robert W. Jimmy McCallum 1921 p.10.

³⁸ Ibid. p.137.

newspaper in fact brings into the open the identification between the kailyard tradition and political conservatism. It takes the same backward-looking stance and plays on the same comforting notions about couthiness, and contentment in poverty. A glance through any copy will reveal an obsessional respect for the establishment, a suspicion of the high flown and the intellectual, an overwhelming trivia and parochialism in attitude and presentation, and a perpetuation of the music hall image of the Scotsman. Above all we find a reactionary outlook that extends from Communist scares to a quibbling resentment about the pettiest examples of social or political liberalisation. It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the whole kailyard tradition arose, and exists, partly as a means of suppressing working class discontent and perpetuating the established order. Its historical roots certainly suggest this. The original impetus came from Blackwood's Magazine and its contributors. In much of Galt's work for example - especially The Provost - the seeds can be seen. As a group these writers tended to be reactionary. Galt for example hated and feared radicalism. The formula, having been established, was taken up and worked on over the years by scores of Scottish writers of the same persuasion. The Glasgow examples as we have found them confirm this view. They foster complacency by refusing to admit the existence of social and economic problems and they act as a soporific by providing entertainment which is unlikely to stimulate thought, and which gives an escape into a world of tranquility.

A significant indication of the political dimension behind the kailyard is the way R.W. Campbell was to use his kailyard heroes in the years after World War I. He wrote for example a series of books which took Spud Tamson out of Glasgow altogether and made him react to a number of contemporary issues. In Spud Tamson And The Pit (1926) he settled him in the coal industry at a time when events were brewing up for the General Strike, and the book is a savage attack on the left. It was hailed by the establishment press as a valuable insight into the troubles. The Bailie wrote:

"An emphatic denunciation of communism will be found in Captain R.W. Campbell's latest novel The new novel is highly didactic, and the author is continually in the foreground impressing his views and opinions. The story, however, is of much more than ordinary interest, and it is in effect a vindication of the real, hard working miner, who is of absolutely a different type from the ordinary paid agitator. The volume ought to sell largely." 39

Such outright political discussion however is unusual in these books. More common is a determination to stifle argument. The kailyarder does not debate, he merely ignores, and, on the rare occasions when anything of a remotely political nature intrudes, it is always kept frivolous. In Jeems Kaye the innovation of the secret ballot prompts not a discussion of the issues involved but an episode of clowning at the poll booth. Similarly Bill Broon as a parliamentary candidate turns a meeting

³⁹"Captain Campbell's Latest" The Bailie 31 March 1926.

into a farce by his refusal to take questions seriously. When Peter McFlannel starts to talk politics he is immediately cut off:

" Peter was at the stage of political enthusiasms of one colour or another. "In a properly organised state of society where the value of every individual's work..." he began. His father assessing the passing zeal at its true value shouted him down with "Ach get'm a soap box somebody." " 40

Before leaving the political question however one should be aware of its connection with the religious convictions of many of the kailyard writers. It is very noticeable in reading through a collection of kailyard novels how respectable the world is. Nothing ever intrudes that could disturb the most genteel sensibility. The writers are always concerned to show that their heroes are respectable individuals. Jeems Kaye for example takes the trouble to tell us that his "left haun man in the volunteers" was a "dacent" bricklayer.⁴¹ Erchie speaks with an untutored tongue, but he never swears. His recreations are always simple and irreproachable. The highlight of the week is a Saturday night spent, predictably enough, not on a drunken binge, but in a stroll around the town with his wife, and a simple meal of "the twopenny pies with which Jinnet and he sometimes make the Saturday evenings festive."⁴² This respectability goes hand in hand with a conventional adherence to religion. It is taken for granted that the Church deserves respect and

⁴⁰Pryde, Helen W. McFlannel Family Affairs 1950 p.5.

⁴¹Jeems Kaye op. cit. 1st Series p.2.

⁴²Erchie op. cit. p.47.

deference. This however intrudes only at a very superficial level. Serious questions of faith or doctrine are never raised. Nor in the Glasgow examples is religion used as a consolation in times of trouble - there is never enough sorrow for it to be necessary. Only in The Guinea Stamp does it have a serious purpose: "She knelt and was purified by God."⁴³ Occasionally however it is sweetly pious: "Today for instance after the brief Bible lesson which she found it her duty and pleasure to give - she learned as much as she taught - she and Joan were taking a walk in the park"⁴⁴ Otherwise it is merely an inactive ingredient whose inclusion is enough to give a book the stamp of respectability. This is seen in the way in which many of the kailyard heroes have religious connections that are of no importance to the stories. Jeems Kaye is an elder of the Kirk, Erchie a Beadle, and Bill Broon a churchgoer. None of them however are serious in their devotions - they have no spiritual side to their nature. Jeems for example has a strong streak of irreverence. He takes missionary work lightly. "So the pennies were duly deposited and I doot not by this time a coloured pocket - nepkin extra has been sent oot tae the Zulus."⁴⁵ Jeems is comic because he deviates from the accepted norm - but the important point is the existence of this norm. The Church is one branch of the Establishment and its presence however slight can be useful in inducing the submissiveness demanded by the right-wing political outlook. It is no accident that today The Sunday Post is full of

⁴³The Guinea Stamp op. cit. p.

⁴⁴The Braw Bailie op. cit. p.71.

⁴⁵Jeems Kaye op. cit. 2nd Series p.7.

homilies about ministers.

What we must also realise however is that religion was an influence, as well as a tool, in the formation of the kailyard ethos. Blake has pointed out the remarkable similarities in the backgrounds of many of the most prominent writers in the genre, in particular their connections with the Free Church of Scotland. Undoubtedly this is important. Calvinism as Janet Dunbar suggests tended to cut out the imaginative and to celebrate the domestic and parochial. Moreover, as she observes, "the faithful of the Free Church truly believed that all misfortunes sent by the Lord were for one's ultimate benefit and one must submit patiently."⁴⁶ Again the religious connection can shed some light on the tendency to portray ordinary people in comic terms. Commenting on those of the north east, where he grew up, W. Robertson Nicoll wrote:

"Religion in most cases had laid its strong hand on them and the results were unmistakeable occasionally long and solitary brooding over religious themes produced a certain refinement and distinction of mind which manifested itself in the supplications at little prayer meetings More often the result was a homely and somewhat unmerciful shrewdness."

47

It is thus evident that the world we encounter in these books has been moulded not only by political interest, but to some degree by religious persuasion. However it must be stressed that although these influences

⁴⁶Dunbar, Janet. J.M. Barrie 1970 p.22.

⁴⁷Darlow, T.H. William Robertson Nicoll: Life And Letters. 1925 p.5.

were at the roots of the kailyard tradition in general they are not necessarily true of all the Glasgow examples of the genre. In the main the latter are slightly more recent productions, and writers like Munro and Bell began working in a medium which had already been shown to be commercially successful. It is impossible to determine in individual cases how much of what they wrote was merely due to the adoption of standards and characteristics already existing in the genre, and how much was a manifestation of a writer's own personality.

CHAPTER THREE

REALISM AND WORKING CLASS LIFE

CHAPTER THREEREALISM AND WORKING CLASS LIFE

All novels by their very nature of course pursue the realistic; yet the term 'realism' has come to have a variety of meanings, many of them contradictory. It is not part of my purpose here to enter the debate surrounding its usage, but to look at how a particular literary trend has developed in the Glasgow novel. The most common meaning of realism is that associated with French fiction in the nineteenth century, rather than with the English or Scottish traditions, (indeed the basic impulse in Scottish fiction has been to the opposite pole - romance) and it is the characteristics of this school I have taken as my standard. It involves an objective attitude to the subject matter, and a scrupulous attention to external details. Society, and generally its lower reaches, is the concern, rather than personality or the inner self. The view of the world is generally pessimistic and unpleasant. Within the range of those Glasgow novels that can be broadly termed 'realistic' only a few are directly in this mould, but they are important as the most uncompromising portrait in Scottish fiction of the ugly face of industrialism. There are also a number of books that incorporate certain aspects of the tradition without adopting it completely. Some works however - most notably Frederick Niven's - while without a doubt accurately described as realistic in a broader sense, cannot be considered as part of this

movement. They are more akin to the English tradition, valuing character, and humour, and dealing with middle-class life.

The era of realism as we are concerned with it in the Glasgow novel was the four decades between the turn of the century and the start of World War II (although not exclusively so), appropriately enough a gloomy time on the social scene. Jean (1906) is an important landmark, the first novel truly in the realistic mould. It represents a point in the development of a trend continuing throughout the nineteenth century. Glasgow fiction in this period did have elements of realism in it, apparent however not in character and situation, but in background description, where aspects of slum environments are minutely observed:

"The Fords' room contained little or no furniture. A bed occupied a recess on the one side; it was a fixture though, and did not belong to the Fords. A coal bunker filled the other side, it was a fixture too. A broken chair stood near the fire, a rickety table in the middle of the room and a stool and two or three boxes turned upside down comprised the whole. The press contained the entire crockery of the family which was two or three cups...."¹

This sort of treatment is only fragmentary, never extending into the fabric of the whole novel, and at times it is at odds with other aspects. The Factory Girl or The Dark Places Of Glasgow (1885), despite the title, is a nonsensical adventure story set against a gloomy East End background. It does establish Glasgow as a bleak place,

¹Gordon, C.M. Jet Ford 1880 p.9.

but the value of the author's creation of a gloomy atmosphere is negated by the incredible characters who people the city:

"On his head he wore a tasselled silk cap, and the upper part of his body was covered by a tightly fitting velvet jacket. Round his waist was a richly ornamented girdle, furnished in front with two pistols and a dagger, the handle of the latter flashing in the candlelight as if it had been studded with precious stones."²

As we would expect, as the century progressed the realistic treatment of lower life increased, as writers gradually came to terms with the nastier side of industrialised Scotland. It is useful to regard Annie S. Swan's The Guinea Stamp as something of a stepping stone between the Victorians and the realistic school. Published in 1892, it tells the story of a child reared in the slums who rises to wealth and position. The slum background and the lives of the poor are adequately rendered although the book lacks objectivity. Swan allows sentimentality, romance, and preaching to intrude. However, of more interest perhaps than the idealised heroine is what happens to Liz, the fallen woman, in whom we get a glimpse of the seamier side of Glasgow life. Swan shrinks from confronting her situation openly and shrouds this strand of the plot in an atmosphere of shadowy sin where things seem darker for being only hinted at. This diffidence is more than an acknowledgement by Swan of the conventions of the age, but an implied

²Pae, David. The Factory Girl 1885 p.25.

reproach of Liz, and there is a sanctimonious air about it that is one of the most objectionable parts of the book. Her end, moreover, involves a departure from truth and reality. Instead of showing it as the squalid affair it undoubtedly is, Swan removes the harshness with the sweetness of religious consolation:

"Let us ask Him to be with you now, to give you of His own comfort and strength and hope."

She knelt down by the bed, unconscious of any listener save the dying, and there prayed the most earnest and heartfelt prayer which had ever passed her lips....

The dying girl's strength was evidently fast ebbing; the brilliance died out of her eyes, and the film of death took its place. She smiled faintly upon them with a glance of sad recognition, but her last look, her last word was for Gladys and so she passed within the portals of the unseen without a struggle, nay, even with an expression of deep peace upon her worn face. A wasted life? Yes; and a death which might have wrung tears of pity from a heart of stone."³

Compare this with the death of Jean, whose story is essentially the same. The treatment shows a vast gulf in attitude. Jean's last hours are filled with no beautiful thoughts but with incoherence and pain:

"Jean had got out of bed, and in her delirium was rehearsing some of the scenes of her recent life. It almost sickened Hughie, but he went forward.

"Jean" he whispered.

She laughed wildly again.

"Another of them! Gentlemen, every one of them, to their wives and sisters, and here - what do you want?" "

³Swan, Annie S. The Guinea Stamp 1892 p.368.

⁴Blair, John. Jean 1906 p.167.

When she dies it is without drama: "There was a spasm of pain, and then the face relaxed and her head fell back on the pillow."⁵

Jean is told simply and straightforwardly, without moralising and without digression, and as Blair presents the facts with restraint and directness he achieves something akin to tragedy. The very simplicity makes it moving, despite a prose style that is ponderous at times. Blair keeps an attitude of detached neutrality throughout, and our sympathy for the heroine is aroused not by the deliberate incitement of the author, but by the facts of the case themselves. Jean is a good novel, not great art, but forthright and honest.

The plot is not complicated. The heroine tends a loom in a weaving factory, she is loved by the steady Hughie, but attracted to the weak and flighty Jock. She gets pregnant by Jock, who joins the army and leaves her, and she is then dismissed from her job at the factory. As life is made unbearable for her at home she drifts to London where she loses the child and is forced onto the streets. Two years later she returns to Glasgow to die. Blair does not idealise Jean but shows her as a real woman with real feelings: "She battled with these contradictory feelings, the physical desire for the man, and the mental shrinking from what she greatly feared that would imply."⁶ Yet none of the characters, including Jean, are highly individualised or shown in any great depth. Jean matters

⁵Ibid. p.169.

⁶Ibid. p.68.

not for herself but as an example of an ordinary working girl harshly treated by society. The important thing is that Blair shows us the nature of society, and what it does to the poor. This involves not only a description of a physical environment ("gloomy mean streets, the drab dirty buildings, and box shaped dwellings of the working classes"⁷) but also of social realities. Mary Graham for instance gets married because she is pregnant, and there is the suggestion that she deliberately got herself in this condition to catch her man. Blair remains detached and there is no moral judgement involved. Similarly he notes the bleakness and monotony of working class life: "The man in the workshop in his well worn groove was a splendid adjunct to the machine which he tended; out of it he was a helpless creature whose only resource was drink."⁸

This quotation is revealing because it shows the fundamental thought on which the book is based, and sheds light on Blair's method. Obviously his conclusion here is that people are creatures of circumstance and are moulded by their environment, an idea apparent throughout the novel. The heroine's father turns to drink not because he is a bad man but because he is the product of an industrial society that provides no other escape - and from which escape is highly desirable - just as the author makes it clear that Jean's downfall is less her own fault than society's. To the more fortunate reader the type of

⁷Ibid. p.6.

⁸Ibid. p.139.

affair she has with Jock may appear irresponsible, but she cannot help it. Her personality is the result of her environment:

"Her home life, the meagre education, the factory had all tended to develop the emotional side of her character at the expense of will and intelligence. The reaction against these had led to the desire for sensation, for anything ⁹ which appealed to the emotions."

Jock represents an escape valve for Jean in the same way that drink does for the males of this society, and although the attraction may spell her ruin it is irresistible.

"Her heart cried out for happiness, of which she had known so little that it was small wonder that she grasped at the present, with its pleasures and faintly hoped for the future Besides, the future was a long way off and in the present there was the everlasting monotony of the factory, its long hours and hard ¹⁰ mechanical toil."

In taking this line Blair is going beyond what is generally described as realism into what has come to be called 'naturalism'. This is really just an exaggeration of the realistic tendency into more than just objectivity and attendance to the probabilities of ordinary life, but something which involves also an environmentalist philosophy. It has been described thus:

"The naturalist novel is one in which an attempt is made to present with the maximum objectivity of the scientist the new view of man as a creature determined by heredity, ¹¹ milieu and the pressures of the moment....."

⁹Ibid. pp.67-8.

¹⁰Ibid. p.79.

¹¹Furst, L.R. and Skrine, P.N. Naturalism 1971 p.42.

Admittedly Jean does not exhibit all the minutely detailed descriptions also generally associated with the naturalistic method - probably to the book's benefit - but this passage nevertheless well describes Blair's presentation of Jean. Such an approach is rare in Scottish fiction, despite the fact that Glasgow would have appeared to provide ideal material. It also explains Blair's handling of another major component in the story - drink. This does not arouse his disapproval as it does Swan's, or call forth any sort of judgement, instead the objective tenor of his mind sees it treated almost scientifically, as he analyses its effects on a working class company. We are confronted with a drink cycle very similar to that which emerges in the body of Robert Fergusson's Scots poetry. The latter expresses the exaggerated joviality that occurs when the ordinary people of Edinburgh get some temporary release from the restraints of a hard and humdrum existence. It is an attempt to pack as much as possible into their short leisure periods. Blair too is concerned with this and like Fergusson shows the different characteristics of the progressive stages of intoxication:

"In the early part of the night their conversation was comparatively decent, centering on the work of the previous week; secondly it becomes boasting and exaggerated stories, accompanied by a feeling of good fellowship, camaraderie. when storytelling is past and intoxication achieved they sally forth into the streets a crowd, a fight ..." ¹²

The naturalistic method excludes any critical interpretation of society or political conclusions, and Blair

¹² Jean op. cit. p.64.

retains a detachment throughout. Yet this sort of realism involves disenchantment with society as it stands. While there may be no overt propaganda the facts themselves act to awaken the reader's social conscience. It is difficult to believe that a Conservative could write a work of naturalistic fiction; and the next writer of this kind in the Glasgow tradition makes the left-wing link clear. Patrick MacGill was born in Ireland, came as a young man to navy in Scotland, became a journalist, a writer of doggerel verse, and a novelist. His political views will be examined fully in Chapter Five.*

Children Of The Dead End (1914), his first novel, is largely the story of his own life, portrayed in the person of Dermot Flynn. Alongside the account of this career is the story of Norah Ryan a girl from the same village, who also crosses the water to work, and who suffers greater hardships and degradation than Dermot. A year later MacGill gave Norah's story a separate book to itself - The Ratpit. It is this novel rather than the earlier one which continues the realistic tradition in the Glasgow novel. It is a gloomy tale, starkly told. Norah is exploited in her native Ireland, exploited on the farms of Ayrshire, and finally in the slums of Glasgow. Like Jean she is not shown in any depth, her plight is the general plight of women (and men) in capitalist society. As she moves through life we see the different manifestations of capitalism that prey on working people. In Ireland "if by chance you made one gold guinea, half of it

*See below Chapter Five.

goes to Farley McKeown (merchant) and the priest, and the other half of it goes to the landlord."¹³ In Ayrshire the oppressor is the wealthy farmer, and in Glasgow the sweat shop proprietor and the patrons of prostitution. For most of the novel there is a high degree of objectivity, but at times however, MacGill betrays himself in the bitterness and sarcasm of his tone. There is no mistaking for example his opinion of Morrison, the middle class dilettante:

"Morrison belonged to a club famous for its erudite members, one of whom discovered a grammatical error in a translation of Karl Marx's Kapital and another who had written a volume of verses Songs Of The Day. Young Morrison himself was a thinker, a moralist, earnest and profound in his own estimation. Coming into contact with potato diggers on weekends, he often wondered why these people were treated like cattle wherever they took up their temporary abode. Here, on his father's farm, kindly old men, lithe, active youth, and pure and comely girls were housed like beasts of burden. The young man felt so sorry for them that he almost wept for his own tenderness."¹⁴

This is very definitely class literature. MacGill is uncompromising in his view of the world. Poor is equated with good, rich with bad. It is only the unfortunate who help the unfortunate. The tramps, Donald and Jean, are described by Ellen Keanan the "progressive thinker" as "wrecks of the social system"¹⁵, but it is they who come to Norah's aid after her betrayal by Morrison, and not any of the well-off phoney humanitarians. There is no overt political thought in The Ratpit, although we do find this in Children Of The Dead End. What comes over

¹³MacGill, Patrick. The Ratpit 1915 p.15.

¹⁴Ibid. p.67.

¹⁵Ibid. p.97.

however is a definite condemnation of the economic and social system. MacGill was a socialist, but of an emotional rather than a theoretic nature, and his novels express a vision of man not so much at the mercy of blind economic forces - as we get in a novel like Barke's Major Operation - but oppressed by particular individuals. Characterisation is seen in terms of black and white; capitalists are not just capitalists but are nasty personalities as well. The merchant for example has a sadistic streak in his nature. This is understandable given MacGill's background, growing up as he did in a peasant community where those directly responsible for poverty and suffering were close at hand and identifiable.

The realism of The Ratpit involves stark and detailed descriptions of physical discomfort and suffering and typically closely observed portraits of background. The quarters of the potato diggers for example:

"An evil smelling byre the roof of which was covered with cobwebs, the floor with dung...on both sides of the sink which ran up the middle was a row of stalls each stall containing two iron stanchions to which chains used for tying cattle were fastened Four or five level boxes were placed on the floor of each stall, a pile of hay was scattered about on top, and over this was spread two or three bags sewn together in the form of a sheet; sacks filled with straw served as pillows, a single blanket was given to each person." 16

The plot moves relentlessly towards a tragic climax, and with the gloomy tone throughout there is never any doubt that Norah's end will be unhappy. Indeed there is an underlying note of fatalism in the novel. Norah is

convinced that "all freedom of action, all the events of her life had been irrevocably decided before she was born."¹⁷ Later on "it came to her that Fate had done its worst; that evil and unhappiness had reached their supreme climax."¹⁸ This perhaps seems strange coming from a socialist who after all must believe that man is capable of changing not only his own life, but the world. Yet it is really less a point of philosophy than an attempt by MacGill to express in a different way the same sort of environmentalist notions Blair puts into Jean. The latter shows her as a creature already largely moulded by her environment, while MacGill dramatises the idea showing the process of a helpless individual being buffeted by circumstances. It is not fate in the sense of a wheel of fortune raising and lowering man, but a means of suggesting in a folk idiom the way the capitalist system inexorably loads the dice against the ordinary person. Like Jean, Norah is blamed for nothing. She becomes a prostitute to get money to support her child in the absence of any other source, and in Children Of The Dead End MacGill explicitly apportioned the blame elsewhere: "The slavery of the shop and the mill are responsible for the shame of the street."¹⁹

The Ratpit is a development in both thought and expression of The Guinea Stamp and Jean, all three dealing with the plight of the fallen woman. Swan's book is sentimental and at times dishonest, Jean is a good detached,

¹⁷Ibid. p.127.

¹⁸Ibid. p.136.

¹⁹MacGill, Patrick. Children Of The Dead End 1914 p.264.

almost neutral study, while The Ratpit is realism with strong political overtones. MacGill shows considerable achievement in this book, managing at the one time to remain objective, to condemn the existing order of society and to create great sympathy for his heroine. It is a forceful novel.

It must be admitted however that this author is at his best not when dealing with life in the city, but with rural areas, particularly his native Ireland. The latter stages of The Ratpit, which are set in Glasgow cannot be criticised; they are powerful, grim, and well written. But the sections set in Ireland have at times a poetic quality. This is however even more apparent in Children Of The Dead End where his weakness mars the second half of the novel. Some of the writing in the first part is very fine, much of it has the quality of folk art. This description of rural life for example:

"The wind was moaning over the chimney. By staying very quiet one could hear the wail of its voice, and it was like that of the stream on the far side of the glen. A pot of potatoes hung over the fire, and as the water bubbled and sang the potatoes could be seen bursting their jackets beneath the lid. The dog lay beside the hearthstone, his nose thrust well over his forepaws, threaping to be asleep but ready to open his eyes at the least little sound. Maybe he was listening to the song of the pot, for most dogs like to hear it. An oil lamp swung by a string from the roof-tree backwards and forwards like a willow branch when the wind of October is high. As it swung the shadows chased each other in the silence of the farther corners of the house. My mother said that if we were bad children, the shadows would run away with us, but they never did, and indeed we were often full of all sorts of mischief.

We felt afraid of the shadows, they even frightened mother. But father was afraid of nothing." 20

However, at times MacGill loses his grip, his artistic sensibilities become blighted and he brings neither a poetic nor an objective vision to his subject matter, but one of debased sentimentality. The nearer he gets to the city the worse this becomes. The death of Norah Ryan for example is presented differently in the two books. In The Ratpit it is in the same style as Blair's Jean, simple and detached:

"She sat up in bed, but as she opened her mouth, shivered as if with cold, looked at Ellen with sad blank eyes and dropped back on the pillow. Dermot and Ellen stooped forward not knowing what to do, but feeling that they should do something. The girl was still looking upwards at the shadows on the ceiling, but seeing far beyond. Then her eyes closed slowly, like those of a child that falls into a peaceful sleep. Norah Ryan was dead."²¹

And so the book ends.

In the same scene in Children Of The Dead End she departs with full sentimental honours, kneeling figures pray by her bedside, and heavenly supervision is laid on:

"Without a doubt outside, and over the smoke of a large city a great angel with outspread wings was waiting²² for her soul."

This is also at odds with the violent anti-clericalism, even atheism, that permeates the rest of the books.

²⁰Ibid. p.2.

²¹The Ratpit op. cit. p.157.

²²Children Of The Dead End op. cit. p. 304.

Undoubtedly the narrative style of The Ratpit helped him here to maintain restraint in his writing. He uses an omniscient narrator approach, whereas the earlier novel is told in the first person by the hero Dermot Flynn. In the later unsteady stages of Children Of The Dead End the fact that rural life is his true milieu comes over when he intermittently pulls himself together to deal with something about Ireland. When Dermot meets Norah for example, something of MacGill's own love for his homeland comes over in his poignancy and warmth:

"In her voice there was a great weariness and at that moment the sound of the waters falling over the high rocks of Glenmorman were ringing in my ears. Also I thought of an early delicate flower which I had once found killed by the cold snows on the high uplands of Donaveen ere yet the second warmth of spring had come to gladden the bare hills of Donegal." 23

Yet his attitude to Ireland is not unmixed. "There is nothing here but rags, poverty and dirt"²⁴ a character comments at one point, and as we have seen the social fabric of the country comes under fire. Moreover, akin to this is a theme of parental oppression, where the parent figure is often presented as ungrateful, parasitic, and deadening, and identified with the old anti-progressive strand in Irish society. Children Of The Dead End is picaresque in structure, recounting the varied experiences of a travelling navvy man and full of digressions and authorial intrusions. The novel is a mixture of styles

²³Ibid. p. 265.

²⁴The Ratpit op. cit. p.14.

and attitudes, brutal realism at times giving way to humour and sentiment. He likes in particular to contrast the lots of the rich and the poor. On a train for example he observed:

"There were twenty in my compartment, some standing a few sitting but most of us trying to look out of the windows. Next to us was a first class carriage and I noticed that it contained only a single person."²⁵

At one point he comments on his theory of art saying that "only lately have I come to the conclusion that true art, the only true art, is that which appeals to the simple people. When writing this book I have been governed by this conclusion."²⁶

This is apparent in the basic simplicity of everything he wrote, but it is of course a levelling doctrine tending to produce banal rubbish more often than quality literature that is genuinely universal. His books did have a popular appeal, and were particularly well received (initially anyway) by the left wing in Scotland, who saw in him a champion of their cause. This was not to be the case for long however; he soon moderated his views and began producing verses romanticising the war, and novels based not on what he knew to be real, but on the cult of the comic roisterous Irishman. He ended up as librarian at Windsor Castle. His first two novels however remain an important contribution to the Glasgow genre.

²⁵Children Of The Dead End op. cit. p.29.

²⁶Ibid. p.271.

Realism in the Glasgow novel did not develop naturally from Jean and The Ratpit, and the books which followed did not continue the naturalistic approach. Samuel McKechnie's Prisoners of Circumstance (1934) came nearest. Before this however we meet The Swinging Tub (1917) by David McCulloch. This is an episodic novel recounting with sympathy and humour the adventures of a Glasgow-Irish docker. It is a mixture of serious realism, sentiment, and comedy. It is well written and very readable though essentially light. It is in the English tradition more than the French tradition of realism, focusing on eccentricity of character as much as on environment. Yet it is important in the genre as the first Glasgow novel which is truly an industrial novel, in that it deals not just with the free time of the urban worker, but places a considerable emphasis on his working life. McCulloch himself obviously had intimate contact with the docks and is able to describe the details of labour there with authenticity.

"His back seemed breaking, his arms grew stiff and the blisters on his hands burst! The blade of his spade was red with ore, the handle stained with blood. There was no respite for either side. Immediately each tub was filled down dumped the empty; heave up signed the hatch-mount man, away sped the crane, a tug at the guy rope, a prod by the tipper, and the contents made another little mound in a railway waggon. Back came the remorseless 'hydraulic', swiftly the fall ran out, and with a hoarse creaking voice the swinging tub spurned the toilers underneath to renewed efforts." 27

²⁷ McCulloch, David M. The Swinging Tub 1917 pp.15-16.

He also shows the kind of things that have to be done to secure employment, the bribing of gaffers and the betraying of mates. Again the background is adequately and honestly documented: "... living in an ill ventilated apartment on the third storey of a rickety tenement, in a building where life festered and rotted, where mankind herded like animals, and virtue was almost unknown."²⁸ A sizeable part of the novel is concerned with a strike on the docks characterised by scurrilous activity by the employers and a great deal of animosity, which at times extends into violence, towards the blackleg labour that is brought in. McCulloch's sympathy very obviously lies with the union men in this first example of organised industrial strife in the Glasgow genre. Yet he is no ranting revolutionary. His stance is that of the moderate man of the centre. In the end the union wins, and his novel, appearing at a time of considerable unrest on Clydeside, provides a sort of manifesto on the benefits of solidarity and united action.

The next novel which can be considered part of the realistic school is John Cockburn's Tenement (1925). However, in 1923 George Blake published Mince Collop Close, the first gang novel, and a good example of how realism depends on more than background authenticity. As in Blake's The Wild Men (1925), the bleak tenement background is well realised but characters and action are rooted in melodrama. This is a feature of the gang

²⁸ Ibid. p.7.

school in general. Like the naturalist the gang novelist often takes an environmentalist approach to characterisation - gang leaders are products of their social background. But the focus is crucially different. They concentrate on the exceptional rather than the ordinary. We shall examine them in detail in the next chapter.

What will be apparent now is that the movement towards realism in the Glasgow novel is followed, almost as soon as its ends have been realised, by a movement away from it again.

In her annotations to The Glasgow Novel 1870-1970: A Bibliography Burgess describes Cockburn's Tenement as "an early example of the realistic treatment of slum life."²⁹ This is not true. Certainly it is an accurate and honest picture of life in a tenement block, but it is not by any means the slum dweller we are concerned with, rather that indefinable area of society where the lower middle class merge with the higher members of the working class. It is a gloomy novel throughout, the tone set in Cockburn's preface (which he calls an 'Apology') where the characteristics of the city are defined:

"Drab buildings. Sheltering equally drab inhabitants. Honest uncomplaining folk who have fought hard against the overwhelming tyranny of their surroundings without much success.

Buildings tall, gloomy, and monotonous in their efficient simplicity.

.... At its best the Clydesdale capital is a dreich city in which beauty spots of which there are quite as many as there are ugly ones, are effectually concealed." 30

²⁹Burgess, Moira. The Glasgow Novel 1870-1970 1971 p.25.

³⁰Cockburn, John. Tenement 1925 - Apology.

The body of the novel is dominated to a quite overwhelming extent by the kind of minutely detailed descriptions of background favoured by the realistic tradition. It far exceeds what we find in Blair or MacGill. Indeed under its weight the book becomes increasingly monotonous. Hugh McDiarmid called it a "purely 'machine made' naturalistic 'study' of Glasgow of the kind old-fashioned people still call, and regard as realistic."³¹ It is not until the final pages that anything like genuine slum life comes in, when the Kerr family are forced to move from their respectable close in Whiteinch to a wretched tenement in Townhead. Here we find it described with typical precision:

"Dirt and filth had been permitted to accumulate everywhere. The kitchen was a veritable midden nauseous smelly worse even than the midden down the backyard.

The furniture was of the poorest description. A plain deal table, partly covered with stained and broken oilcloth, stood in the centre of a threadbare carpet which was so dirty that no primary colour could be determined. The concealed bed was just a litter of filthy blankets³²

However, Tenement is not a social document but a study of personal relationships, particularly those within the family of small time builder Peter Kerr. It is the story of an unhappy marriage along largely conventional lines. Kerr is selfish and neglectful. He beats his wife and drinks heavily. The portrait is

³¹McDiarmid, Hugh (C.M. Grieve). Contemporary Scottish

³²Tenement op. cit. p.269. Studies 1976 edition p.11.

capably drawn - Kerr is not a monster but a weakling. The affairs of those who reside in the same close are also described, and without exception their relationships are lacking something - as befits the general gloom of the book. The author focuses in particular on the large role gossip plays in the life of the tenement dweller. Indeed it is an obsession with him, and he is unswervingly bitter about it. At times it looks as if Cockburn may be about to try to synthesise the unhappiness of most of the characters with the gloom of the physical face of the city itself, into some sort of deeper vision of the life of Clydeside. On one occasion for example, he sees Annie's depression as part of the essential spirit of Glasgow. "Her's was a snappy temper in a city of irritant mood. A city on edge."³³ It is something however, that never goes beyond the preliminary stages.

The major part of the novel is not taken up with the more dramatic features of life but with the petty details of ordinary, day to day existence. Shopping, washing, cooking, are all closely and extensively observed. Cockburn manages to give us a comprehensive picture of ordinary tenement life but becomes boring and pedestrian in this meticulous approach. He lacks imagination. The plot moves very slowly, taking second place to description. Cockburn falters however at times in his low key realistic approach and we find certain novelettish features that are out of keeping with the tone of the rest of the novel.

³³Ibid. p.87.

For example we are allowed a glimpse of Annie Kerr's earlier life and it transpires that the man she could have married had she not taken Kerr went on to be knighted. Similarly Annie's sister, the dominant fiery woman able to stand up to Kerr, is married to a wealthy man, has a house in Hillhead, servants, and a grand car.

The book is on the whole written objectively. Cockburn is neutral on everything except drink, which he attacks as vehemently as the Victorian tract writers. There is nothing in it of the political affiliations that drove him in later life to write a biography of Keir Hardie.^a

With Prisoners of Circumstance we are back to working class poverty. As we shall see in the chapter on politics below, it has a large element of political comment in its make-up. It is a development of the novels of Blair and MacGill involving something of the same approach but also a greater breadth and complexity. Again there is a fair degree of objectivity. The book tells the story not of a single unfortunate individual but of an ordinary working class family over a period of years. It is an account of hardships large and small, and is deliberately kept undramatic. The characters suffer from the relentless grind of poverty, and are worn down through time rather than dramatically murdered. Again there is close observation of the sombre background. The back court for instance:

^aThe Hungry Heart 1955.

"The midden in which he had taken shelter for a few minutes was one of the back court open middens with which every working class tenement was endowed. They were structures of brick or stone and stood next to the similarly built washhouse. The front portion except for some three feet of wall at the bottom provided an opening through which housewives emptied ashes and other refuse. In doing so they held their head well back in an effort to avoid the rising dust as they knocked the ash pan on the inside portion of the ledge perhaps to dislodge from the bottom or the sides some such thing as adhering tea leaves." 34

It is a characteristic of this type of fiction that this kind of precision also extends into financial matters. In The Ratpit we are told how much Norah earns in the sweat shop, and here the family's monetary situation at a particular time is often laid out in detail: "They found life pretty hard on seventeen shillings a week. The rent of the single end took away three shillings and sixpence for which he was working long hard hours."³⁵

Prisoners of Circumstance is also a novel very much of the Thirties, reflecting the way economic depression affects the working class, with unemployment and wage cuts. A major way in which this novel is an advance on earlier ones is that it brings out not only the physical deprivation and discomfort suffered by the poor, but also, for the first time, the humiliation and mental pain that can hurt more. It is something that hits both young and old. "Stuart felt he was begging when he held up his hand in the classroom and thus asked for free books. He

³⁴McKechnie, Samuel. Prisoners Of Circumstance 1934 p.50.

³⁵Ibid. p.26.

humbled himself and bitterness entered his heart."³⁶ As his father tells his mother:

"I knew a man once when I was labouring in my younger days, put slices o' turnip in his sandwiches, and he pretended it was cheese so that the rest o' us wouldn't notice anything when we were all eating thegither. I've seen men eating their piece away from us for shame." ³⁷

Yet it is Frazer's own story that provides the best illustration of this spiritual oppression. His life is lived in constant fear of the future and his personality becomes soured by it, making him dour and forever apprehensive. As his wife comments: "He looks ahead and wonders what he'll do if this or that happens. He's worrying himself and he's worrying me."³⁸ Yet this is no deep character study, such a thing would have been out of place in this type of realistic fiction, rather it is the predictable responses of a man who knows little respite in the struggle for existence.

The next novel however to bear close similarity to Prisoners of Circumstance was not to appear in the Thirties but the Sixties, with the publication of The Clydesiders (1961) by Hugh Munro. Again it is a family saga covering a period of more than twenty years, and again it is largely undramatic. There is nothing of the campaigner in Munro, and his book, unlike the earlier ones, is devoid of political implications. It is however a fine, honest, if somewhat lightweight, evocation of a way of life.

³⁶Ibid. p.45.

³⁷Ibid. p.38.

³⁸Ibid. p.290.

In the portrait of Collie Haig, the shipyard worker, and his family, there is a good deal of warmth and sympathy. They are entirely ordinary, and in their story, perhaps more so than in any other in the body of Glasgow fiction, can the average Glaswegian recognise something of his own life. It is by no means an idealised picture of family life; there are periods of considerable strain, when it looks as if the group may fall apart, particularly when the children are young and Collie's outbursts of drunkenness and violence frighten both them and their mother. Yet Collie is handled with admirable restraint by Munro, he is never shown as a mere brute, and alongside his real failings lies a genuine skill, and a pride in his work. He remains a good study of a type of industrial worker. The years bring a steadiness and maturity to his character, and by the end of the novel he has become something of a patriarchal figure representing the spirit of Clydeside craftsmanship. The younger men with whom he works look to him for knowledge and advice. As Collie grows old the children grow up and their emergence as adults, their courtships and their aspirations for the future, are handled with skill and honesty.

Yet the book has its harsh realities, particularly in the earlier stages. Young Colin is persecuted at school by a talentless, mean-spirited master, while his father is unjustly sacked from his job at the shipyard, to start a long period of unemployment. The best parts of the novel are in the first half when Colin is still a boy, probably because Munro himself has a greater feeling

for this period of his own boyhood. (Glasgow novelists in general tend to write better about childhood than about anything else.) The Clydesiders has not the same doom-laden atmosphere as Prisoners Of Circumstance, and perhaps because of this it seems a less substantial novel - though it is perhaps truer to life. The focus is not always on the unpleasant. There are small triumphs as well as disappointments. Moreover there is far less emphasis on external detail than in most of the earlier works. Munro tends to take for granted what earlier writers dealing with material relatively new to Scottish fiction understandably glutted themselves on. Also, at times he is not above departing from the objective approach to indulge in passages of pseudo-poetry:

"At that moment the sun came out gilding the distant spires and domes of the Art Gallery and University in an almost translucent haze of fair beauty. Farther, amid a tangle of rooftops and hillside streets, the green trees of Kelvingrove and the Botanic Gardens bloomed like velvet banners set in granite frames." 39

It will have become apparent by this point that we have long since left behind the standards of strict detachment and neutrality observed in Jean. It is an approach largely isolated in the Glasgow novel and after Prisoners Of Circumstance it features less and less. What we see is not a return to the Victorian practice of moralising, sentimentalising, and digressing, but the attempt to delineate working class life less narrowly,

³⁹Munro, Hugh. The Clydesiders 1961 p.171.

to show the good as well as the bad, and to make use of humour, imagination, and sympathy, while retaining an authentic and honest view of the environment. Characters become much more individuals in their own right and less representative of a type. This is as true of the left wing novels as of the non-political ones. The quotation above from The Clydesiders comes from a scene where Collie is moved to comment, "No' a bad city Glesga when you see it right. What are they a' greetin' about?"⁴⁰ It is a vision inspired by a huge ship passing by. Collie and his workmates gaze at it in admiration:

"In a silent communion of worship they fastened their eyes on her white tier of decks and enjoyed an unreasonable unnameable sense of proprietary pride in her..."⁴¹

It is one of the few points in the book where Munro is not content merely with reflecting the Glasgow experience but attempts some interpretation. Here the spirit of the city and its inhabitants become associated with craftsmanship and mechanical achievement, with things solid and majestic. The sun which lights the Art Galleries directly appears in the wake of the great ship, suggesting (and showing artistically the economic fact) that the skill of the yards provides the very life force of the city.

This however only remains half realised in The Clydesiders. A much fuller working of the idea is to be

⁴⁰Ibid. p.171.

⁴¹Ibid. p.170.

found in Blake's The Shipbuilders. This novel appeared in 1935, a year after Prisoners Of Circumstance, and is a major work in the genre. It is very different from McKechnie's book, though the same desire to describe truthfully the life of the ordinary worker is present. The Shipbuilders, Blake's best novel, is one of several he wrote centering on the shipbuilding industry on the Clyde. His The Constant Star (1945) and The Westering Sun (1946) deal with its development in the nineteenth century and are set in Garvel (Greenock) rather than Glasgow. These books deal with the Clyde in its great years, The Shipbuilders takes up the story in decline. The novel is concerned with several things. Firstly it is a lament for the passing of old ways, secondly a celebration of what the author sees as the peculiar skills of the Clyde, thirdly it is an attempt to evoke the ethos of industrial Scotland, and finally a tentative look at what constitutes the essentials of the Scottish character, and what qualities mark the Scots as a distinct race.

Celebration and lament are bound up in each other. Blake's thesis essentially is that the history of the Clyde is a glorious tale of great ships, born out of traditions of craftsmanship and mechanical genius unrivalled anywhere in the world. We see it not only in the long list of floating achievements the area has produced, but in the pride and love of the Glasgow tradesman for his work. These men who build the ships are spoken of in heroic terms, are above ordinary mortals:

"Down to the engine room where the real men in their dungarees were happy in their battle with the fretful complications of a huge power unit - a fractious beast in early youth, but destined to lovely efficiency before it would pass out of their hands." 42

They are artists in "the arts that go to the building of a ship"⁴³ Danny Shields the hero is one of these men and Blake creates around him a cult of the blunt, honest, uncomplicated shipbuilder, the man with no frills but with something better. Leslie Pagan, the boss, thinks of him as one of "plain people without any bookish culture, without any metropolitan confidence, with only their high traditions of craftsmanship in wood and metal."⁴⁴ In a chapter called Trial Trip (p.115-135) we are taken on a sail the length of the Clyde, ostensibly on the trial run of a new ship, but really as Blake makes clear to view 'the high tragic pageant of the Clyde.' It is a journey through history:

"Yard after yard passed by, the berths empty, the grass growing about the sinking keel blocks. He remembered how in the brave days there would be scores of ships ready for launching along this reach, their sterns hanging over the tide, and how the men at work on them on high stagings would turn from the job and tag off their caps and cheer the new setting out to sea. And now only the gaunt dumb poles and groups of men workless, watching in silence the mocking passage of the vessel..... It was a tragedy beyond economics. It was not that so many thousands of homes lacked bread and butter. It was that a tradition of skill, a glory, a passion was visibly in decay and all the acquired and inherited loveliness of artistry rotting along the banks of the stream....." 45

⁴²Blake, George. The Shipbuilders 1935 p.125.

⁴³Ibid. p.130.

⁴⁴Ibid. p.116.

⁴⁵Ibid. p.130.

This sums up the whole tone of the book.

At a time when the idea of myth was current in the Scottish literary world, and other writers were forging theirs out of the facts and spirit of rural life, Blake took the iron and grease and the pride of the skilled worker to create one for industrial Scotland. Instead of standing stones and elder people it is cranes and derricks, platers, welders, engineers, which provide his material. Thus the heroic language, the grandiose claims for the business of building ships. Depression means not just depression but an upheaval of world shattering significance:

"The fall of Rome was a trifle in comparison. It was a catastrophe unthinkable, beside which the collapse of a dynasty or the defeat of a great nation in battle was a transient disturbance. How in God's name could such a great thing, such a splendid thing be destroyed?"⁴⁶

This kind of treatment goes beyond just the shipyard connections, but extends right into the fabric of Glasgow life. A football match for example is described in the same epic terms:

"All sorts of racial emotions were released by this clash of athletic young men; the old clans of Scotland lived again their ancient hatreds in this struggle for goals. Celtic battled to equalise, breaking themselves again and again on a defence grimly determined to hold its advantage, the waves of green hurling themselves on the rocks of blue..."⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid. p.133.

⁴⁷Ibid. pp.79-80.

Even doing the pools is no commonplace act, but becomes "part of the ritual of the week."⁴⁸

This mythmaking reads as somewhat naive and over-written today, not to say dishonest, calling for an idealisation and glorification of the facts of Glasgow life. It is also the superficial, skin deep, vision of the journalist rather than the penetrating vision of the artist. Yet it is part and parcel of his concern to bring about some sort of definition of Scottishness. Throughout the book he makes comparisons between the Scots, and in particular the English, and points out qualities he sees as characteristic of the Scottish people. Always there is a note of pride in his observations. Travelling in England Leslie Pagan asks directions of a native only to be given a wandering incoherent set of instructions: "This was England indeed! A Scot would have gone into the most exact detail of the route..."⁴⁹ Similarly the way his wife treats the servants irritates him: "He hated to hear the girls ordered about by their second names in this English way."⁵⁰ Generally it is something which denotes efficiency, skill, and solid worth. Even food gets the treatment, and Union Street is where "a nation of great bakers exhibits its expertise in cereal goodness. Cakes and biscuits..."⁵¹ Yet ultimately Blake fails in his attempt. He never manages to point to anything other than the superficial or the debateable. What he says amounts to little more than

⁴⁸Ibid. p.31.

⁴⁹Ibid. p.266.

⁵⁰Ibid. p.19.

⁵¹Ibid. p.163.

that we are good with tools, dour, and can cook. Nor is he any more successful in expressing his closely allied pride in the city itself. He glorifies the trivial and the ordinary. Even a walk down the street has romantic overtones. "The tides of people flowing backwards and forwards along the Dumbarton Road delighted him,"⁵² Nor can he wash a car without a reference to "Glasgow's abundant water supply."⁵³ Blake's greatest failing is this lack of restraint.

Yet the world on which Blake's myth is based is fast disappearing. We enter Glasgow when the great days are gone, and Blake, as we have seen, is^s mourning for them. It is more than just a trade depression but something that enters into the spirit and culture of the country. Something alien and enervating. The conflict between the old and the new is dramatised in the gulf between Danny on the one hand, and his wife and his eldest son on the other. The latter are associated with the false values and soft lazy outlook of a modern world dominated by an American influence. It is a world characterised by dance halls, films and phoney glamour. Danny revolts against it, but his wife is increasingly taken up with this kind of life, to the neglect of her family. The tinsel of the movies becomes her creed. "She passed like a Hollywood heroine through the door."⁵⁴ His brother-in-law, once a quiet-living working man, having come into some money, adopts this flashy life style:

⁵²Ibid. p.38.

⁵³Ibid. p.183.

⁵⁴Ibid. p.140.

"with his queer ambiguous interests in bookmaking, the films, boxing, and indeed all those activities, that catering for an uneasy generation shelter and sustain in affluence as many latter day pimps." 55

Peter, Dammy's son, is however the epitome of this new force in Scotland. He is weak and lazy, a waster, and it is he above all who irritates Dammy.

"The boy's job he despised - one of these flash, cheap unskilled billets that lads were tumbling into nowadays: no apprenticeship, no early hours, but just a game for any mug at a labourer's wage, and all very fancy with their jazz and chit chat of film stars and dancing." 56

The move away from the old traditions is particularly associated with women. Blake actually accuses Danny's wife of "betrayal", of "treachery to a system." 57 Pagen's wife too lets her man down, refusing to stay in drab Glasgow, although she knows her husband's heart is in the city and its industrial traditions, but dragging him away to a soft life in the English home counties.

Yet this is only one aspect of Glasgow life, and it is the others, the more traditional ones, that are Blake's main interest, for it is in them he finds the essential ethos of industrial Scotland. Paramount of course is the craftsmanship, and the deep love of it in the Glasgow character is typified by Danny Shields. However, Blake also brings in the physical aspects of heavy industry, with descriptions of machinery, the yards and

55 Ibid. p.84.

56 Ibid. p.173.

57 Ibid. p.140.

the ships. Particularly vivid is the scene at the launching, full of sense impressions:

"a thin metallic sound of splintered glass, a small spit of foam a wet smear on the shear bows of the ship - and then the awful moment when the hammers shuddered on the chocks, and drag chains rattled and it seemed she would never move; then moved ever so slowly, then seemed to stop and at last slipped away, roaring and at the end of the speed that brought the heart to mouth, to take the water with a rush, plunge wildly once, shiver a little, then come to rest - safely launched and water-borne."

58

There are however drabber sights, grey streets, rusting hulls. Yet it should be understood that while there is plenty of descriptive detail, enough certainly to firmly establish the world we are in here, Blake does not go in for the extensive use of the precise observation we find in other books. He is in no way naturalistic. He takes the physical face of the city for granted and concentrates on the spirit of the people. Thus what we remember about Danny's tenement is not its looks but its inhabitants: the prying gossiping neighbours hanging around. Squalor is kept out of his picture. Nor is he objective; he is very much in love with Glasgow and his realism, faithful on the whole, is at times tempered with romance. The quality of working class life is well expressed. Danny is proud of his children, especially the younger ones, and takes his responsibilities towards them seriously. What is not good however is the dishonesty

involved in Blake's depiction of his two central individuals, the representatives of different sections of Glasgow society. Both Danny Shields the worker, and Leslie Pagan the employer are idealised. Danny is supposed to be a typical working man, and although he comes over as a real character he never appears as this. Blake by his own admission⁵⁹ did not know enough about working class life to be entirely successful here. Danny is conceived in patronising terms. He is rough and ready yet deferential towards 'the boss' in whom he has an unshakeable faith. His pleasures and his desires are simple, all he wants is a drink, a football match and a chance to exercise his skill as a riveter. He is completely caught up in the cult of the old soldier - Blake actually uses the phrase "old soldiers never die" - drooling over the events of the 1914-18 war. Blake himself, like R.W. Campbell, has this kind of 'king and country' mentality and is forever idealising the army and glorifying war. He talks of "the bloody and splendid assault on the heights above V Beach"⁶⁰ and of how "the British Legion did well by Joe in death as in life. They buried him as a soldier with a band to head the cortege..

....."⁶¹

Yet there are well drawn aspects of Danny, his pride, his determination, and his despair and frustration at being idle. Moreover it is Danny, and not his employer, on whom Blake hangs the positive note of hope on which he

⁵⁹See - Blake, George. Annals Of Scotland op. cit. p. 32

⁶⁰The Shipbuilders op. cit. pl34.

⁶¹Ibid. p.113.

closes the novel. He makes a strong affirmation of his belief in the Scots working class. Pagan is retreating to a life in the South and offers Danny the chance to accompany him and take up a job in his household. Danny however refuses, unable to tear himself away from the city or its traditions. "I think I'll stick to my trade sir"⁶² he answers at each request.

It is difficult however to accept Leslie Pagan the shipyard owner. We see him for example park his large car in a side street and seek out the company of his employees in a pub. "Evening boys! What about the usual drinks to the ship? Yours Jock?"⁶³

With all its faults however The Shipbuilders remains a fine attempt at expressing what industrial Scotland is like. While Blake never manages to integrate his pride and his sorrow, his patriotism and his visions of Glasgow as a centre of craftsmanship into a satisfying work of art at least he raises the issues. He was to take up the subject of the Depression again the following year, in David And Joanna, but with little success. He produced in this work, with its theme of escape from industrialism, merely a mediocre Arcadian romance.

The Shipbuilders is the best-known fictional study of the Depression on Clydeside but there are several other novels more or less within this tradition of realism which deal with the period. 1936, the year after the

⁶²Ibid. p.286.

⁶³Ibid. p.13.

appearance of The Shipbuilders, saw the publication of James Barke's Major Operation, which was followed in 1937 by Gael Over Glasgow by Edward Shiels. (David Lambert's books - He Must So Live (1956) and No Time For Sleeping (1958) - although set in the period are not really part of the tradition.) As we shall see Barke's and Shiels' novels are primarily works of political propaganda, although intermittently they do provide realistic slices of working class life. They continue the movement away from closely observed background, favouring a wider more sketchy approach, which at times allows the author to zoom in to look in detail at particular things. The family life of ordinary working people is presented honestly, but sympathetically rather than with detached neutrality. Major Operation is the better of the two novels. Its opening sections are among the best to be found in Glasgow fiction, written in a strong racy prose style full of well struck phrases. It is something he cannot keep up however. He begins by taking a panoramic view of the city, looking from on high on a hot summer's day, seeing its general outlines and occasionally swooping down to examine more closely some particular individual. It is exactly the same zoom lense technique that Fergusson employs at the start of Auld Reekie. Barke succeeds in catching the diversity and variety of city life. Later on he goes on to show what it is like for the working class in particular, focusing on the family of a shipyard worker. Despite their poverty, relationships are warm. It is the feeling of the

environment rather than the physical details which come over. Of course there are glimpses of the slums, like the passage where Barke uses the nose rather than the eyes to make us aware of the unpleasant realities:

"The subway entrance breathed out its stale decayed air. Immediately beyond where they turned into Walker Street a warm odoriferous waft of slumdom met them. It was not a smell that could be escaped. There were identifiable odours of cat's urine: decayed rubbish: infectious diseases: unwashed underclothing intermingled with smells suggesting dry rot; insanitary lavatories, overtaxed sewage pipes and the excrement of a billion bed bugs." 64

This sort of focus on social conditions however is not very extensive in Major Operation. Barke's political outlook explains why. As a Marxist he was concerned with the propagation of a particular set of ideas. He sought, not like the realists following the French school, to produce in the reader a vague reforming urge, but to convince him in argument that his analysis of society is correct and that his plans for its reorganisation are the only ones logically conceivable. It was an appeal to the intellect and not the emotions. The novel is a specific political manifesto, not an emotionalisation of a situation. Thus great chunks of it are not parts of the story at all but Barke's abstract meditations.

Edward Shiels is much less concerned with dialectics and more with establishing the effects of unemployment on a working class community. Since to do so he has

⁶⁴Barke, James. Major Operation 1936 p.72.

first to show what that community is like, Gael Over Glasgow is a better portrait of working class life.

There is more detail. The Glasgow slums are viewed the way MacGill or McKechnie looks at them:

"Squat ugly wash houses faced each close or entry with high spiked railings running from each end to the tenement. So that the children from No. 1 could not invade the tarred back garden of No. 2 without first making, hammering and bending a series of entries and exits, which gave the railings the appearance of a much battered and grotesque harp. A depressing vista of bent steel railings, wash houses, dustbins and tar. The back view of the tenement was a sin against sight."⁶⁵

He is also meticulous about financial matters, wage rates, dole payments, and knows the ins and outs of work in the shipyards:

"Brian knelt on a staging, placed his chisel on the bulge of a rivet and began cutting it flush with the plate. A bracket to hold the gear shaft would be placed here and three rivets had to be flushed so that the base of the bracket would lie flat on the plate."⁶⁶

Shiels gives us a sensitive portrait of a boy growing up, his eagerness to learn a trade, and his delight when his time is finally served. He shows us the landmarks in his journey from boyhood to manhood. The death of a tradesman with whom he works, for example, gives him his first real taste of grief: "Yesterday he had been a child. Life was just flowers and wind and laughter. Today he had entered man's estate."⁶⁷ Later

⁶⁵Shiels, Edward. Gael Over Glasgow 1937 p.127.

⁶⁶Ibid. p.67.

⁶⁷Ibid. p.85.

on he is to experience the bitterness of enforced idleness and the author succeeds in capturing the spiritual malaise of the time, the "heart breaking monotony",⁶⁸ and the despair. He also gives us a good portrait of a dying breed, the self-educated working man, pillar of the mechanics institutes, intelligent, articulate, and interested in a wide range of knowledge, technical and artistic. He is less good in his handling of the love interest. The low key romance is too much in an unoriginal well-worn formula of shy boy meets girl - they don't know their own feelings. There are other flaws in the novel. Shiels has not the artistry to successfully handle symbolism. In a scene where we find Brian discoursing on the relations between God and man, we get a particularly crude example.

" Suddenly Alec grabbed Brian's arm.

"Look! A shooting star. See! A, you missed it. It was a beauty."

"Served me right for blethering about the earth." " 69

The ending of the novel is contrived. Throughout there has been a theme of the Gael, and of the Celtic imagination trapped by the confines of industrial society. Brian yearns for the freedom of the hills. Miraculously all his dreams come true when his uncle returns from abroad to announce that he is going to start farming in the Highlands and that he wants his

⁶⁸Ibid. p.311.

⁶⁹Ibid. p.167.

nephew to accompany him. A happy ending is ensured, but the plight of all the other unemployed, so forcefully expressed earlier in the novel, is left dangling in the air.

Lambert's He Must So Live (1956) and No Time For Sleeping (1958) deal with the same background and type of characters as Barke and Shiels but they focus on the working class struggle as opposed to the working class condition. While they give us an insight into the intricacies of political activity they make little contribution to our knowledge of working class life. Background is at a minimum and the books cannot be seen as continuing the realist tradition. It is not without significance that they are products of the Fifties rather than the Thirties.

It will be apparent that realism as we have encountered it so far is essentially limited. It is accurate yet lacking in creativity. We must view it in the light of a comment by Maupassant:

"The realist if he is an artist will endeavour not to show us a commonplace photograph of life, but to give us a presentment of it which shall be more complete, more striking, more cogent than reality itself." 70

There has been a movement away from the austere reflection of Blair and MacGill towards a more interpretative look at society - in Blake for example in terms of myth

70 Quoted in Dale, John. Progress Of The Novel 1962.

- but there has not been an imaginative, and truly artistic look at city life. This changes however when we arrive at the work of Edward Gaitens. He blends the realistic and the imaginative together in a superb expression of the quality of working class life in the Gorbals. It is full of humour and vitality - yet absolutely authentic. Its nature is described exactly by remarks V.S. Pritchett made about Arthur Morrison's The Hole In The Wall:

"It has the kind of fidelity to scene that the modern documentary writers have sought, yet it is never fattened, as their work is by concern for conditions; let us not allow conditions to deflate the imagination or argue away the novelist's chief delight and greatest difficulty: the act of constructing and telling a story complete in itself. For unless he learns this art, a novelist neutralises his power of observation, his power to observe more than one thing at a time, his power of writing on different planes and varying perspectives and discriminating among the accumulated incrustations of fact that clog an impressionable mind."⁷¹

Taken together Growing Up (1942) and The Dance Of The Apprentices (1948) form the best fiction Glasgow has produced in the last half century. The first half of the second novel is largely a reworking of Growing Up, much of it indeed is incorporated intact, while at other times passages in themselves largely unchanged are arranged in different order or inserted in a different context. Neither book has a sustained plot but they deal in an

⁷¹Pritchett, V.S. The Living Novel 1946 (1960 Arrow Ed.) p.156.

impressionistic manner with a number of separate slices of the Glasgow experience. Gaitens has a fine ear for language as well as an eye for detail, and renders sharply and with authenticity a variety of dialects - Irish, Ulster, Jewish.

One of the best parts of Growing Up is the chapter entitled The Sailing Ship. Johnny Regan is unemployed and dispirited, nagged by his shrewish mother, and, as an ex-conscientious objector, sneered at by his neighbours. He is in a rut and can see no way out. Taking a walk by the docks however, he sees a wonderful sight, a windjammer, grand and beautiful, moored among the ordinary ships of the river:

"He loved the way her slim bows curved like the flanks of a fawn. France: that was a light little name that suited her beautiful poise. He had heard it said that the Clyde would never see a windjammer again, that they had all been requisitioned, dismasted and turned into steamships for war service. And here was a lovely one whose decks he had walked." 72

While the ship is in Glasgow Regan's luck unexpectedly changes. He gets a temporary job, and for the first time in a while enjoys a song and a drink. He decides that when the job is finished he will tramp to London and look for work there. The storyline is unremarkable, but what is important is the way in which Gaitens uses the sailing ship as a symbol for the great days of the Clyde, now gone.

⁷²Gaitens, Edward. Growing Up 1942 p. 18.

He captures perfectly the sense of hope and romance Regan associates with the ship. He watches her disappear in the distance:

"So ecstatic was his concentration upon that vanishing ship that he felt her decks quiver under his feet, saw her high spars tremble, heard the flap of her sails as he gazed with uplifted head. He was sailing on, away from unemployment and slums and wretchedness...."⁷³

By contrast A Wee Nip, included in both books, is an assertion not of melancholy but of the vigour and colour of life. Jimmy returns from sea in a condition that surprises his family:

"For ten years Jimmy had been coming home from sea at varying intervals and had never been able to get up the stairs unassisted; and here he was after a six month voyage not even giving off a smell of spirits. Mr. Macdonnell put on his glasses to have a better look at him Jimmy swore he hadn't touched a drop since he had sailed from Peterhead and described the torture of his two days self denial so vividly that his father shivered and hurried into the parlour to get his coat and vest. Jimmy said he was finished with the sea and booze; sick of squandering money. He was determined to settle on shore, get married and spend all his money on Meg's happiness."⁷⁴

This however is not to be. The rot quickly sets in, encouraged by his family who are dismayed at the prospect of losing their liberal dose of free drinks. There follows a riotous party of drink song and laughter which lasts several days. A Wee Nip is a collection of sharply observed details where the comic eye transforms

⁷³Ibid. p.28.

⁷⁴Ibid. pp.31-33.

everything, including the less pleasant details into a celebration of the joy for living.

"The gathering had overflowed into the parlour when Eddy returned with the gasworker behind him; the lobby was crowded with newly arrived guests listening to Aunt Kate's singing "The Irish Emigrant's Farewell"; the eyes of all the women were wet with film star tears and the singer herself seemed to be seeing a handsome Irish youth as she looked straight at her husband standing in the kitchen doorway and returning her stare with a malignant leer. Aunt Kate filled a large cup with whisky from a bottle on the dresser and still singing handed it to him with a mock bow. On similar occasions Mr. Hewes had been known to dash the cup from her hand and walk out and desert her for six months, but this time he seized it, swallowed the drink in one gulp, hitched up his belt and joined the party." 75

Jimmy chooses the freedom and squalor the party represents rather than the life of temperance and dour respectability which marriage to Meg means. While it lasts it is a gaiety that is all pervasive, even the policemen who come to complain at the noise are absorbed into the festivities:

"In five minutes both policemen sat down and laid their helmets on the sideboard among the numerous bottles, and fifteen minutes later they had loosened their tunics and were dancing with the ladies, their heavy boots creating a louder rumpus than they had come to stop." 76

The world of Gaitens is a mixture of high and low, the intellectual and the earthy. There is the live-for-the-moment attitude of the party, seen again in the story

⁷⁵Ibid. p.38.

⁷⁶Ibid. p.44.

of how the family spend their Sundays - drinking in shebeens, playing pitch and toss, and curing the hangovers of the night before. There is also the intellectual vigour and seriousness of Donald and the other apprentices, reading Marx and Milton, philosophy and psychology, and discussing them under the gaslamps of the street. These people are not the submerged proletariat of MacGill or McKechnie, but triumphant examples of the irrepressibility of the human spirit. Yet Gaitens never sentimentalises. His strength lies in his basic honesty. Harsh and ugly details are always cropping up. Note for example the absolute truth of his observation of the two parents in Growing Up, at times, oppressed by their surroundings, genuinely hating each other:

"They were often sulky and apart with each other, and sometimes he had been wakened at this hour by a brutal altercation, when his father had struck her and rushed out, crashing the door and she had yelled after him she hoped he'd be killed at his work."⁷⁷

Similarly when death comes to the Macdonnells Gaitens can see that the professed grief of the neighbours is not genuine, nor is it hypocritical pretence. Rather it is partly the maudlin sentiment into which working class women retreat almost automatically in such situations as a sort of communal defence against the harsh realities of life in the surroundings they live in, and partly a diversion from the humdrum. "They were thoroughly enjoying themselves. They loved emotional scenes."⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.150.

Gaitens is not a political writer like Barke or MacGill though politics does enter his work. His characters talk it all the time, with varying degrees of logic and fervour, and while it is never stated there is always a noticeable sympathy for their views.^b Gaitens is no rigid doctrinaire thinker but treats this subject with as much levity as he treats anything else, constantly poking fun at the earnestness of his young intellectuals. Jimmy's dissertation is quickly undercut for example:

" "Revolution is the historic mission o' the workers" retorted Jimmy, primed with a Marxian slogan for every turn. He flicked a dead match from his fingers; it flashed a white parabola in the darkness and vanished in a gutter stank.

"Damn guid shot that eh? Did ye see it? Right across the pavement and down the stank, by jove!" he cried, delighted more with his dexterity than with his skill in debate. " 79

It is frequently held that Gaitens' earlier stories are the best, that Growing Up and the first half of The Dance Of The Apprentices are superior to the latter half of this second book. Certainly there is a freshness and vitality in them not found in the later stages. They tell mainly of a time when the world was young, the Edwardian era, when the apprentices were still in their youth and full of life and promise. The later episodes focus on their maturity and middle age and paint a sombre

^bGaitens' writing cannot in any meaningful way be seen as political since there is neither interest in 'conditions' nor any positive political affirmation. Yet there are those who would disagree and argue that any sympathetic portrait of working class life is in itself a valuable contribution to the socialist struggle, e.g. The Word. Feb. 1949. P48.
79 Growing Up op. cit. p.121

picture of life. Gone is all the excitement and relish, in their place instead sorrow, fatigue, regret and fear. Francie ends up a screaming idiot in an asylum, broken by the war. Neil Mudge, trapped into a marriage with a girl he dislikes, has nothing but a bleak future in front of him. Donald Hamilton in middle age is a shell tortured by the thoughts of his past. Once, thinking he had V.D. he tried to cut his own throat, and now years later the memory haunts him, and he can't bear to think about anything. His former cocksureness is gone, along with his philosophy books which are sold. "... once he could quote from memory long passages of Milton and Shakespeare. Ach, what's the use of stuff like that anyway? It doesn't get you anywhere."⁸⁰ Gaitens succeeds in these chapters in creating a tragedy of broken hopes and illusions, and making a powerful statement of the way circumstances can ruin even the most promising lives. A tone of disappointment and regret pervades them.

It is no accident that the turning point in the lives of the main characters seems to be the First World War. It is not just that the war years provide a chronological dividing line between youth and manhood, but that the war assumes the nature of a sour, blighting influence. The sufferings of Eddie Macdonnel in prison as a conscientious objector, his boredom and frustration, and the tyranny of warders, chaplain, and doctor, is the most direct examination of this corruptive force. However

⁸⁰Gaitens, Edward. The Dance Of The Apprentices
1948 p.216.

everything else that is unpleasant is directly or indirectly attributable to the war. It is something which breaks families (Jimmy is killed), drives men mad, and destroys beauty." (Even the sailing ships are taken from the Clyde by it.) The anti-war note is the most positive statement we get of Gaitens' own beliefs in the two books.

Writing in 1962 Clifford Hanley observed that "if a publisher sends me a new novel to read I can lay odds it's about life in a Glasgow tenement Most of them I am sorry to say are also laden with doom, because that's what They (whoever they are) expect tenement life to be laden with."⁸¹ Later on he remarks that "hordes of Scottish authors have worked on the tenements but hardly anybody has even noticed the material in the council housing schemes. I took a nibble at this myself but there are huge bites left."⁸²

Hanley's criticism is an accurate summary of the story of realism in Glasgow fiction. The bias he notes is understandable, for it is a fact that up until comparatively recently the vast majority of working class Glaswegians lived in tenements. Yet fiction has not caught up with social changes. Even today, more than a decade later, the new corporation houses are little in evidence. There are a few exceptions. Hanley's nibble, The Taste Of Too Much (1961), focuses

⁸¹Hanley, Clifford. New Saltire No. 5. August 1962 p.6.

⁸²Ibid. p.9.

on an ordinary working class boy living in just such a housing scheme. It is the world of television and pop music but the actual physical face of Glasgow is little seen. Indeed the novel could be set almost anywhere. The background is only sketched in, what is of more importance is the study of adolescence - the boy's problems with school, girls, and his parents. It is not a deep novel but is honest and accurate, expressing well the typical experiences of the average teenager.* Much of the appeal of the novel comes from the very ordinariness and familiarity of the situations presented; they are ones which almost everyone has experienced. Hugh C. Rae in Night Pillow moves us into an even more modern world - that of the high rise flats. His book is hardly in the realistic tradition however, for while the background is authentic, like the gang novel, the plot is melodramatic. But there is a good appreciation of the differences between living in a conventional house and in a flat in a skyscraper, and of the problems of adapting one's lifestyle. This involves an accurate observation of the physical characteristics of the two environments, on the one hand the solid dullness of the ordinary corporation house, on the other the paper thin, plastic crampedness of the tower block:

"A maisonette was more than he had bargained for. When they said a flat he thought they meant a flat all on the one level. Waste of space; bad planning; jerry built. The fierce

*See also Chapter on Childhood And Adolescence.

anger at what he was sacrificing to come here welled up in him again. There was nothing personal in this mammoth warren. He was like a rabbit in the side of a hill; no even less individual than a rabbit: a bee in a box hive, a bee in its cell. This is what they were all so anxious to jump out of their homes for, to keep in step with progress. In five years - he'd give it five years - the whole place would be falling round their ears like a slum." 83

With Hanley and Rae we have left behind the type of realism that has primarily concerned us in this chapter - the close, detailed, study of working class life and environment typified in novels like Prisoners Of Circumstance. It did not survive the last war. Modern Glasgow has given us realistic background and characters but there has been a crucial difference in emphasis. In the pre-war novel the setting was of prime importance, both for itself and for its political implications. In the post-war novel it has been less intrusive, taking, as we shall see later, a minor role (much to the novel's benefit) to an interest in the individual and personality. In writers like George Friel tenement life is skilfully captured but it is not allowed to dominate the novel. To sum up however we will do well to recall a question posed by John Cockburn in 1933:

"Where, I ask, is the unembellished story of the folk who year in year out, from birth to death live 'up a close' and to whom the incidents that occur in practically all our industrial novels are more or less travesties of

⁸³Rae, Hugh C. Night Pillow 1967 p.

fact? Where is the industrial story in which the background, which is an integral part of the people, and a most important part, is anything more than a recital of street names with a description of a few well known buildings thrown in?" 84

If this type of novel exists at all in the Glasgow genre it is not in Cockburn's own Tenement or in the painful gloom of MacGill or McKechnie, but in the realism of Edward Gaitens, and, at a lesser and more debateable level, in Munro's The Clydesiders. In the next chapter we will examine a side street of realism - the gang novel.

⁸⁴Cockburn, John. The Scots Observer, 25 Feb. 1933 p.9

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GANG NOVEL

CHAPTER FOUR

THE GANG NOVEL

To the larger part of the reading public the Glasgow novel is No Mean City and very little else. This is understandable for it is the only example of the genre to have reached bestseller status, and has provoked considerable attention over the years. A number of attempts have been made at emulating its success yet the Gang School which it represents remains only a very minor part of the Glasgow tradition as a whole. There are five novels in this category proper - Mince Collop Close (1923); No Mean City (1935); Glasgow Keelie (1940); Cut And Run (1962); No Bad Money (1969) - while the gangs do appear incidentally in a number of others.¹ In literary terms they are insignificant, yet they demand attention for their continuing influence on the mythology of the city. They inhabit a world on the periphery of normal Glasgow life. The focus is not merely the criminal underworld of the slums but the peculiar phenomenon of the notorious street gangs of the inter-war years. It is a sordid and unattractive picture which in its own way is as narrow and limited as the vision of Glorious

¹See Blake's The Shipbuilders and Highland's The Dark Horizon.

Glasgow found in the works of some middle class novelists.^a

The first, George Blake's Mince Collop Close, set the tone for those that followed, and from the start the gang novel was to be a mixture of realism and fantasy.^b The background was on the whole authentic, yet the action sensational and exaggerated. Here for example is a part of Blake's setting:

"The mission hall was situated in Kyle Street in the midst of a rich field for missionary endeavour. Sheebens and ticketed houses were round about it. Bookmakers and women of the street polished the shutters over the curtained windows. The electric lights of a public house on the opposite side of the street competed at night with the pallid incandescent mantles of faith. Loafers, drunkards, unskilled labourers, hooligans and aliens swarmed the alleys² and closes about it."

His plot on the other hand centres on a female gang leader - romantically styled "Queen of the Fan Tans" - whose adventures include the kidnapping of a football star, robbery, violent assault, and a plot to steal

^aThe gangs as recognisable entities go back to the 1880s,ⁱ but it was in the post World War I era that they became prominent. One will do well to remember that much of what is frequently criticised in the novels as unreal and exaggerated did happen in real life. Sir Percy Sillitoe, the Chief Constable largely responsible for ending the gang troubles, describes in his memoirs - Cloak Without Dagger (1955) - numerous incidents with close parallels in the novels. It is the concentration of violence in the fictional accounts, its frequency and prominence which make for sensation rather than the facts themselves.

^bBlake's analysis of the real life gang phenomenon was tinged with romance. "Its basis was the essentially Scottish one of the clan system." - The Trials Of Patrick Carragher (1951) p.23.

²Blake, George. Mince Collop Close 1923 p.117.

dynamite for the I.R.A.. The same kind of dichotomy is apparent in No Mean City and Glasgow Keelie where the authors take considerable pains over their background, then proceed to fill it with melodrama and sensation. Much of the description is of the scrupulously detailed type we associate with the realists encountered in the last chapter. Squalor is favoured:

"Blending with the other smells of the houses was the reek of paraffin. It was particularly strong in the cavity bed when the door was shut, for the woodwork was infested with bugs, and Stark's wife conscientiously tried to keep them under by smearing every crack with oil."³

Somewhat different is Ben Jarvis's snack bar in Glasgow Keelie:

"It wasn't one particular flavour that met your nostrils as you drew near - just a warm steamy smell recalling hot-dogs and tea urns, and the aroma grew strong and almost thick when you opened the door. Inside were nine or ten dimly lit tables, and behind them partitioned off to make the word 'rooms' ring true was a counter piled high with cheese cakes and fly-marked pies. Sundry advertisements decorated the walls, telling the customers of relishing gravies, nourishing sausages, and the fineness of a popular brand of salt. Woodbine and Capstain" ⁴

In this aspect these novels function as something of an exposé - confronting the reader with the world of the slums. But in treatment of character and situation they

³McArthur, Alexander and Long, M. Kingsley No Mean City 1935 p.9.

⁴McNeillie, John. Glasgow Keelie 1940 p.94.

take the opposite route to escapism and romance. Indeed one can think of the world of the gangs as being akin to the Wild West myth, with heroic figures triumphing through force and daring. The gang leaders become legends in their own environments and are treated with deference and respect by those around them.^c The emphasis is on action, not personality, and none of the characters are shown in any depth. What they do is what matters - not what they are. This leads to one of the main features of the gang genre - the concentration on the violent and sensational. Brutality is extreme and detailed. For example:

"He grabbed a pint measure from the bar, smashed it, and jabbed the broken edge at Ben's 'coupon'. I could have told him not to try that. Too often I had seen Ben in action Ben's hand darted in the direction of his handkerchief pocket, and at the same time he instinctively dodged the jagged glass.

The Dummy's weight was behind the intended blow, as he hit the razor with his cheek. Suddenly he was in possession of another mouth at a slight angle to the original one. This new opening was spouting blood like 5 rain from a broken gutter."

Again:

"As he struggled to get astride the body he brought his razor down. The kid saw it and he was screaming before he felt it touch his face. Even Jimmie shivered as he slashed and felt the keen blade bite the flesh and he saw the blood spurt.⁶ Jesus it made him sick."

^cEven factual writers have been guilty of romanticising. (Not merely the popular newspapers.) J.D. Mack for example compares a battle on Albert Bridge in 1928 with 'the fight of the clans in Scott's Fair Maid of Perth' - Third Statistical Account of Scotland. Glasgow. 1958 p.646.

⁵McGhee, Bill. Cut And Run 1962 p.23.

⁶McGhee, Bill. Cut And Run 1962 p.23.

It will be apparent however that these descriptions have little evocative power. They are necessarily sterile. If they had any ability to move the whole basis of the novel would be destroyed, playing as they do on the powerful attraction of the anti-hero, the figure who acts as he likes without scruple. Real violence would only arouse the reader's overwhelming revulsion. Bound up with this is the fact that here we are in an amoral world where the law and normal values are irrelevant. In plot terms this means not gangs v police, but gangs v other gangs, and the reader is invited to identify with one particular set of thugs. When the police do appear it is not as the agents of morality restoring a necessary order, but as the spoilers of a good fight, or as the helpless spectators on the fringe of trouble. A character in No Mean City describes a typical police contribution:

"The Bridgeton mob was well over two thousand strong, an' if the coppers had got caught between the two armies they wid ha'e been drooned i' the tide. They wis scrum three-quarters the poliss - blowing their whistles an' dancing wi' rage on the edge o' the battle an' being terrible rough wi' the wee yins that wid come rollin' out of the big rammy like washed up pebbles! Aye! We'll be readin' in the papers o' the grand baton charge, but they didny charge at all until the two divisions wis going away of their 7 own accord."

Force is the only morality and the reader sides

⁷No Mean City op. cit. p.221.

inevitably with those best at using it - the gang leaders like Johnnie Stark in No Mean City or Jimmie Lunn in Glasgow Keelie.

None of the novels however make any kind of serious attempt at analysing or interpreting the gang phenomenon. It is possible to find a number of passages which outline the most obvious causes, like this one from No Mean City:

"Battles and sex are the only free diversions in slum life. Couple them with drink, which costs money, and you have the three principal outlets for that escape complex which is forever working in the tenement dweller's subconscious mind. Johnnie Stark would not have realised that the 'hoose' he lived in drove him into the pubs and the dance halls. Fighting is truly one of the amusements of the tenements. Nearly all the young people join in, if not as fighters themselves at least as spectators and cheering supporters."⁸

Similarly in Glasgow Keelie the source of the hero's criminality was:

"Not the work he had done at the yard nor the life he had with Sarah and Bill, but the very atmosphere of bleakness and poverty. These youths were the sons of men and women who had lived a life in darkness and had bowed slowly and surely to the relentlessness of the system On their faces according to their ages you could see how near death was the spirit It was more than unemployment that had damned their souls. Unemployment was but part of their doom, and the cause of their doom. It was the poverty; the darkness; the endless struggle for existence; the very harshness of their surroundings."⁹

⁸Ibid. p.37.

⁹Glasgow Keelie op. cit. p.370.

Yet observations like these exist in isolation from the fabric of the novels, in effect tagged on to excuse all the excesses that we witness. The social and psychological pressures behind the gangs are probed neither in individual human terms, nor as examples of collective action; they are colourful; a good story can be built around them. No more is of concern. This leads us to the question of seriousness. Are the novels conceived purely as entertainment or have they a more thoughtful side? All of them contain the ingredients of commercial success - sex as well as violence and sensation. This is never of a pornographic nature, but mild titillation whose tameness contrasts with the lurid public image of the gang genre. But we must discriminate among the novels, and only McArthur and Long's No Mean City and John McNeillie's Glasgow Keelie can be seen as having any substance. Mince Collop Close is a flimsy hash of romantic nonsense, while No Bad Money and Cut And Run are merely trying to cash in on a successful formula. The latter in particular is atrocious hackwork which sensationalises the already sensational, picking up and amplifying all the faults of its predecessors. No Bad Money is more competently written - has a more literate prose style - but again is impossible to regard seriously. In the other two books however we are aware of something more solid, an underlying social concern which, if badly expressed, is at least genuine. It is apparent in the determination to fill in the social background in detail, to capture a WAY OF LIFE, as opposed to merely colouring

in a violent story.^d This is partly because the gangs and the squalor of the backstreets were contemporary fact when McArthur and McNeillie were writing, whereas, by the appearance of Cut And Run (1962) and No Bad Money (1968)^e the bad times were merely a memory. Compare for example two similar passages from respectively No Mean City and No Bad Money:

"The door of the cavity bed was barely ajar, for the night was cold and the children had opened the window which gave upon the street

Cavity beds are so common a feature of the Glasgow slums even to this day that the tenement dwellers take them for granted. The ordinary 'room and kitchen' apartment, and even the one roomed 'single end', always include a cavity bed or beds. These beds are no more than windowless closets - little tombs about five feet by five by three and a half. The door of each closes against the side of the bed and flush with the wall of the room itself." 10

By contrast:

^dIt is important to note that Alexander McArthur took his writing seriously. His career was unusual; a baker to trade, he became obsessed with the literary treatment of Glasgow life, and for years bombarded editors and publishers with rambling ill-written pieces. No Mean City only appeared after Longmans commissioned London journalist H.K. Long to work it into coherent form. (This dual authorship, apart from explaining many of the novel's faults, may account for its strangely distant tone, almost that of an anthropological observer encountering a lost tribe.) That McArthur saw his writing as more than a commercial enterprise, but as filling a social need is seen from some fascinating correspondence that appeared in the periodical The Word during 1947 (see issues March 1947 p.88, May 1947 p.116, Oct. 1947 p.20). This relates to the controversy surrounding the authorship of the play The Gorbals Story produced by the Glasgow Unity Theatre and attributed to Robert McLeish. McArthur claimed that this was substantially stolen from his own The Mystery Of Gorbals Terrace, and The Word presents strong evidence of plagiarism. McArthur died before the question was resolved, but in his last letter he

"The bedroom was smaller than the other room and was almost filled with furniture. There was a cavity bed in the wall, the other was a double that took up almost the entire room and almost blocked the door. Norah used the cavity, the two girls slept in the double. They both now started to undress without a single glance at Leyland who stood wondering what he should do next"¹¹

The first is concerned with showing how people live, the second with sketching in a setting. Again there is a different attitude towards language. Both No Mean City and Cut And Run show a certain clumsiness and unease in their use of dialect. In the former for example we meet the eternal dilemma of the Scottish writer - is Scots a language in its own right or merely mispronounced English? McArthur never resolved this and self-consciously explains Scots expressions or brackets them in inverted commas: "Mrs. Stark was alone in the 'hoose'" or "there was 'auld' James Hurley."¹² Yet the problem arises in the first place from a genuine wish to reproduce Glasgow speech authentically* that is merely one facet of the

d(Contd)

talks in terms that shows him interested in more than money: "Who is now going to supply Glasgow with the plays, stories etc. that it obviously needs? McLeish?" (Oct. 1947 p.20).

^eNo Bad Money is supposedly written jointly by McArthur and Peter Watts (based on McArthur's posthumous papers). It is a case really of using the former's name for commercial reasons and the book is essentially Watts'. This accounts for a prose style which is smoother than that of No Mean City.

¹⁰No Mean City op. cit. p.7.

¹¹McArthur, A. and Watts, P. No Bad Money 1968 p.17.

¹²No Mean City op. cit. p.10.

*See Chapter Seven below.

concern to portray conscientiously a way of life. On the other hand the gross, awkward dialogue of Cut And Run is simply pandering to sensation, supposedly the gritty language of the hooligan that matches the violence of his actions. It becomes laughable however: "For cheeses sake screw your bobbin" or "mibbe Isa'll no' want me noo wi' a face like a pun o' mince."¹³

No Mean City has been repeatedly attacked not only on literary grounds, as sensational and badly written, but for giving Glasgow a bad name. For example Blake curiously takes it to task for stigmatising the Gorbals as "a cesspool of crime and degradation,"¹⁴ while his own Mince Collop Close had done the same to Cowcaddens. Yet despite its undeniable faults - the melodrama, flimsy characterisation, clumsy writing - No Mean City deserves more credit than it is generally given. It has vigour and raciness; many of the fight sequences are genuinely exciting, and there is a certain gloomy power in its pessimistic vision. The downfall of gang leader Johnnie Stark is echoed in the careers of others. The hopes of his brother Peter and his friend Bobbie Hurley of climbing out of the slums to a life of respectability come to nothing despite their efforts. All three are caught in a trap of circumstances and environment from which they cannot escape.

A better novel than this however is Glasgow Keelie which appeared five years later. The setting is as

¹³Cut And Run op. cit. p.25 and p.64.

¹⁴Blake, George. Annals of Scotland 1956 p.34.

squalid and the violence as nasty, but not only is the quality of writing better but there is a greater depth in characterisation. A major fault is the unconvincing speed of the hero's rise to criminal prominence. One minute he is an insignificant bookie's runner, the next an authoritative gang leader. There is not the same step by step development we get in No Mean City. Jimmie Lunn however is more fully realised than Johnnie Stark. For a start he is more intelligent (this allows a deeper psychological study). Stark we see externally only, but at times we are taken into Lunn's mind and shown the link between his actions and his personality. What emerges are strong escapist tendencies in his make-up. He lives in a mental world dominated by the heroes of the cinema, and "according to his taste in the stars at the time he would be George Raft, Gary Cooper, Clark Gable"¹⁵ Significantly his first step into crime is inspired by this make-believe: "Pinch a car. They did it on the pictures didn't they?"¹⁶ From then it escalates into violence. Yet he does not go untouched by it:

"All the things he had done wrong before had never worried him. Why did it worry him now ...? But here he was thinking again, instead of getting to sleep."¹⁷

Later on he begins to doubt himself:

"It wasn't the same as being scared of fighting anybody or doing anything. It was a different kind of scaredness. You were scared you couldn't go on doing the things you had been doing. You got scared of yourself."¹⁸

¹⁵Glasgow Keelie op. cit. p.37.

¹⁶Ibid. p.41.

¹⁷Ibid. p.183.

¹⁸Ibid. p.233.

The escapism is linked with a disquiet about American influences on Scottish society, particularly the shadow of Hollywood:

"That was 'slick' as they called it on the pictures Real 'slick' that was, yes, he was slick and Mrs. Duffy was 'dumb' and even O'Flannigan was only 19 a 'small-time sucker'".

There is a clear assumption in McNeillie's mind that the values of the films are a major contributory factor to the violence on the Glasgow streets. Lunn identifies with the movie gangsters and believes his own sordid actions to be in their mould. While in court, the bailie trying him confirms the connection: "Youths of your type", Lunn is told, "must realise that this is not America and we are not prepared to tolerate the methods of the American gangster here."²⁰

In this McNeillie is presenting a more complex view of the causes of violence than just the poverty - boredom - release syndrome. The novel has in it the seeds of a commendable study of the violent personality, and could have been a worthwhile novel had the author chosen to look at this aspect in greater depth and seriousness, instead of playing up the sensation with an eye to a big market.

All in all however the gang novel is a sensational, badly written, literary phenomenon where a realistic background is fronted by a lurid plot.

¹⁹Ibid. p.30.

²⁰Ibid. p. 289.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICS AND THE GLASGOW NOVEL

CHAPTER FIVEPOLITICS AND THE GLASGOW NOVEL

In Chapter Two we noted that a recognition of the link with political conservatism was crucial for an understanding of the kailyard novel. Similarly we can get a useful perspective on the Glasgow genre as a whole by approaching it through its politics. Viewed as a whole it is not overtly political yet its characteristics have been formed by definite political assumptions. I pointed in the Introduction to two different faces of Glasgow that have reflected themselves in the literary idea of the city - Glasgow as industrial and Glasgow as metropolitan. This split becomes important when we bear in mind the suggestion that to confront or ignore certain aspects of a society may in itself amount to a political gesture. A full and honest reflection of a society's evils carries its own implicit criticism and those writers then who paint only the favourable middle class face of the city are as much making a political affirmation as the socialist propagandists. Conversely, the movement towards realism in the Glasgow novel (in the sense of a detailed, frank, and perhaps painful picture of working class life) corresponds with an awakening of radicalism, and the great period of realism, roughly 1900 - 1940, was also the period of left wing protest. It is thus in a sense artificial to deal with realism and politics as separate topics, although I am forced to do so by the need to make manageable a wide and frequently incoherent body of material.

When politics is coupled with the name of Glasgow the most common reaction is probably to recall the myth of "Red Clydeside", yet the fiction produced by the city does not confirm the association. A non-aggressive conservatism is the main mood, although there are also a tidy number of works which adhere to the extreme left or right. I will outline the main trend, examine the partisans of both sides and also look at a group of novels which deal with the mechanics of political activity rather than the philosophy behind it.

The nineteenth century writers set the tone for the continuing middle class response to Glasgow. From my remarks on ambition and materialism the ethos of the novel in this period will be clear. It is very much concerned with the higher levels of city life - at the expense of the poor. Writers will condemn the moral weaknesses of the wealthy but they never question the social or economic system itself. The working class are not a concern, and when they do appear they are never presented in a way that will cultivate class consciousness. Glasgow is a city of drawing rooms and fine buildings, not factories or slums. It is complacent, and on the whole, self satisfied. The mood of the city, and the novels can be well illustrated by looking at J.A. Hammer-ton's descriptive work, Sketches From Glasgow (1891). In particular the author takes exception to lines published more than a century earlier in The Glasgow Museum (1773):

"That Glasgow on the base of commerce rose
 A noble pile, all the world knows,
 She bids her sons to fly from pole to pole,
 Where Sol enlightens or where oceans roll,
 And for her, fleets bring to their native strand
 The arts and treasures of each foreign land;
 Rich in her industry she sits secure,
 Nor heeds the clamour of the vain nor poor."¹

It is the last line that offends: the suggestion that all is not glorious. To Hammerton the reproach is unjustified since Glasgow is famous not only for its architecture and colourful history (the theme of his book), but for its philanthropy and compassion.* Those who raise the problem of the poor are griping philistines. The smug self-satisfaction of Sketches From Glasgow typifies the blindness of many of those who did well out of an era of expansion, to the problems in their midst. Yet the vision has persisted among Glasgow writers well into the twentieth century. Most Victorian novels then, instead of industrial life gave the reader commercial life, romance, intrigue, and adventure. Those who did show it, like the tracts, or A.S. Swan, were often attempting to perpetuate the system as it stood by removing the poverty and squalor which could have been a powder keg. It is difficult to believe that the omission of the slums and the poor was due to the writer's ignorance, since there were numerous accounts in the nineteenth century which showed just how bad life was for much of Glasgow's population. For example Chadwick's Report On The Sanitary Conditions Of The Labouring Population (1842) wrote:

¹Hammerton, J.A. Sketches From Glasgow 1893. p150

*See below Chapter Seven.

"It appeared to us that both the structural arrangements and the conditions of the population in Glasgow were the worst of any we had seen in any part of Great Britain. In the courts off Argyle Street there were no privies or drains, and the dung heaps received all the filth which the swarms of wretched inhabitants could give The picture is so shocking that without ocular proof one would be disposed to doubt the possibility of the facts."²

Again, a visiting Frenchman, O'Rell, wrote of Victorian Glasgow:

"I have seen poverty and vice in Paris, in London, in Dublin and Brussels, but they are nothing to compare with the spectacle Glasgow presents. It is a living illustration of some unwritten ³ page of Dante."

Instead of this world, however, Sarah Tytler and George Mills gave us business life and middle class society, Frederick Arnold and Thomas Alexander, romance and university diletanteism, and David Pae swashbuckling adventure. I make this contrast not to blame them, for their position was understandable. The Scottish novel as a whole was later than the English in responding to industrial capitalism. The Victorian era was very much a time of flux and expansion. The splendours of the city were still new; the middle class was on the uprise and the increase, and it is natural that writers wanted to come to terms with these aspects first - their own back yard in fact - before they tackled low life. However, it is more disturbing when we find novelists of the twentieth

²Quoted by Oakly, C.A. The Second City 1975 (3rd edition) p.51.

³Quoted by Kellet, John R. Glasgow. A Concise History 1967 p.36.

century taking a coy attitude about the existence of the poor, and here we must suspect if not political motives, at least political feelings. At this point we can do no better than refer to an article by Lewis Grassie Gibbon in which he contrasts the ugly facts of Glasgow life with a typical middle class vision of the city.

"In Glasgow there are over a hundred and fifty thousand human beings living in such conditions as the most bitterly pressed primitive in Tierra del Fuego never visioned. They live five or six to a single room it is a room that is part of some great sloven of tenement - the tenement itself in a line or a grouping with hundreds of its fellows, its windows grimed with the unceasing wash and drift of coal-dust, its stairs narrow and befouled and steep, its evening breath like that which might issue from the mouth of a lung diseased beast."⁴

The opposite pole is summed up in the contents of the periodical The Modern Scot where:

"Mr. Adam Kennedy is serialising a novel, The Mourners, his technique a genteel objectivity. And one of his characters has stopped in Glasgow's Kelvingrove, and is savouring the essence:

"John's eyes savoured the spaciousness of the crescent, the formal curve of the unbroken line of house facades, the regimentation of the rows of chimney pots savoured all these in the shimmering heat of the day just as his nose had savoured the morning freshness. It was as good for him to walk round these old terraces as to visit a cathedral. He could imagine now and then that he had evoked for himself something of the atmosphere of the streets. The world was surer of itself then, sure of the ultimate perfectability of man, sure of the ultimate mastery over the forces that surrounded him."

Glasgow speaks.

⁴Gibbon, L.G. (Leslie Mitchell) A Scots Hairst 1967 p.83.

The hundred and fifty thousand are answered. Glasgow has spoken. This indeed, is its attitude, not merely the pale whey of intellectualism peculiar to The Modern Scot. The bourgeois Glaswegian cultivates aesthetic objectivity as happier men cultivate beards or gardens (These are) people to whom Glasgow is the Hunterian Museum with its fine array of Roman coins, or the Galleries with their equally fine 5 array of pictures."

Gibbon's impatience and disgust with the kind of writing typified by The Mourners is well justified, his criticisms fair and accurate. There is a type of writer who still persists in seeing the city with blind Victorian smugness. The hunger marchers can be on the streets but Glasgow is still the Athens Of The West. It was not only the kailyarders who managed to ignore what they did not like but writers like George Woden and Guy McCrone. While I do not suggest that a failure to enter political debate necessarily means a right-wing political philosophy it is reasonable in times of crisis to make some assumption of the sort. To write a novel about Glasgow in the inter-war years without showing the dole queues, slums, and socialist unrest , involves a deliberate act of misrepresentation. The fault is not so much that the novelists lack commitment but that they lack awareness. (It should be understood that most of my remarks on the politics of the Glasgow novel are confined to books that appeared before the last war. This is because in the new Britain of the Welfare State and general economic prosperity

⁵Ibid. pp.84-85.

politics has not been a vital issue. Personal rather than social questions have been a concern.)

It is difficult to illustrate negatives, but this quotation from Guy McCrone's The Striped Umbrella (1937) shows the blind unseeing gentility that characterises much of the middle class approach to Glasgow and her social problems:

"Marion was glad that the man had decided to keep in the flow of the traffic, taking his way by Renfield Street, Union Street, Jamaica Street and thus across the river. For so she remained in the streaming procession of noise and light. She saw the lights of the river front mirrored in the water and the shining windows of the trains moving above her on the Central Station bridge.

They had crossed the Clyde, and were on the south side of the city.

The streets became meaner, lined with poorer tenements or factories. In such quarters as these the greater part of Glasgow lived. Strange, and a little alarming! She tried to visualize life as it must be lived there. She found she could not." 6

So much for the "strange and a little alarming"! The novel proceeds as a genteel romance with Marion at the centre and never a glimpse of the dark side of the city. Glasgow is a recitation of street names. Similarly, where, we may ask are the slums in O. Douglas's books, or the Depression in George Woden's or Archibald Crawford's, to name but a few? Woden wrote three novels during the

⁶ McCrone, Guy. The Striped Umbrella 1937. p.5.

Thirties which dealt with contemporary Glasgow - Tammenbrae (1935), The Bailie's Tale (1937), Happiness Has No Story (1938) - and managed to ignore everything outwith a faded middle class environment. Crawford was a Conservative politician who spoke and wrote on economic affairs but his Tartan Shirts (1937) is totally oblivious to the real world. It is a trivial and badly written fantasy about intrigues in the clothing trade. However, more important than those who altogether ignored working class Glasgow and the Depression are the writers who paid it lip service and then proceeded to nullify its political significance by filtering their vision, and imposing a bland middle class interpretation. They react not with anger but bewilderment and dismay, and never think to question the system. George Blake's The Shipbuilders (1935) is the foremost novel here. It is a creditable attempt at rendering the ethos of industrial Scotland, although Blake's success is only partial. As we have seen the decline of Clyde shipbuilding and the subsequent social distress does not provoke in him a protest, but a lament for the passing of old ways. The Depression assumes the status not of a crisis of capitalism, but a side effect of modernism. He is concerned to work the traditions of industrial Scotland into a myth, but not to examine the basis and consequences of that industrialism. He idealises the working man, the employer, and the relationship between them. We are shown unemployment only as it affects one individual and its effects

are relatively mild. Poverty, squalor, and social unrest never appear. Danny, the hero, is as unconscious of the class struggle as any kailyard figure, and Blake applauds his stance. The variety and vigour of Glasgow life are elevated at the expense of the sordid side. For example:

"To think that a chap could live all his life along the Dumbarton Road and never realise the variety and fascination on free display only a mile away! Had a Communist, taking advantage of his condition, pointed the sharpness of the contrast, Danny would not have listened. Times were hard for some, ⁷ but Glasgow lived still."

The attitude behind this passage is in essence the same as Gibbon complained about in his article on The Mourners a year earlier. In Blake's David and Joanna published in 1936 we again see the Depression as a symptom of the modern world, not of capitalism. The description of Mr. Balharrie illustrates the identification. Blake sees him as:

"a pathetic figure, an absurd survival from another age. The straw hat, the alpaca jacket, the beard - they were not of the world of fast cars and unemployment and Sunday breaking hoards. That richly allusive and deliberate flow of information had no place in an era of screaming headlines, popular education and ⁸ catchwords."

Dot Allan's attitude was much the same. Her Deepening River (1932) is in three parts. The first two are historical, dealing with eighteenth and nineteenth

⁷ Blake, George. The Shipbuilders 1935 p.164.

⁸ Blake, George. David And Joanna 1936 p.120.

century Glasgow, but the third takes us to the years after the Great War, when, the boom period past, Clyde shipbuilding is ailing. Like The Shipbuilders Allan's concern is less with how this affects the community than the romantic notions about a tradition in decline, and things are seen from the employers' point of view. She does realise that there is something far wrong in the contemporary situation but in her attempt to confront the problem she is vague and uncertain. Her analysis amounts to little more than the feeling that modern employers, in contrast to those of the past, are soft and selfish, neglecting their businesses for their private pleasure; again a romantic attitude. She rejects socialism in favour of a plea for better understanding and greater kindness between individuals. The novel, written at the height of the depression, ends on a none too convincing note of hope, as its heroine decides to keep the family shipyard open despite the bleak economic outlook. It is not, however, surprising that the author, the daughter of a wealthy ironmaster, should not question the basis of the system on which her own prosperity was founded. Two years after Deepening River she published Hunger March (1934), which, despite its title, is not about the problems of unemployment, but about the personal lives of a group of mainly middle class individuals whose paths cross on the fringe of a large demonstration being held in George Square. The crowds in the street are little more than a picturesque background for the stories played out in the buildings surrounding the square, although there is some, albeit

superficial, attempt to tackle the question of the Depression. We see, as in Deepening River and The Shipbuilders, the situation of a long established firm about to close down, and the dilemma of the owner who has to decide whether to finish the old song or to struggle on against the odds. Allan decides on a note of hope again, and refrains from putting up the shutters. She also brings in the revolutionary solution - in the figure of Nimrod the socialist - only to knock it down again in favour of religion. A convert from socialism to religion explains the author's thesis:

"That no kind of political readjustment, no state of communism, or if preferred Nationalism, was going to save the country. A country such as this, parched and resentful of the marauding spectre of famine, no man born of woman was capable of saving. There was only Christ."⁹

It is also the easy way out for a writer without the intellect or courage to approach the situation in any really meaningful way, or to rock the Establishment boat. Allan's abilities lay in the field of light women's fiction, and she was out of her depth in attempting anything more serious. We can see in the internal structure of a single novel, Clyde Valley (1938) by Catherine Gavin, how this sort of mind shrinks from the real Glasgow and lets the soft eye take over. She was another woman writer moved by the Thirties to tackle serious questions which, like Allan, she does not prove

⁹Allan, Dot. Hunger March 1934 p.278.

up to. Clyde Valley starts as if it is going to be an account of the effects of the slump on Clydeside but soon proves to be little more than the story of a middle class love affair. Issues are raised and characters are introduced to be completely forgotten when the romantic interest takes over and dominates the novel. This is summed up in the different attitudes seen in these two quotations, one from the beginning, the other from the end of the novel:

"No one could rejoice here, where the shadow had lain for two years. It was a town of death, and there, just across the road, above the little boy with his sandwich boards, above the "Scottish Bluebell" rose the corpse, the dead hulk of the giant Cunarder, no. 999 in John Brown's yard." 10

And:

"She knew now that she need never be afraid of forgetting Kennedy's face. He would live in all the beautiful things she had still to see: never a moonrise or a dewfall but would bring her lover back to her." 11

This raises an important point, for it is often difficult, when dealing with women writers, to determine whether their apparent philosophy stems from their political convictions or their sex. As a rule they are not temperamentally inclined to confront the sort of situations an industrial society creates.*

¹⁰Gavin, Catherine. Clyde Valley 1938 p.13.

¹¹Ibid. p.271.

*See below Chapter Eight.

What we have been looking at so far are novels which seem, allowing for considerable aberrations, to represent the dominant political outlook of the genre. There is little explicit political comment but we can identify what is essentially a non-aggressive conservatism, a philosophy of moderation and "no change". It does not quite square with the image of Red Clydeside. To sum it up we can do no better than quote a passage which occurs incidentally (significantly) in Thomas Muir's The Sea Road (1957):

"It disturbed him for it seemed the height of nonsense that working men could ever hope to run an engineering concern like McKechnie and Lorimer's. He was all for the established order of things - a competitive world in which the only way to achieve anything was to stick in and work for it with 12 no help from anybody."

Yet we cannot ignore the propagandists. There are a number of novels which take an explicit political stand, both to the left and right of the trend we have considered. The left wingers are a twentieth century phenomenon and as a group are more coherent in their outlook, and more concerned with general political and economic philosophy than the right wingers, who span the period and are inclined to react to some specific situation. The nineteenth century threw up two such works, the Rev. Henry Duncan's The Young South Country Weaver (1821) and the anonymous How Glasgow Ceased to Flourish (1884). Duncan's

¹²Muir, Thomas. The Sea Road 1957 p.211.

book was born out of the period of economic depression and political unrest that followed the Napoleonic Wars. This was a nationwide phenomenon and was met by ruthless repression by the Establishment. In the Glasgow area a small armed uprising was put down in February 1820 and there were executions and transportations. A notice in the Glasgow Courier of 4 April 1820 captures the spirit of the times:

" 300 Pounds Reward.

WHEREAS, certain wicked, evil-disposed, and traitorous Persons during the night of the 1st or on the morning of the 2nd of April instant, did FELONIOUSLY, TRAITOROUSLY and DARINGLY in furtherance of a CONSPIRACY to compass or imagine the death of our Lord the King or to LEVY WAR AGAINST OUR LORD THE KING, within his Realm, or to commit other Treasons, PUBLISH and AFFIX on the walls and public places in many parts of the city and suburbs of Glasgow and other parts of the County of Lanark, a most WICKED, REVOLUTIONARY and TREASONABLE ADDRESS to the inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland

The LORD PROVOST and MAGISTRATES of the city of Glasgow, SHERIFF of the county of Lanark and JUSTICES of the PEACE for the lower ward of Lanarkshire hereby offer a

REWARD OF
THREE HUNDRED POUNDS

to any person or Persons who shall, within fourteen days from this date, DISCOVER and APPREHEND, or cause to be DISCOVERED and APPREHENDED, those guilty of THIS OVERT ACT OF TREASON¹³

T.C. Smout writes of the period that "it is meaningful to use the expression "class war" to describe the motives for a great many of the actions of employers,

¹³The Glasgow Courier April 4 1820.

judges, and middle class writers when faced with the labouring classes whom they regarded as a threat to their own power or property."¹⁴ John Galt, for example, feared and distrusted the radicals and in The Gathering Of The West (1823) painted a highly unfavourable picture of their influence among the weavers. The Young South Country Weaver is Duncan's contribution to this class war, a staunchly reactionary novel designed to dispel any radical notions in the minds of the lower orders. It is anti-democratic and elitist. Duncan puts his message over in several ways. There is his extremely crude characterisation, where the radicals are ignorant vicious drunkards and their opponents clean living, God fearing, and modest men. The radical orator who comes to Glasgow to incite the populace is little more than an idiot. He bases his argument on a denunciation of the power of the bishops, without realising there are none in Scotland. More important however is the number of set-piece debates which purport to deal with the arguments for and against radicalism, and which always end in triumph for the conservative point of view. A character for example complains about the high level of taxation only to be countered by the hero, William:

"As lang as the taxes dinna pu' down the rich the poor labourer has little to complain o' for if he gets work and good wages that's a' he wants. To be sure he pays mair than used to be paid for his tea, and his sugar, and his whisky and his braw claes, but he gets high wages which makes him able to pay, and what the waur is he?" ¹⁵

¹⁴ Smout, T.C. A History Of The Scottish People 1560-1830. p.448.

¹⁵ Duncan, The Rev. Henry. The Young South Country Weaver or a Journey To Glasgow 1821 p.31.

A dubious argument, to say the least.

Though the reactionaries invariably get the last word Duncan fails to put over their case with either skill or intelligence. Their philosophy is neither properly understood, nor adequately expressed. Again for example the question of electoral reform: the hero believes that "universal suffrage as it is called, would be a curse instead of a blessing."¹⁶ His grounds are that he has seen drunkenness and corruption at elections.

Formal argument is more in evidence in the first half of the novel than in the second, where the author contrives to ridicule the liberal ideals of freedom and democracy by showing the chaos they cause when put into practice in the family circle. In the home of the hero's uncle, a radical weaver, we are faced with a picture of family life in disintegration. Ingratitude, vice and blasphemy reign in place of duty, respect and parental authority. In presenting this however Duncan does his case little good for it is clear to the reader that ideals best suited to the family unit become ridiculously inappropriate when applied to the body politic. He tries to use the instance of an ungrateful son to justify the denial of democratic rights to the majority of his countrymen.

The author himself will speak out in his own voice, to denounce for example those fed from "the vile sink of

¹⁶Ibid. p.47.

Thomas Pain's abominations" or to proclaim a God in the Old Testament mould.

Duncan was extreme in his views. Yet for all the reactionary outlook, the advocacy of spying and informing, and the direct urging of labourers to denounce their fellows, he was no sycophantic self-seeker. He forsook a career in banking for the ministry, opted to serve in a poor parish, and during an economic depression brought corn from Liverpool for his parishioners at his own expense. He was above all paternalistic and The Weaver should be seen as a product of his genuine concern for the welfare of the lower classes, based on the belief that their happiness was best assured through a religious acceptance of their lot and a determined attempt at self-help. Respect for authority and not conflict was the route to follow. It is basically the kailyard point of view.

For the rest of the nineteenth century the Glasgow novel was to produce nothing as political as The Weaver. The nearest example came in 1884 with the appearance of How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish: A Tale of 1890. The authorship is unknown but it is easy to imagine some retired red-faced general, indignant about inadequate defence spending, producing it over a couple of bottles of port. It is a science fiction tale which in the eyes of a contemporary reviewer "actually brings home to us the ruinous character of the leading tendencies of British politics both domestic and foreign to the present day

Let us hope it may have the effect of arousing us, as it ought, to a sense of the danger we are in."¹⁷ The book focuses in particular on the destruction of the Clyde as a centre of shipbuilding and cites a number of things as the reason. Although it is more than half a century removed from The Weaver in time, the thought behind the novel is very similar. It is the product of a mind out of tune with the movements of a commercial age, an old fashioned high Tory reaction that disapproves of the actions of both masters and men. "Laissez Faire" the author says "may be carried too far,"¹⁸ and one of its results, trade unionism, is thoroughly condemned. Because of it "labour in certain branches was extremely scarce (in 1890) and this had the effect of retarding business and keeping large numbers of workmen in idleness."¹⁹ The wealthy of industrial society, for their disregard for the welfare of the poor, are equally at fault:

"You boast of the splendour of your 'west ends', but turn to the 'rookeries'. There is small comfort to be derived from the contemplation of a select few living in affluence while millions of human beings are dragging out an existence scarcely removed from savagery in your midst." 20

It is a paternalistic creed based on duty and responsibility. More important however is the government's failure to take the necessary steps to protect the

¹⁷The Bailie 12.3.1884.

¹⁸Anonymous. How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish 1884 p.26.

¹⁹Ibid. p.3.

²⁰Ibid. p.24.

nation from external foes. He has a number of complaints. He shows his opposition to a series of unspecified army reforms - probably those initiated by Cardwell in the 1870s - which, although they modernised the army, were resisted by much of its old guard. His grouse about insufficient finance for the armed forces is understandable when seen in the context of the Liberal administration of 1880-85 and Gladstone's niggardliness over the defence estimates. The results of this, as predicted in the novel, are very much in keeping with the mood of the times, which in the field of foreign policy was dominated by the shadow of Russia. The Eastern Question and the tensions that came from Russian expansion in the Balkans created in Britain a strong anti-Russian feeling which periodically boiled up into popular jingoism and demands for war. R.G.K. Ensor points out that till as late as 1885 "Great Britain was still regarded as Russia's natural adversary."²¹ It is thus not surprising that in our novel the source from which Glasgow reaps the whirlwind is Russia. A Russian fleet sails up the Clyde, unchallenged, sinks the pleasure steamer "Ivanho", then proceeds to destroy the shipyards. With their ruin a chain reaction sets in, thousands of workers are made idle, food riots occur, other businesses start to fold and the city heads towards chaos. This then is what will happen if the author's warnings are not heeded. As a work of both science fiction and propaganda

²¹Ensor, R.G.K. England 1870-1914. 1936 p.195.

it is crude and unsuccessful. It is nothing more than a simple essay cataloguing, rather than dramatising, the possible consequences of contemporary policies, and doing so without any subtlety or imagination.

How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish is aimed at the reconsideration of certain specific policies and items of legislation; however the next major production of the political right (apart from the kailyard novels), George Blake's The Wild Men (1925), is a very different piece of work. Again it is a response to the times, but to something wider than the debates of conventional politics, rather to the existence in Glasgow of left-wing activists seeking to overthrow the status quo and establish socialism. This was the time of revolutionary politics in the city, dominated by figures like John Maclean, and it is his name which immediately springs to mind when reading The Wild Men. Dan Dalveen, Blake's agitator, is portrayed with little subtlety. He is a purely one sided figure unfairly presented as a typical socialist. He has no real human feelings, only a rigid dialecticism. His wife's death:

"It was typical of him that the sad personal memory of Sarah did not haunt him and that the fate of the child hardly occurred to him as a near problem. The offence to his own egotism hurt most terribly, and that he justified to himself as a righteous indignation against a social crime. The habit of the demagogue moved him. He saw himself the champion of the poor and the oppressed. His truculent passion against authority he believed to be the emotion of the liberator."²²

²²Blake, George. The Wild Men. 1925 p.33.

The egotism is important for the novel equates revolutionary fervour with personal conceit. Dalveen's son, Paddy, who follows in his father's footsteps as a revolutionary, is another illustration of the same idea, and even more so than with Dan we see how emotional problems become rationalised into a political creed. The description of the boy's growth to manhood - reared by an aunt after the death of his mother and the disappearance of Dalveen - is the best feature of the novel. Paddy seems to have been modelled on young Gourlay in The House With The Green Shutters. He is a weakling, is over sensitive and has an imagination that is too highly developed. He has little intelligence:

"All his feeling and thinking were done in such symbols, and the fearsome pictures were predominant. Lonely, he escaped them by inventing in his quick imagination a world of his own, a lighted rich world in which he walked a nobleman." 23

Blake handles with honesty and delicacy the fears of this boy coming into puberty, his disgust with the physical aspect of sex, and the fact that all he can recognise is sentimentality. His first relationship with a girl is well drawn: the awkwardness, the temporary elation, the despair when she spurns him. It becomes clear that the great need in Paddy's life is for love, and his involvement in political activity is an extension of this craving. It is Rourke, another

²³Ibid. p.112.

revolutionary, who crystallises Paddy's feelings into a political form and "he loved the man who was to be his leader, and made absurd heroic protestations of his will to die for the cause if need be."²⁴

The course of the plot is ludicrously melodramatic, with Blake playing for cheap sensation on the popular myths about revolutionaries. Paddy, still a youth, becomes an overnight success as "The Boy Orator" and a major left-wing figure. His father, removed from the scene by prison, then a spell abroad, returns to Glasgow and takes his place again as a leading light in the movement. Father and son however are not yet aware of each other's respective identities. The return of Dalveen removes Paddy from the limelight somewhat and we again become aware of how much the latter's ideals are a projection of his egotism, firstly in his jealousy, then in his hatred, for his father. Meanwhile things have been happening in the background - Blake is vague as to the exact details - but Glasgow is suddenly presented as a city on a powder keg, poised to explode in violent revolution. The "terrible monster" of working class unrest has become organised and armed. The description of the sinister conspiracy behind it shows just how much the novel is fantasy and how little it has to do with real life. As one of the reds says: "We have arms - rifles, revolvers, ammunition, even a few machine guns got from our good friends in Ireland - and these are distributed ready."²⁵ How this situation is defused is again vague

²⁴Ibid. p.169.

²⁵Ibid. p.280.

and unconvincing. The novel concentrates only on a narrow personal level and not on the more widespread events. The confrontation between Dalveen and Paddy comes to a head, the latter just refraining from shooting his father. By this time Dalveen has shown himself a coward and has been bought over by the city's establishment.

The Wild Men is a simplistic view of politics, attributing "extremism" to emotional problems and ignoring the roles of such things as disinterested idealism or the hatred of injustice. Like The Shipbuilders it is blinkered by a middle class consciousness that refuses to recognise the implications of the more unpleasant aspects of society. Blake sketches in a drab background which is authentic but which remains nothing more than a background. The environment never becomes a political issue. It is not until the last paragraph of the novel that the melodrama gives way to the posing of a serious question:

"Meanwhile in the grey slums of Glasgow huddled in filthy rooms, breathing foetid air, starving, the children of darkness waited in endless patience for the saviour who would break their chains and lead them out into the sunlight, some day, some day...."²⁶

Social change then, is obviously desirable, but how to get it is left unexplained. Blake is more concerned with attacking socialism than with calling for reform. The Wild Men leaves us with nothing more positive than a

²⁶Ibid. p. 319.

vague notion of compromise. Dalveen, when he forsakes his revolutionary aspirations, is smiled on by Blake: "He was mature and he could compromise."²⁷ While Paddy, retaining his ideals, is not. "He was young and he could not compromise."²⁸ Even this however is never developed into any kind of meaningful affirmation but stands as a superficial afterthought tagged on at the end of the novel to provide what has been lacking throughout - a positive moral centre.

Rather different are John Buchan's Huntingtower (1922) and Neil Gunn's The Lost Chart (1949). They are adventure stories where a right wing political ideal is crucial to the plot. Both novels are less a reaction to domestic matters than events on the world stage, in particular the changing role of the Soviet Union. Huntingtower is inspired by Buchan's misgivings about the recent Bolshevik revolution, while The Lost Chart reflects the attitudes of the west during the cold war period. Buchan's novel is in his usual romantic mould, featuring aristocratic Russian exiles fleeing, with a collection of priceless jewels, from the clutches of the new regime. These jewels are to be used to finance the counter revolution. The Bolshevik agents have pursued them to the West of Scotland, but the ends of this sinister conspiracy are foiled by Dickson McCunn, a retired Glasgow grocer, and a band of street urchins, named the Gorbals Diehards. Huntingtower is inferior to most of the author's better known novels,

²⁷Ibid. p.311.

²⁸Ibid. p.309.

at times is clichéd and obvious. His considerable narrative skill is still apparent nevertheless. The author's political attitudes are evident not only in the implications of the plot but in his eulogy to the middle classes. Saskia, the high born Russian heroine, issues a warning about the Bolsheviks:

"You good people in England think they are well meaning dreamers who are forced into violence by the persecution of Western Europe. But you are wrong. Some honest fools there are among them, but the power - the true power - lies with madmen and degenerates, and they have for allies the special devil that dwells in each country." 29

Later on in the novel she goes on to explain, with a note of wishful thinking, that "it is not Bolshevism the theory you need fear, for that is a weak and dying thing. It is crime"³⁰ Seemingly the upheavals in Russia have released a torrent of dark forces which have spread into an international crime network.

It is meaningful to see Huntingtower as Buchan's small contribution to the determined move by the British establishment to discredit not only the revolution, but those in Britain who would take it as an example. The novel however also shows the more general hatred of the left to be found in most of his other works. He pours scorn for example on Mr. Heritage, the old Etonian, who sees himself as a champion of the workers. McCunn points out his error:

²⁹Buchan, John. Huntingtower 1922 p.91.

³⁰Ibid. p.190.

"You idealise the working man, you and your kind, because you're ignorant. You say that he's seeking for truth, when all he's looking for is a drink and a rise in wages. And when you run down what you call the middle classes that do three quarters of the world's work and keep the machines going and the working man in a job, then I feel you're talking havers." 31

As Saskia says of Mr. Middle Class, at the end of the novel, "he is the stuff that above all makes a great people. He will endure when aristocrats crack and proletariats crumble."³² Buchan is aggressively right-wing and baldly asserts his views without any compromise. Whereas his modern counterpart is more likely to play down the idea of class, and maintain the idea of a common interest, he openly takes sides. In contrast to the middle classes, the workers are good hearted but stupid:

"Wee Jackie went to a Socialist Sunday school last winter because he heard they were for fechtin' battles. Ay, and they telled him he was to jine a thing called an International, and Jaikie thought it was a fitba' club. But when he found out there was no magic lantern or swaree at Christmas he gied it the chuck." 33

The heroics of the Diehards are a mixture of the comic and the sort of stiff-upper-lip cult of manliness found in the Richard Hannay stories. It is a picture made possible only by the filtering of reality, by deliberately ignoring poverty and the unpleasant aspects of slum life.

³¹Ibid. p.38.

³²Ibid. p.276.

³³Ibid. p.177,

The Diehards are ridiculously idealised, their rags and the squalor of their situation is overshadowed by their noble sentiments and their military pretensions.*

The Lost Chart is a very different novel. On one level it is a spy thriller about the loss of a secret naval chart, on another a symbolic and mythological journey. F.R. Hart has spoken of it as a "dangerous quest for the lost paradigm or 'key', set in a world of modern violence yet displaced in the protagonist's vision and ours onto the 'other landscape' where all stories are one story and all times one."³⁴ It is appropriate that he should furnish this description, for its pretentious obscurity is matched only by what we find in the novel. The Lost Chart is confusing both in terms of its plot and its philosophy. Gunn insists on imposing on the story what can only be regarded as phoney mysticism - since it is vague and inadequately realised, consisting of a mumbo-jumbo of pretentious language instead of any coherent thought. When Dermot the spy is questioned on his motives he replies that his aim is "to save the white swan of the songs I mean that these swallows are after the swan, that they'll kill it."³⁵ The effect is that the plot becomes obscure and fails to hold our attention. Characters become insubstantial and incredible. To be fair to Gunn, however, the political element - the identification of British

*See below Chapter Nine.

³⁴Hart, Francis Russell. Comedy And Transcendence In Neil Gunn's Later Fiction in Neil Gunn: The Man And The Water. ed. by Alexander Scott and Douglas Gifford 1973 p. 245.

³⁵Gunn, Neil Miller. The Lost Chart 1949 p.241.

trade unionists with subversion and treason - is less a testament to any political interest on the author's part than an attempt at topicality in the neurotic red-hunting days of the late 1940s.

The Left Wing Novels

By the very nature of their relationship with society the left-wing novels are protests whereas those on the right are defensive at heart. It is with the protests that the question of realism arises, especially the novels of Patrick MacGill and Samuel McKechnie. We have already examined these books so I will deal here only with their political thought. MacGill's two novels in the Glasgow genre, Children Of the Dead End (1914) and The Ratpit (1915), are dark and bitter realism which expose the hardships inflicted on the poor by capitalist society. He is direct and uncompromising in his criticism of those he considers oppressors:

"The Church allows a criminal commercial system to continue and wastes its time trying to save the souls of the victims of that system. Christianity preaches contentment to the wage slaves and hob nobs with the slave drivers, therefore the Church is the betrayer of the people. The Church soothes those who are robbed but never condemns the robber who is usually a pillar of Christianity."³⁶

There is however little theoretical comment in his books. He never attempts to analyse the structure of

³⁶MacGill, Patrick. Children Of The Dead End 1914 p.256.

capitalism but is content merely to abuse its more obvious beneficiaries and point out glaring wrongs. His aim is not to help the reader to any kind of understanding of the system, but to whip up anger against it. The language is emotive and the technique unconsciously reflects MacGill's philosophy, for his socialism was without any real intellectual basis. It is an emotional thing, a convenient label for the anger that was his reaction to life's injustices. So much is obvious in Dermot's (MacGill's) description of his conversion to socialism:

"When I heard the words spoken by the socialists at the street corners a fire of enthusiasm seized me, and I knew that the world was moving and that men and women of the country were waking from the torpor of poverty full of a new faith for a new cause. I joined the socialist party." 37

One suspects indeed that he did not really understand the full complexities of the creed he was espousing and that any sort of abstract thinking would have been less than completely comprehended. At one point for example he becomes dangerously vague when he "tried to explain to Joe that time and space did not really exist and that they were only illusions used for practical purposes."³⁸ He was the product of Irish rural society where the concepts of capitalism and socialism were largely inappropriate, and although he lived in, and

³⁷Ibid. p. 140.

³⁸Ibid. p. 224.

wrote of, Glasgow, the life he knew there was more that of an outcast on the periphery of Scottish industrial society than a full member of it.

The writers who came later had an altogether better grasp of these matters. During the Thirties the left wing novel in Glasgow was part of a wider literary trend. The idea of the "proletarian novel" was in the air both in Britain and America, and there are a number of similarities between the Glasgow examples and works like Walter Greenwood's Love On The Dole (1933). The same kind of characters and situations come up time and again - worn-out old men, dole queues, disillusioned youths. For instance Brian in Gael Over Glasgow is immediately comparable with Greenwood's Harry Hardcastle. Yet it would be wrong to push the affinities too far, for the Glasgow writers did bring a distinctive response of their own. In Gael Over Glasgow for example (like The Shipbuilders) the Depression means not only the lack of work but the severance of traditions of craftsmanship peculiar to Clydeside. Yet it is important to note that while united in their discontent with the record of Scottish capitalism the hard core of political protesters in the Glasgow tradition - Shiels, Barke, McKechnie and Lambert - were by no means in agreement about the remedy. There were distinctions, at times considerable ones, in philosophy, and broadly speaking we can see a ladder of extremism with Shiels the moderate at the bottom, Barke at the top and McKechnie and Lambert

in between. Their novelistic methods also varied, although in no case did they lead to a particularly good novel. Even Barke, whose The Land Of The Leal (1939) is a Scottish novel of some importance, produced in the ambitious political novel, Major Operation, an awkward failure.

It is useful to illustrate the difference between the two poles, Shiels and Barke, by noting the respective importance to them of the Depression. It is doubtful for example if Gael Over Glasgow (1937) would ever have been written but for the peculiar circumstances of these years. It is specifically a reaction to the slump whereas Major Operation is a reaction to the whole concept of capitalism. This is not to say that the former is not aware of its more objectionable economic and social truths, but that it required the jolt of a national crisis to make him confront them. He is not a natural revolutionary. Yet he does see what life is like for the poor:

"He and his mates left the slums every morning to build palatial liners that were the wonder of the world; suffered struggled and sweated to build the world's food carriers; and returned to the slums again, to the frying pan, the sink and one lavatory for three families." 39

However Gael Over Glasgow is a relatively mild book where a youth's growth into manhood, honestly told and

³⁹Shiels, Edward. Gael Over Glasgow 1937 p.26.

not without touches of romance and sentimentality, is set against the background of unemployment in Clydebank. The tone is sad, not bitter, the waste of life conjures up regret not anger, and there is little sympathy for the sort of class conscious agitation indulged in by the revolutionary left. Shiels is a moderate man and the idea of the communists - particularly active in his area - hold no attractions for him. This rejection of Marxism lies in its incompatibility with the author's Catholicism and we see him constantly revile its proponents. "The communists themselves," he says, "realised little of the implications of the doctrine they preached. All the workers were, and should be, prepared to fight for economic justice. But communism was something more than that. It was the propagation of a materialistic philosophy. And here Brian saw clearly the tragic absurdity of communism....."

..... But the communists arrogantly expected Christian workers to surrender their beliefs to materialism, a materialism which was now as dead as the dodo, and these 'advanced' rebels only perpetuated an echo of the Victorianism they continually sneered at."⁴⁰

Of what then is Shiels in favour? This is never made clear. At one point the Labour Party seems to hold the answer, but later on it is dismissed with all the other alternatives. The hero says: "I haven't any politics. I mean I can have a choice between

⁴⁰Ibid. p.151.

Socialism and Toryism. What have these to offer Scotland? What have they done for it, or plan to do for its derelict industrial areas?"⁴¹ Like MacGill, Shiels is noticeably lacking in any solid theory, and the thought of the novel is muddled. What comes over is a distinct radicalism but its exact form is never made clear. Things moreover are complicated by the religious note - "a society without God is an insane society"⁴² - which sits awkwardly with the politics. The thoroughly unsatisfactory ending to the novel becomes less surprising beside the fact that Shiels himself seems unable to reconcile his diverse thoughts in any coherent philosophy. He takes his hero out of Clydebank, away to an idyllic rural job, and forgets about all the other problems he has raised.

Major Operation in contrast is not just a novel inspired by mass unemployment, but is a thorough and detailed economic and political treatise. Its appeal is to the intellect and not the emotions, and it is one of the most important - though not one of the best - novels in the genre. The best indication of Barke's approach is the quotation from Engels with which he prefaces the book:

"The forces operating in society operate exactly like the forces operating in Nature: blindly, violently, destructively so long as we do not understand them and fail to take them into account. But when once we have recognised and understood how they work, their direction and their effects, the gradual subjection of them to our will and the use of them for the attainment of our aims depends entirely upon ourselves."⁴³

⁴¹Ibid. p.351.

⁴²Ibid. p.167.

⁴³Barke, James. Major Operation 1936 Preface.

By sound analysis and determination then, the structure of society can be understood and altered, and it is around this belief that the novel is built. Barke's purpose is threefold; firstly to make the reader aware of the essential nature of society, secondly to inspire in him a desire for change, and thirdly to briefly indicate the means of attaining this. A number of methods are involved including the personal observation and comments of the author, the actions of the characters, and in particular, a series of formal and informal discussions between the two chief protagonists. Much of the analysis is in the form of small potted lectures which are dispersed throughout the novel, and which comment on and explain aspects of the story. These are generally not very deep but are sharp and to the point, on the level of good journalism or popular sociology. A Marxist standpoint is frequently evident. The picnic for example:

"Rowatt's party looked incongruous sitting round the white cloth on the green grass: looked utterly alien and uncomfortable: as if they didn't belong. The Gael had always seemed inevitable. There is significance in this. The social forces that had gone to the making and fashioning of the Gael were different from those that had shaped and were shaping Rowatt and his friends. The Gael could not survive into a world of expanding capitalist production: Rowatt and company looked uncomfortable on the stage they had departed."⁴⁴

More important than these however is the series of conversations which make up the long middle section of

⁴⁴Ibid. p. 96.

the novel and provide a sustained look at the essentials of Barke's Marxist philosophy. They are the core of the novel. Jock MacKelvie, shipyard worker and revolutionary, and George Anderson, failed middle class businessman, meet in the ward of a Glasgow hospital where they are both confined after an operation. They become friends and MacKelvie determines to convert the other to his political ideals. "The greatest difficulty would be to convince him of the class nature of society. Unless he got him to understand this clearly there would be no progress."⁴⁵ But over the weeks they are together there is progress, so much so that by the end of his sojourn Anderson has come round to MacKelvie's way of thinking. Their range of topics is wide and varied - God and the universe, imperialism, unemployment, class hatred, economics - all of them interpreted from a decidedly Marxist standpoint. Even love is a subject for dialectics:

"Now we can deal with the question of love! Centuries of unrealist and romantic approach to the question of sexual mating, arising from a desire very often to cloak over the ugly realities of it, has resulted in the belief that there is something extraordinary about the condition of being in love. And this leads to the attitude that love is something over and apart from the conditions that give rise to it"

His final comment:

"What a commentary on bourgeois love!"⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ibid. p.292.

⁴⁶Ibid. p.325.

In employing this sort of discursive method Barke is very obviously modelling himself on Robert Tressell's The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists (1906), the great classic of British socialist literature. (Indeed McKechnie and Lambert too copy it to an extent.) However, while Barke is every bit as successful as Tressell in explaining his political and social views, managing as he does to give an articulate Marxist critique of Scottish society, he cannot in this novel match Tressell in artistry. Major Operation is fatally stricken with didacticism, by the number of long and unrelievedly serious passages of philosophy. It slows down the action unpardonably and loses the reader's interest. There is just not enough sugar on the pill, and while there is no denying the clarity and logic of most of his arguments we badly miss the sort of comedy that makes this bearable in The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists. Moreover, it has unfortunate effects on characterisation. In the dialogues between Anderson and MacKelvie the latter's long speeches are too formal, too coherent and well organised to be the spontaneous outpourings of a sick working man. Barke's people can also be faulted on other occasions. At times their talk is artificial; their actions wooden, particularly when he is dealing with love. He can also be guilty of overwriting, of grandiose and pretentious statements that verge on the ridiculous, like the meaningless pseudo-mystical description of Anderson in his new job:

"Here was the world robbed of all its
 terror and horror. Almost it was a
 state of non being: a complete merging
 and identity of the physical and
 psychical in a harmonious whole:
 the dichotomous division healing,
 coming together in unison,
 recreating the One" 47

Nor is he very successful in his use of the
 sustained metaphor which provides the novel's title.
 Not only do the two central figures undergo surgery,
 but Glasgow and society in general is seen as sick
 and in need of treatment - of a major operation. Barke
 throughout keeps drawing appropriate comparisons: "It
 cannot be denied that the Second City is suffering from
 low blood pressure. Rather a dangerous thing low blood
 pressure."⁴⁸ While this sort of personification may in
 moderation be telling, despite its crudity, used time
 and time again it becomes contrived and awkward. It
 must be admitted however that the author does have a
 talent for well struck phrases and for colourful prose,
 especially when he is expressing anger or contempt.

Barke's writing is at its most fiery when he is
 talking about class, a point worth mentioning because
 an acute class consciousness is one of the most important
 features of Major Operation. Class is present of course
 as one reality of the structure of society as comprehended
 by MacKelvie and the author, but perhaps more significantly
 it exists as a major source of his inspiration and a
 focal point for his most vitriolic abuse and his warmest

⁴⁷Ibid. p.443.

⁴⁸Ibid. p.440.

praises. He creates a moral scheme where working class is equated with all that is good, and middle class with what is worthless. Marriage provides a prime example. MacKelvie and his wife are poor and live in cramped surroundings, yet their relationship is warm and secure. In contrast, Anderson's wife Mabel is unfaithful to him at the best of times, is selfish, conceited, and altogether unpleasant, but when his business fails and illness strikes she runs off with one of his friends. Again however friendship among the working classes is less fragile:

"They were workmates and they were friends. The fact that MacKelvie was not going to join the I.L.P. made no difference to their friendship. First they were mates: comrades of the dock bottom. Nothing was going to be allowed to stand in the way of that comradeship." 49

It is of course a completely biased outlook, a vision totally in black and white, but nevertheless a useful stance as it furnishes something to satisfy the author's second requirement - inspiration for change. It whips up the emotions, raises disgust, anger, and hatred against the middle classes who do so much to perpetuate capitalism. Barke's own direct comments on the subject are numerous and range from thoughtful observations to angry diatribes. Here are two examples:

"The crowd in Sauchiehall Street was a middle class crowd; the crowd in Argyle Street was a working class crowd. In

⁴⁹Ibid. p.67.

Dumbarton Road the crowd was more finely divided. On the north side paraded the better working class: on the south side the slum dwellers. Between ran two sets of tram lines. They might have been a barbed wire entanglement." 50

Again:

"She had been trained to be a lady, a social parasite. Her only aim in life had been to achieve mating with another social parasite: a gentleman. As a lady her position was maintained by the wage-slavery of some forty human beings. Thus she was never devoid of clothes, food shelter or entertainment. But the wage-slavery of forty million wage-slaves cannot secure happiness for their owners." 51

Given that we now want revolution of some sort how are we to achieve it? In common with the vast majority of books of this type the "how" is inevitably destined to remain only partly answered. To suggest too specific a solution is to limit the novel's relevance to a particular set of circumstances at a particular place at a particular time. Major Operation however not only responds to the immediate blight of mass unemployment - with a call for increasing agitation - but looks to the longer term. We are left in no doubt about the specific vehicle to take us on the road to socialism - the Communist Party. One by one the author attacks the other alternatives on the left that deviate from his own orthodox Marxism. The Labour Party is wishy-washy and reformist, its local leaders, characterised by Bailie

⁵⁰Ibid. p.85.

⁵¹Ibid. p.216.

Perk, are self-seeking buffoons. The I.L.P. is little better. "In her bones Bessie knew that the I.L.P. had been a failure: a party of false hopes and childish illusions."⁵² Yet extremism is by itself no answer. Discipline is important and he has little time for "Trotskyite and provocateur elements."⁵³ Barke sets himself very much then in the mainstream of British Marxism and bids that we follow.

Undoubtedly many readers will find Major Operation offensive. Its extreme politics and continual attacks on the middle class make no concessions to conservative taste or values. More, however, will probably find it artistically unsatisfying. Its faults cannot be denied. Yet Marxist critics have almost completely ignored them in their zeal to praise anything they find politically acceptable.^a

Samuel McKechnie's Prisoners Of Circumstance is a different type of novel. Unlike Major Operation it is concerned as much with people as with ideas. It is meant not to be analytic but to emotionalise the situation of the poor in capitalist society. Outrage and reforming zeal are the desired end. Thus as we saw in the chapter on Realism McKechnie delineates both the material

⁵²Ibid. p.282.

⁵³Ibid. p.453.

^aTheir criticism shows little sense of relative literary merit and their eulogies elevate Barke to a status besides which Dickens or Tolstoy pale into insignificance. e.g. See Robert Bonnar James Barke: A True Son Of The Soil in Essays In Honour Of William Gallacher - Humbolt University, Berlin 1966 pp.185-192. Also an article by Jack Mitchell in The Scottish Marxist No. 8. 1974.

deprivation and the mental suffering of the poor. He employs many of the stock sympathy-mongering characters of social protest fiction, the ever-suffering mother, the hungry child, the prostitute forced on the streets by poverty and the unemployed. Yet the book is not without thought. A definite socialist philosophy is apparent, not in the sort of long discussions employed by Barke, but in short bursts of polemic or as ideas forming in the head of Stuart, the son of the central character, as he moves towards left wing politics. He muses for example on educational inequality:

"Why should fools - and many of them he took it for granted were fools - be given the best education that money could buy, and people like him be denied it? They called themselves sportsmen, these public school products whose names were everywhere in the paper, but they were receiving, sportsmen as they were, opportunities that were denied to him they were afraid to death of fair competition. They had to get a long start in the race the sportsmen, they would be able to beat working class people even if they themselves had been born mentally lame." 54

On occasions moreover the author uses aspects of the world of the boy to make crude, yet effective comments on the world in general:

"He recognised only one kind of class distinction: if a boy was unsightly by reason of physical infirmities Stuart did not like to play with him. As a rule he was not called upon to do so for weakly boys lacked the energy to take part in the games most favoured by him; and for boys with bow legs,

54 McKechnie, Samuel. Prisoners Of Circumstance 1934 p.199.

twisted legs that were as thin as silver candlesticks, or legs that were thicker than the deformed feet it was an impossibility. For deformed or sickly boys he had no sympathy if an infirmity was unpleasant to him he avoided it by not playing with the afflicted boy. That was what others did when they avoided seeing or thinking about slum dwellers."⁵⁵

Like Major Operation this novel was not only a reaction to the Depression but to capitalism. And we are aware of its structure not only as story-telling technique but as an acknowledgement of the emphasis the Marxist places on history. For it deals with the life of the Frazer family not just in the 'Hungry Thirties' but over a period of two decades, placing it in a wider historical context. The background of major world and national events like the Great War, the General Strike and the elections of 1924 and 1929 is filled out with precise statistical details - figures for the number of unemployed in Glasgow, the number of Labour seats won at the elections, the proportion of the population living in single ends. Only by taking a historical viewpoint can we see the essential truths about society. As he says of Stuart and Mary:

"Their poverty was simply a repetition of what had never ceased to exist on a large scale for the longer part of two hundred years, much of it due to unemployment, much of it accounted for by low wages."⁵⁶

Similarly of two youths: "They had been unemployed

⁵⁵Ibid. p.46.

⁵⁶Ibid. p.306.

since leaving school; and the Depression had not yet started."⁵⁷

Yet McKechnie is far less positive than Barke, and Prisoners Of Circumstance ultimately comes to no conclusions. Society is sick and unfair but the way forward is not clear. He leaves us with little more than disgust and despair.

David Lambert's He Must So Live (1956) and its sequel No Time For Sleeping (1958) are curious cases, novels that seem to have been born two decades too late. The setting is the Thirties, and they are largely typical of the left wing fiction of that era, propounding the same kind of message as Barke, although in a less ambitious form. They are straightforward accounts of the personal lives and political activities of a group of foundry workers, with the emphasis on tactics and organisation rather than social conditions or characterisation. Lambert's description of background is slight and his people are competently portrayed but no more. Indeed his interest in man as a human being as opposed to a political animal is perfunctory. His attitude is uncompromising. "Communism is the greatest liberating force in the world,"⁵⁸ says Bill Omond the hero of both books, and nothing is ruled out in its pursuit. We are told at one time that "the only answer is force."⁵⁹ Yet Lambert's concern is not with general theory but

⁵⁷Ibid. p.293.

⁵⁸Lambert, David. He Must So Live 1956 p.52.

⁵⁹Ibid. p.181.

with the mechanics of the political struggle, with battles fought out in Union branches and party meetings. This makes the books somewhat arid and tedious as we are treated to exhaustive accounts of factional squabbling and negotiation. Several points emerge however. There is a deep suspicion of the Labour Party, and in the first book in particular of the Catholic influence within it. It is this he says which prevented Labour Party help for the Popular Front during the Spanish Civil War. A major element of He Must So Live is the tension caused in Bill Omond's household by the clash between the Catholicism of some of the family with the communism of the others. The Catholic Church, through the interference of the priest, Father McGrory, comes over as bigoted and ignorant. There is also a strong call for working class solidarity and specifically the right of Communists to join the Labour Party. Bill Omond articulates it here:

" "Who was first in the field in defending Spain?" demanded Bill. "A year before the Labour Party had its mind made up. Who's led every fight on the Clyde here in your lifetime? College boys, and Transport House men or blokes like me? Any Labour men in these fights have been there despite their party, not because of it. And it'll never be any different till we're back in there as we should be with the rest." " 60

The novels demonstrate the success of militancy and unity. In the second for instance the erosion of wages and conditions in the foundry is prevented only by

⁶⁰Lambert, David. No Time For Sleeping 1958 p.52.

militant opposition to the management's new schemes for the completion of war work. The point of view is one sided and crude: the masters are villains, the men blameless. Both books are steeped in the lore of Scottish socialism in the Thirties - Lambert invokes the names of Maxton and Gallacher and has the shadow of Spain looming in the background. Yet in this element we can detect a note of nostalgia which removes the novels from those genuinely written during the Depression. There is an affection for the period that only hindsight can produce. Bearing this in mind certain aspects of the novels must be recognised as being derivative, rather than spontaneous responses to a situation. Compare for example this quotation from He Must So Live with a passage from Walter Greenwood's Love On The Dole (1933):

"They watched the great tide of humanity surging through the main gate breaking the high factory wall. It boiled and frothed in a many coloured, rising torrent, flooding the wide stretch of concrete around the factory and rising still like flood waters between the houses, snaked and darted its way towards them. Men and women, young girls fresh-cheeked from school sauntering with easy grace, arms linked in lines that stretched half-way across the street. Exuberant boys, with boundless energy, released; a sigh of memory for the old men, twisted and bowed to the shape of their machines from a lifetime on some soulless task that killed the power of thought and dimmed the joy of fine creative labour. 61
Ten thousand numbered cogs."

And:

⁶¹He Must So Live op. cit. p.41.

"In a moment this silence would be shattered. Shattered by the influx of the vast concourse of men congregated outside the walls. Before six o'clock the twelve thousand of them would pass through the gates. They crammed the wide thoroughfare, a black mass of restlessness; crammed, saving a strip of roadway kept clear for the frequently arriving bell-clanging tramcars full of more overalled men. The air stank of oily clothes, reeked with it and tobacco smoke, and buzzed with conversation to do, mostly, with week end sport." 62

Passages like this abound in social protest novels - descriptions of humanity in the mass. We noted it in Gessing's The Nether World.^{*} Here however it reminds us of the links the Glasgow genre has with the wider literary world. There are tentacles stretching out in every direction and the Glasgow novel is linked in many ways with a variety of literary trends.

The Process of Politics

Finally mention must be made of those books which deal with politics without taking sides: The Second City (1912) by W.J. Eccott, The Douglas Affair (1966) by Alistair Mair, and George Friel's The Boy Who Wanted Peace (1964). Their concern is with the mechanics of political life rather than ideology. The Second City looks at the subject on both a local and a national level. As a novel it is not good; the characters are wooden, the dialogue artificial, the plot improbable and the prose style

⁶²Greenwood, Walter. Love On The Dole 1933. Penguin ed. 1960 p.20.

^{*}See above - Introduction.

awkward. It is as much a novel of romantic, as of political, intrigue, and a complicated love interest is a major element in the story. However the grasp of the realities of politics is honest and balanced, if unsubtle. Eccott reveals nothing new about political life but confirms what we expect to be the case. It is an uninspired vision. Ian Mackay the hero:

"could see that beneath this strange collection of individuals, duly elected to represent their fellow men by a still more heterogeneous body of voters, there was infinite diversity of aim, of ability, of education. Some of them were mere futilities, some merely creatures of limitless impudence, some who could only be there with the sole purpose of grinding their own axes. On the other hand, there were men of real purpose, of force of character, of single eye for the weal of the
Second City." 63

The author dramatises this view in the experiences of the central characters, and as Ian Mackay sets about canvassing the city's councillors in an attempt to get a public appointment we get a glimpse of the kind of manoeuvring which goes on behind the scenes. More important however is the picture of manipulation and corruption which extends from Glasgow to Westminster. There are a number of alternative schemes for the development of a canal in the city and Benjamin Birse, wealthy contractor and councillor, is likely to be involved in the construction work. One particular scheme however offers the most profitable possibilities

⁶³Eccott, W.J. The Second City 1912 p.55.

and it is with an eye to its promotion that he contrives to get himself elected to parliament, where the opportunities to influence matters are the greatest. His election itself is a shady affair. With a cynical disregard for any sort of ideology he weighs up the electoral chances of the opposing parties, selects the one with the most popular current appeal and goes about securing his adoption as its candidate for a city constituency. A large contribution to the party funds buys him the support he requires. As an M.P. all his efforts are directed to the furtherance of his own plans for the canal. It should be noted however that Eccott does not associate this kind of behaviour with any particular political party, or specifically with Glasgow, but views it as a universal feature of political life. He does make a point however of commenting on the tendency of Scottish M.P.s to quickly forget about the affairs of their homeland after their arrival in London.

Alastair Mair's The Douglas Affair (1966) is of the same broad type. It is however concerned wholly with Scottish politics, particularly the development of Scottish Nationalism. It is not a futuristic novel but does conceive a situation where Scotland can easily be brought to independence. Douglas is a successful businessman and fervent patriot who determines to put his energies and his wealth behind the nationalist cause. This scheme has been shaping in his mind for a number of years, but the novel joins him at the critical stage of take-off, where he is about to put them into action. Basically it

involves peppering up the existing nationalist party, which has become moribund and stale, and creating a more dynamic public image. Douglas secures himself the leadership, and also the control of its important offices and with vast sums of his own money promotes a massive propaganda campaign which includes the establishment of a new newspaper and the projection of himself as a major political figure. The campaign however is noticeably low on policies and it is gimmicks which form its basis. Moreover the novel is lacking in significant political motivation. Nowhere does Douglas - or the author - explain the desirability of Scottish independence. Nor are the practical implications of a separate Scottish state considered. On the other hand the book is not a deep study of personality - and personality traits could have been used to explain Douglas's obsession with nationalism - but rather is a sketch, and only a sketch, of the increasing momentum of a campaign. A major fault in the novel is the speed and facility that marks this nationalist upsurge. Douglas's efforts come to fruition with unconvincing ease. The novel is inconclusive. With the hero's death at the end his aspirations have neither succeeded nor failed, but we are left with the implication that the party will continue to make progress. "It was not the end of the affair."⁶⁴ The Douglas Affair is capably written, tells an interesting story, but is essentially lightweight. The one note in the book that demands real attention is the author's vision of the iron

⁶⁴Mair, Alastair. The Douglas Affair 1966 p.244.

hand that lies behind the glove of British democracy. He deliberately draws a comparison between the ruthlessness of Spanish fascism and the dirty tricks which the British establishment will ultimately resort to when the status quo seems threatened. The novel opens with Douglas on holiday in Spain where he witnesses the shooting down of a communist by the police. Later on he is to comment:

"I don't think political assassination is necessarily ruled out in a democracy like Britain If ever there was a threat one that could be dealt with by the killing of a single man, then in the name of State Security and the welfare of the greatest number, I believe 65 democracy would kill."

The novel's subsequent action proves him correct. It must be stressed that Douglas's activities are in no way subversive, that everything he and the party does is completely legal and democratic. However, faced with its increasing success, and the definite possibility of a break-up of the U.K., and with the failure of conventional politics to combat it, the British government decides to set the 'security forces' into action. A number of dirty tricks are employed, intensifying from an attempt at discrediting the party to the murder of its leaders. Douglas himself is killed by government agents. What is particularly worrying however - and topical today - is that the 'security forces' are seen to have an independent existence, and act on their own initiative. Government ministers are powerless to control

⁶⁵Ibid. p.32.

them, and in their turn even become victims. There is a note of grim prophecy in the novel.

The best look at politics in the whole of the Glasgow tradition comes in George Friel's The Boy Who Wanted Peace (1964). At first glance it is not a political novel at all, but a study of childhood. On a closer examination however we become aware of it as an allegory on the nature of power and political organisation. It is a fine book, one of the best in the genre, funny, yet also serious, showing perception and imagination. The unrecovered loot from a bank robbery - which amounts to many thousands of pounds - lies hidden in a cellar until found by a group of boys. Under the leadership of Percy, who is a bit simple-minded, but who dominates the company by virtue of his age, they resolve to tell nobody, but to spend the money themselves in small inconspicuous quantities. In order to preserve their secret and to help the division of the money they decide on a number of precautions which develop into an elaborate system of rules and rituals. It is on these, and the way they are used to manipulate members of the gang, that Friel draws his parallels with the wider world. Percy is almost wholly lacking in any abilities but has a craving for distinction and what he considers to be cultural. He conceives of a religion revolving round the hoard of money and placing emphasis on the worship of the God El. This not only satisfies needs within himself but is a means of quieting rebellion within the gang. The boys are drawn together in their devotions, complaints are

appeased and secrecy maintained. One member however sees it as nonsense and Percy has to explain the practical advantages:

"So he spoke to Savage privately and told him it was a matter of policy to make the brotherhood respect the holy name of El. If they didn't it would mean complete lawlessness and nobody would win. They would all lose everything."⁶⁶

We see here the political role of religion, and its practical origins. As time passes however what had begun as a matter of security becomes valued for itself:

"Like him (Percy) they enjoyed the secrecy and mystery of it, they loved the hymn-singing and the bell-ringing in candlelight, the sense of belonging to a chosen people when they made the sign of El. It was better than going to Church."⁶⁷

The opposition between Percy and Savage grows and develops into an outright power struggle, obviously relevant to the world of real politics. The two protagonists represent contrasting types of authority and styles of diplomacy, with the characteristics of each type springing from their personalities. Percy, with his cultural leanings and his respect for the trappings of government and for law, stands for open, civilized politics. Savage however, as his name implies, is on the side of naked power. He has no ideals, is intelligent, but cynical and treacherous. He despises all of Percy's philosophy but is not above using it when it suits him. Thus he brings the moralistic Garson, who refuses to take any money, quickly to heel:

⁶⁶Friel, George. The Boy Who Wanted Peace 1964 p.49.

⁶⁷Ibid. p.99.

"You've no right to be coming to Percy's Friday Night Services. That's only for folk that believe in El, like Percy says it's no' for heathens like you that believe in nothing." 68

Savage schemes behind Percy's back, increasing his own influence in the gang at Percy's expense. In the end he emerges triumphant, confirming the view that in politics he who plays dirty generally wins. On the disintegration of the conspiracy he has the wit to burn most of the money, realising that he wouldn't be able to spend it, but thereby protecting the £250 he keeps for himself. By comparing this novel to one obviously similar, Golding's Lord Of The Flies, we can highlight the major flaw in The Boy Who Wanted Peace. Both use the world of the boy as political allegory, but unlike Friel's, Golding's novel is set in an alien environment where all the strange happenings seem possible. The action in The Boy Who Wanted Peace, however, although very much milder, occasionally does not ring true. The very ordinariness of the surroundings sets the improbability in relief. Can we accept that the boys could have sustained their secrecy and their interest in the rituals for so long?

The political aspect of the genre then is by no means homogeneous. A basic conservatism coexists with extremists of the right and left, and there is a group

⁶⁸Ibid. p.99.

of novels which ignore policy altogether in favour of the mechanics of public life. If we are to make any broad general assumptions however we must recognise the split in emphasis between the vision of Glasgow as industrial on the one hand and metropolitan on the other, with the latter dominating. As the twentieth century progressed political interest declined in the novel and was replaced by an increasing concern with the individual. We shall examine this trend and its relationship with the question of religion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

CHAPTER SIX

RELIGION AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Religion is not in itself a major theme in the Glasgow novel in the way politics and ambition are, yet it is important enough to merit some extended consideration for the light it sheds on the Glasgow novelist's changing attitude to the question of man's relationship with himself and with the cosmos. The second decade of the twentieth century provides a rough dividing line between two markedly different responses. The nineteenth century writers, whatever their particular persuasion, were unanimous that religion was an issue. The twentieth century approach is far more fragmented. Some writers ignore it altogether, to some it is of incidental importance; a very few feel strongly about it and they are mostly hostile. Moreover, as the century wears on it ceases to be a subject at all.

The role of Calvinism in Scottish literature is well known yet as far as Glasgow fiction is concerned it is not important. Indeed it should not be. By the time Scottish writers were beginning to tackle industrial life the excesses of rigid Presbyterianism were largely - though not completely - a thing of the past. Despite popular belief to the contrary, religious extremism in Victorian Scotland was not a widespread phenomenon and where it existed it was generally in a rural, not an industrial setting. Henrietta Keddie (Sarah Tytler,

author of St. Mungo's City) noted the misconception in her autobiography:

"A common impression exists that Scotch children with parents 'sitting under', as the phrase goes, a Presbyterian Calvinistic minister are, or certainly were brought up amidst Calvin and his creed. This notion is and has been much exaggerated. We were not subjected to any depressing influences of the kind. My father and mother were of the milder school in the Church. My father left the religious teaching of his children to my mother in accordance with what I believe was the general custom unless in the houses of ministers, elders or ¹ very strict professors of religion."

Moreover the extent to which religion of any kind, moderate or extreme, affected the whole community has also been exaggerated. Drummond and Bulloch write of the church in Glasgow that "her support in working class and middle class districts of the city was very high",² but the figures they actually produce for church attendance in the city are not very impressive. "In 1881 the Glasgow United Evangelistic Society took a census of the church attendance in the city by stationing observers at each church door to count the number entering and it was found that the combined attendances at all services was about ten per cent of the population."³ They add moreover that "the state of the church in the Glasgow slums may well have been worse than in any other part of the country."⁴ It is clear then that Scottish industrial society was not dominated by the rigours of

¹Keddie, Henrietta. Three Generations 1911 p.178.

²Drummond, A.L. & Bulloch, James: The Church in Victorian Scotland 1975 p.113.

³Ibid. p.113.

⁴Ibid. p.113.

Calvinism and that R.L. Stevenson for example, in drawing much of his inspiration from the schisms it produced in the Scottish consciousness, was essentially backward looking. Such an approach was in no way appropriate to the ethos of a rising commercial city and the Glasgow writer understandably ignored it. His attitude was conditioned by his vision of life in the contemporary city, and the unavoidable awareness of the terrible social problems created by its dramatic expansion. His concern then is not with rarified questions of doctrine or theology, or with the agonising conscience, but with social responsibility and basic morality. What was the church doing in practical terms for the people? What about its obvious failure (sic Drummond and Bulloch) to even touch large sections of the urban population? In the handling of these topics they were often nauseatingly self righteous and generally dull, but at least their sincerity is never in doubt. The same cannot be said for their twentieth century counterparts. The new age, supposedly free from Victorian hypocrisy, produced little more than the shallow and spurious. Calvinism was resurrected when its influence was even less vital, not because they had anything meaningful to say about it, but as a source of ready made character motivation and instant colour.

At the heart of the Victorian writer's treatment of religion lie the questions of sincerity, worldliness, and inactivity. As E.S. Haldane writes:

"There were in the nineteenth century in Scotland two tendencies running alongside of one another - one of genuine religious feeling, participators in which truly valued the means of grace and endeavoured to live a life consistent with their profession, and another which regarded the ordinances of religion merely with a traditional respect."⁵

George Mills paints exactly such a picture in The Beggar's Benison (1866). On the one hand we are faced with fashionable religion in the figures of the Rev. Nahum and his congregation. He is the minister of the city's most prestigious church, a drunkard, hypocrite and money grabber who is particularly associated with the ugly commercial side of Glasgow life. He moves in a world peopled by selfish materialists whose only interest in religion is the fine show they cut at church on Sunday morning, pandering to their prejudices that his collection plate may be well filled. To them the Christian gospel is meaningless, and we see the hero enrol himself in the congregation for the same reason as most of the members are already there - the promotion of his business activities. One Sunday, however, after Mills has taken us to Nahum's service, where we see them all go through the motions of observance, he immediately conducts the reader to a contrasting scene, an unfashionable church in the city's East End. Here the pews are sparsely filled, but here we may also listen to a sermon preached by a man of integrity, a clergyman who disparages materialism, proclaims the love of God, and exhibits a genuine concern

⁵Haldane, Elizabeth S. The Scotland Of Our Fathers 1933 p.129.

for mankind. Yet Mills is not finished here, for The Beggar's Benison articulates a plea for a more direct practical approach to Christianity than was usual for the time. Preaching was not enough to help those who needed help. For the poor "something that would elevate them in a social and physical way was required and not ethics and homilies."⁶ This evangelical note, largely incidental in Mills, was to be taken up and developed in Glasgow not only by writers but by religious organisations. Bodies of the kind had been working in the slums for a long time - the Glasgow and West of Scotland Temperance Society for example dates from 1829 - but in the second half of the century they became increasingly active. The United Evangelistic Association was set up in 1874, providing food for the poor, bible lessons and holidays for slum children. In 1894 A. Aird testified to the continuing good work of The Glasgow City Mission, in reaching the city's poor.⁷ While in Mills' book the split in religious life is seen as differences within the conventional churches later novelists presented it as a contrast between the conventional church and bodies like these.

The movement to take religion and practical aid into the slums produced Jet Ford (1880) and City Echoes (1884), missionary works obviously meant for distribution to the poor. Their characteristics have been examined elsewhere

⁶Mills, George. The Beggar's Benison 1866 Vol.I p.141.

⁷See Aird, A. Glimpses Of Old Glasgow 1894 p.200.

and one need only stress the way in which the writers introduce a material incentive. For conversion to Christianity and the adoption of a temperate and industrious life style brings not only spiritual health, but wordly rewards, and results in the dramatic improvement in the slum dweller's lot.^a It is significant also how these tracts confirm the religious split we have observed. City Echoes for example warmly commends for their work amongst the urban poor, not the conventional churches, but the slum missionaries:

"Amongst such a class Mission Halls and other kindred agencies such as reformatories, Free Breakfasts, Tent Meetings, Mizpah Bands etc. are coming like a summer sun after winter; growth and beauty where was the deadly miasma and bog." 8

The author of How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish notes the mess the church is in, and the propensity of the clergy to spend time attacking each other instead of spreading the gospel, but the most dramatic expression of the theme appears in David Pae's The Factory Girl (1885) where we find a damning indictment of its sloth and hypocrisy. Willie the consumptive waif is on his death bed, and being religious - despite his lowly situation - requests the attentions of a minister. Mr. Barton the actor who has befriended him does his best to find one, but is on every occasion rebuffed. Sometimes

^a Alexander Brown ("Shadow"), a Victorian journalist, in his Midnight Scenes And Social Photographs (1858), a study of the Glasgow slums, noted the failure of conventional religious bodies but also expressed his doubt at the efficacy of the tracts to do any good at all.

⁸ Naismith, William. City Echoes 1884 p.155.

it is his profession which repels them (although his character is impeccable), at other times the reason is sheer laziness.

" "I have come to you today on behalf of a little boy who is dying and who would like so much to see a minister." The countenance of the rev. gentleman became clouded and he looked out of the window. "It is so cold", he said, "the air seems raw and damp. I think⁹ I cannot go today." "

When he does eventually find one who is willing to help, it is not a clergyman of a conventional church, but a slum missionary. By the end of the century this dichotomy is by no means resolved as a literary issue, and as late as 1921 R.W. Campbell is still moved to observe that while there are conscientious churchmen "there are others, sleek with the fat of established teinds, and comforted with the joys of publicans and sinners."¹⁰ Indeed Campbell himself is something of a link between the two sides. On the one hand his Jimmy McCallum and Winnie McLeod are crusading works, more elaborate than the Victorian tracts, but essentially the same in thought; social concern and didactic religion run hand in hand. Conversely, however, Snooker Tam and the Spud Tamson books are representatives of the smug blinkered kailyard world where religion is nothing more than a label of respectability.

Linked with this theme in the nineteenth century

⁹Pae, David. The Factory Girl 1885 p.180.

¹⁰Campbell, R.W. Jimmy McCallum 1921 p.149.

is a definite moral concern which focuses on the reluctance of the middle classes to have anything to do with the poor. The world of fashionable respectability is as guilty as the church for the neglect of the slum dweller. Apart from greed the sin of pride is the fault most evident in Glasgow society at this time, and it is this which comes between the well-off and their moral responsibilities to the less fortunate. As City Echoes puts it:

"The world of business does not harden the heart - it hardens the character. But it often leaves the heart soft - as constant beating will soften iron, and make it glow with incandescent fire. Say what men may of the heartlessness of trade - it is nothing compared with the stoicism which fashion causes." 11

It is not fashionable to bother with the poor, and time and time again we find writers pleading with the middle classes to attend to their welfare - indeed to attend at a personal level. It is a call for human contact between the classes. Fred Arnold demands: "I would inquire of the rich have they done their duty towards the poor in coming in much personal contact and manifesting sympathy and brotherhood with them."¹² In The Guinea Stamp Mrs. Fordyce comes under attack for the same reasons:

She "was a kind hearted woman and did a great many good deeds though on a strictly conventional basis she grudged neither time nor money; but she did not believe in personal contact with the very poor nor in the power and efficacy of individual sympathy and effort." 13

¹¹ City Echoes op. cit. p.83.

¹² Arnold, Frederick. Alfred Leslie 1856 p.83.

¹³ Swan, Annie S. The Guinea Stamp 1892 p.201.

Sarah Tytler again laments how rich and poor are becoming increasingly cut off from one another and her observation is perhaps more significant than the rest, for she above all understands that this has been a consequence of industrialisation. The Glasgow Fair for example has been held as an annual gathering on Glasgow Green for centuries, but its character has radically changed:

"There is an almost entire withdrawal of the upper classes from taking any share in the gala Not a conventional gentleman, not a single woman who makes any pretension to being a lady appears where their grandfathers and grandmothers mixed freely with the multitude, relished the spectacle heartily, and claimed¹⁴ their due in the people's holiday."

However much criticism we find levelled at the church in the nineteenth century we must remember that it was not Christianity which was coming under attack but the abuses and omissions of the church. Indeed the criticism only emphasises how much of a positive force it was to the writers of the time. Even those like Sarah Tytler and Annie S. Swan who do not enter this particular debate express a religious conviction, the former quietly and tastefully, integrating it unobtrusively into the moral fabric of St. Mungo's City, the latter with a chorus of very mixed trumpets, blasting in different keys, some over sweet, others stern and reproving. When we enter the new century however we

¹⁴Tytler, Sarah. St. Mungo's City 1885 p.81.

leave behind the blanket religious concern; of course there are still those who show themselves committed, but not nearly so many, nor so deeply. As a literary movement the Glasgow novel is now undergoing something of a change. Religion is never again closely allied with a serious social concern. The response of the Glasgow writer to spiritual matters now becomes much less homogeneous and often much less sincere. It is as if it has become charged with a post Victorian feeling of release, but, uncertain as to what to do with the new freedom, its energies became dispersed in a variety of responses. Criticism of religion itself now becomes possible. However, before we consider these, mention must be made of O. Douglas. Her three novels of the City The Setons (1917), Ann And Her Mother (1922) and Elija For Common (1928) all focus on manse life and the affairs of ministers' families. They are trivial and shallow, debilitated by a kailyard cosiness, and an innate sentimentality in the writer's personality. We are confronted with a stable world of unchangeable values dominated by the uneventful and uninteresting. What is very noticeable is that while they deal with the clergy, they have a very low religious content. A few biblical quotations and homilies, some light passages of scripture and the occasional sentimental scene where it proves a source of comfort is about all. There is no deep religious awareness, nor serious questions of philosophy. This passage from The Setons is typical of her tone:

"The president this winter (of the Fellowship Meeting) is a most inestimable person but he has a perfect genius for choosing inappropriate hymns. At 10 a.m. he gives out 'Abide with me fast falls the eventide' or again we find ourselves singing 'The sun that bids us rest is waking our brethern reach the Western sky' - such an obvious untruth! And he chose the prizes for Band of Hope children, and last year " 15

Yet despite this inane gentility the novels are revealing in that they present us unconsciously with perhaps a truer picture of why conventional religion failed to reach the poor than we find for example in The Beggar's Benison. What comes over above all is how ineffectual her characters are - polite, soft and gutless. The author herself had the same background and it produced in her this mealy mouthed sensibility lacking in both depth and courage. One suspects then that hypocrisy and wilful neglect may not have been such a harm to the church as the innate helplessness of those caught up in the stupor of a polite middle class life style. What was required in view of the city's terrible social problems were men with robust and challenging natures.

With the twentieth century the Glasgow novel as a literary movement no longer expressed anything constant or certain in the religious sphere. One avenue of interest was the question of Calvinism and here the publication of Satan On Holiday (1903) has important implications, for it marks something of a step backwards

¹⁵Douglas, O. The Setons 1917 p.134.

in the treatment of religion, a step which will become more important later on. Written by Rev. William Fergus of Blythswood Church, it is a partly humorous, partly serious, account of a meeting between Satan and a Glasgow joiner named Adamson, in which the author complains about the decline of religious values in his contemporary society, and enters into scriptural debate. The figure of the devil is interesting for, conceived as much with affection as with fear, he stands very much in the Scottish folk tradition. He is an affable, yet slightly pathetic character to whom we cannot help but extend our sympathy. Nobody for example has ever wished him happy birthday. Moreover: "If ever a poor being needed a holiday it is I. Why, just think of it, sir, I never had a holiday in my life."¹⁶ His roots however are in the folklore of a rural society and have little in common with a modern industrial city. Fergus is thus drawing not on a living tradition but on the notions of the past. This is exactly what is done by those who examine Calvinism. If it was not a vital issue in the nineteenth century, it certainly was not in the twentieth. Yet various writers go to lengths to describe its characteristics. The fullest example is Mary Cleland's The Sure Traveller published in 1923 but dealing with life in the last century. Calvinism is central to its theme, which deals with Catherine the heroine's disgust with the materialism of her age. This materialism is directly associated with

¹⁶Fergus, Blythswood. Satan on Holiday 1903 p.5.

rigid Presbyterianism, and her family is dominated by the figure of her grandfather, a religious hypocrite and commercial tyrant who comes over as a deadening anti-life force. His daughter Robina in particular has been moulded by his influence and she carries his prejudices with her always. On a visit to Paris she is unable to enjoy the beauties it has to offer:

"Everything small or great was subjected to poor Grandpa's standard of right and wrong she stood enraptured, before Botticelli's Madonna with the Infant and St. John, the round white baby with the serene holy smile filling her with tender joy, till she remembered with dismay that Madonnas were Roman Catholic institutions"

17

Of the same ilk as the grandfather is Mr. Macbeth, greedy and self important: "I am as good a Christian as is going - never miss a Sabbath at church and give to anything in reason and always a shilling in the plate."¹⁸ His philosophy of life is curiously unchristian. He had "no patience with the idea of keeping weaklings alive to prey on the strong, and keep the nation from getting any farrarder, taxing the decent and hard working to preserve imbeciles, parasites and gaolbirds."¹⁹ Cleland is in fact giving a crude expression of the often observed link between 'grace and gear' in Calvinism.^b It must be stressed that it is Calvinism specifically

¹⁷ Cleland, Mary. The Sure Traveller 1923 p.179.

¹⁸ Ibid. p.56.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.145.

^b Indeed her novel is to an extent a fictional representation of Max Weber's famous thesis in The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism.

and not religion in general that comes under fire here, and by way of emphasis the author introduces the contrasting character of Mrs. Fox the Quaker, who works tirelessly among the poor, bringing material as well as spiritual aid. Compare her attitude to Mr. Macbeth's. As a minor character tells us of her:

"The wee lady's been at them, taking them by the arm like a sister, pleading with them for Christ's sake and their own sake to give up the life (prostitution) offering them decent work. Clothing them, feeding them, 20 and setting them on the right way."

The radical difference is that the one sect has charity while the other lacks it.

Cleland has an important affirmation to make, one which perhaps is only possible in an age where the Calvinism she writes of is no longer a vital force. For, having established the destructive aridity, she proceeds to assert her faith in the human spirit to overcome rigidity and heal the ills it causes. The actions of Robina testify to this. After her father's death his evil influence continues to afflict. By the terms of his will Robina is forbidden to have any contact with the particular neighbour whom the old man hates, if she does she will forfeit her inheritance. Despite this however and despite her fanatical reverence for her father's opinions she finds herself unable to refrain from helping the man when he falls ill. She becomes

²⁰Ibid. p.117.

emotionally involved and finally marries him.

Other writers have worked along similar lines. W.C. Tait in The Wise Thrush (1937) confirms her observations. Again the aridity is there. Calvinism destroys beauty and makes life bleak. The child in the book is changed by it:

"The flood of fire and brimstone, the revengefulness of the Covenanting God, had scorched his soul with fear. Red sunsets were no longer beautiful, they were portents of that malicious rage that Pastor Bruton assured his congregation²¹ would one day sweep the world away."

Similarly this Pastor Bruton personifies the link between religious extremism and greed:

"Pastor Bruton was an eloquent ironmonger who worshipped ancient prophecies and modern profits with equal fervour. A mean-faced clay-coloured hen-toed and narrow chested Glaswegian, he began each day by reading a chapter of the Old Testament to his wife and servants. The reading finished he would unlock the food cupboards and issue the rations for that day. Everything in his house was kept under lock and key. Like a lean rat he crawled out of a Glasgow slum to squirm and bite his way into the ownership of a business he had²² entered as an errand boy."

As the story develops Bruton emerges as a striking figure, a nasty character who succeeds in arousing a strong dislike in the reader. This gives us a clue to the author's - indeed many modern authors' - attitude to Calvinism. For while it could be argued - albeit

²¹Tait, W. Cumming. The Wise Thrush 1937 p.7.

²²Ibid. p.7.

tenuously - that in The Sure Traveller it is made use of to say something about the expansiveness of human nature here it is neither of any real consequence in terms of the thought, or the plot, of the novel. Rather it is an effective way of creating a clearly defined character. Extremists are far easier to realise than ordinary folk; far more colourful and memorable. This is essentially why so many writers have turned their attentions to it - as a source of the picturesque, of ready made drama. Calvinism moreover is a convenient motivation for all sorts of idiosyncracies, moral, sexual and social. George Blake's David And Joanna (1936) is a novel about escape - the escape of a young man from a bleak family and social environment - which becomes a boy meets girl tale. By going cycling in the country David not only leaves behind the unemployment and hopelessness of Glasgow in the Thirties but also the rigid, suffocating atmosphere of his home, where he lives with a strict puritanical aunt and uncle. "These were folk of a late Victorian generation, sober, disciplined in self repression, and grimly concerned with security in obscurity."²³ It is the release from the influence of the latter which is important, for the tensions between these two and David, who has the natural outgoing instincts of youth, are genuinely funny, and the one spirited note in an otherwise mediocre novel. The Depression on the other

23

Blake, George. David And Joanna 1936 p.25.

hand, sad as it is, is a lukewarm unworthy, protagonist^c since it is a negative rather than a positive thing. The Sea Road (1959) by Thomas Muir again focuses on escape, again from the strictures of a dour Calvinistic aunt and uncle. While Gavin's conflict is not essentially with his guardians' religion, but with their opposition to his ambition to be an engineer, what makes it particularly effective is the dramatic tenor of his uncle's character. Stern, humourless, and utterly unshakeable in his convictions, he carries with him an aura of the Old Testament, and while a tyrant is still a tyrant no matter how he is dressed, there is something particularly vivid about one who exudes religious wrath and speaks in colourful biblical phrases. Calvinism then is a decoration whose surface tones can be usefully employed to catch the eye. We see the sort of visible peculiarities for example in Muir's description of the call to Sunday service: "Two bells started to peal, practically simultaneously. One had a deep melodious boom which seemed to announce with assurance that it belonged to the Established Church; the other several tones higher, and with a more strident note, had a defiant self assertion as it called the faithful of the Free Church to worship."²⁴

Many more novels flirt with the subject for the same reasons, most notably Homeward Journey (1934) by J.M.

^cNote that the cancer from which David's aunt dies is associated with repression - an idea similar to what we find in Auden's Ballad Of Miss Gee.

²⁴Muir, Thomas. The Sea Road 1959 p.21.

Reid, J.F. Hendry's Fernie Brae (1947) and Douce (1950) by Elizabeth Kyle. In all however we are aware of it as a hollow issue. The only exception is with Edward Gaitens where the rigours of Calvinism come under attack for characteristically practical reasons - the way they affect the contemporary Sunday.^d In literary terms there is something unhealthy about this refusal to confront the present not only as a setting, but as a source of spiritual and ethical problems, it shows a certain philosophic bankruptcy and intellectual cowardice. This may be an indication of a post-Victorian uncertainty in the Glasgow novelist. He has lost one role in this field and not yet, as a general rule, found another. Of course it did not on every occasion take this form. There were those honest enough to see some route out. There were others who replaced it with a new kind of certainty - a vehement denunciation of any religion at all. This has almost always been linked with various brands of socialism. Major Operation views it as an irrelevance, an interest for fools and rogues. With materialistic logic MacKelvie takes the concept of divinity apart demonstrating its social origins: "The idea of death and resurrection which you, Anderson, think is special to Christianity, is in fact one of the elements of all religions, and can be traced back to the sowing of seed, and the seed's resurrection in the plant "25

^d"He knew that every pub door outside was as inexorably shut as the closed mind of the rigid Presbyterian in this city where the rich lay and religious, were at this moment drinking their wines from cool cellars, their whiskies and liqueurs from cabinets on pleasant trays, in their homes and clubs well away from the South Side while wagging gravebrows over the wastefulness of the poor." Growing Up p. 92.

Similarly in He Must So Live (1956) Lambert attacks Catholicism in the figure of Father McGrory, a rigid unsympathetic character lacking not only compassion and understanding but also intelligence.^e (Shiels' Gael Over Glasgow (1937) is an exception in that it makes an affirmation of Christianity as a basic thesis of the book.) Patrick MacGill, however, is a classic example of a dualistic attitude to religion. Within the one personality we have the socialist God-defier, and the pious Christian. At one point he pours scorn on the railway workers for having "no comprehension of a just God. To them God took on the form of a monstrous and irritable ganger who might be pacified by prayers instead of the usual dole of drink."²⁶ At another the anger of Fergus Ryan is as much the author's own as his character's when he says: "If ye kept very good and pure He might let ye into heaven when he died - but would He give ye a pair of shoes in midwinter? There's no God."²⁷ Similarly we find him railing at the church for exploiting the people and elsewhere assuring us that an angel is taking charge of the soul of a dead girl.

Frederick Niven is something the same, along with his disgust with suburban Christianity we are aware of an unsure, yet open minded response to 'Belief'. "Chance (or God, I do not know) had made Miano Fortury the first of these friends."²⁸ He is more important than MacGill

^eIt is surprising how little the question of Catholic v. Protestant arises in the genre. Only a few incidental comments are apparent and there is no extended treatment of the problem.

²⁶MacGill, Patrick. Children Of The Dead End 1914 p. 256
²⁷MacGill, Patrick. The Ratpit 1915 p.134.
²⁸Niven, Frederick. Justice Of The Peace 1914 p.56.

however, not only for being a better writer, but because he points the way to a trend that is absolutely crucial to the development of the Glasgow novel. For Niven was to place a new emphasis on the study of personality. The Glasgow writer up to this point had only been interested in people in their social role - Jean for example traces the heroine's life not for herself but for what she shows about the circumstances of her class.

Justice Of The Peace (1914), however introduces a concern for people as individuals and the idea of a personal inner fulfilment that goes beyond, for instance, the sort of materialistic ambition we find in the hero of The Beggar's Benison. This was to be the stamp of that school within the genre which was to search for some new kind of faith to replace the forsaken religion of the Victorians. It was of course an attitude completely in tune with the age. The secularisation of the twentieth century has been accompanied by movements of thought influenced by modern psychology and existentialist philosophy, which have tended to view man not in relation to God but in relation to himself. Theology has given way to psychology in an interpretation of the world which stresses personality, the individual will, and the inner consciousness. The Glasgow novel, parochial as it has been, did not remain untouched by such trends in the wider literary world. This of course did not mean that Glasgow writers turned to this approach en masse, but that to varying degrees a distinctly large number of the more thoughtful, wrote, and have continued to write; from this

viewpoint. The Glasgow novel of the Fifties and Sixties has shown itself, with its attention to personality and human relationships, to be a direct development of this interest.

Niven's works are certainly not deep journeys into the psyche but excellent rounded studies of particular types of individual. His best novel, Justice Of The Peace, not only portrays superbly the young Martin Moir's journey to maturity and personal fulfilment through art, but in the peculiar relationship with his mother shows the corruptive nature of the disturbed mind. A Tale That Is Told (1920), another fine piece of writing, is again essentially the exploration of personality. As the narrator says in the Prologue: "I see I shall have to represent myself as a case - I trust not a hard case!"²⁹ What he gives is a portrait of an individual who remains detached from life, a voyeur rather than a participator. The hero is not making a religious affirmation but expressing this when he says: "I am one of those to whom this planet is more of a section on a long journey than the promised land in which to build the final home."³⁰ His response to life is something like that of the tourist on holiday. There is also a measure of introspection in his make up. "I often look on at myself," he says, "as I look on at the other little puppet people who appear so small coming down Buchanan Street."³¹ Mrs. Barry (1933) is another case study, this time of a remarkable

²⁹Niven, Frederick. A Tale That Is Told 1920 p.2.

³⁰Ibid. p.197.

³¹Ibid. p.I.

middle aged woman. She is a widow with a young son and a small income who learns she has a terminal disease and that her days are numbered in months. Secretly, without fuss, she goes about the business of arranging her son's future, and Niven tells her story with restraint and compassion, producing a fine picture of fortitude and courage. In all three novels it is the personality of the central character which matters and not the plot. He deliberately keeps the events low key and undramatic. However, Niven's technique is traditional; he has not been influenced by the stream of consciousness method coming into vogue at the time, and what we learn about the inner life of his people we learn through conventional means. In the same year that Niven published A Tale That Is Told Catherine Carswell came out with Open The Door, and what we have said about the former we cannot say about her. Andrew Melrose the publisher whose firm named it its prize novel for 1920 wrote in a preparatory note that, "as a story of tumultuous emotion and the passionate efforts of a young girl for freedom and self fulfilment it is one of the biggest things that the adjudicator has met with in a longish period."³²

In perspective such admiration seems distinctly unfounded though it is easy to see why it should have attracted it at the time, for Carswell was very much influenced by the modern school and her approach had

³²Carswell, Catherine. Open The Door 1920 Preface.

elements of D.H. Lawrence,^f Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson. That is not to say that she came within a mile of emulating their achievements and Open The Door remains little more than a turgid failure. It depicts the growth of Joanna Bannerman, not only her outward progress, her awakening emotionally and sexually and the ageing of her mind, but even at times probes the subconscious. Carswell picks out the major incidents in her development: from a childhood encounter with a young country boy to her several adult relationships with older men, and we are aware of her as a many sided being. She is an egotist, and her relationships with others we see are largely attempts to satisfy her own needs. For example:

"How dared Lawrence stretch himself, unconscious as an animal in spring sunshine, finding happiness in himself, in all about him, even in her unresponsive companionship, while she walked by his side in torment? How dared he." 33

She is also a romantic, living out dreams in her head, bending the real world to her requirements. The basis of her relationship with Bob for example is not genuine love, but her attachment to the romantic idea of being in love. Thus when it breaks up she consoles herself by erecting another dream in which she sees

^fLawrence praised her writing and for a time intended to collaborate with her on a novel. Later she wrote a biography of him - The Savage Pilgrimage (1932). A contemporary critic described her approach differently: "There is no direct reference to psychoanalysis but the philosophy indirectly incubated suggests that Mrs. Carswell has interpreted Freud in the perverse manner of G.K. Chesterton" - Agnes Stewart in The Northern Review No. 1 May 1924 p.41.

³³Ibid. p.222.

herself in the role of the heroic lover, remaining faithful to him after he is gone. A further complication of her personality is her initial sexual diffidence. Despite her basic need for a relationship with a man she refuses to acknowledge the reality of sex:

"She would not have it that her very considerable knowledge of natural processes should in any real way affect her love fantasy in which she now had her being. Constantly and to the full she indulged herself in the drug habit of maidenhood; but her waking dreams were quite as innocent ³⁴ as they were sensuous... yet all the time a lover was what she unceasingly sought."

The novel however is strangled by the wordy concentration on the heroine's inner life. Too much is made of too many matters that are neither intrinsically interesting nor well expressed. Emotions of course are difficult to express at the best of times but when they are the conflicting, half realised, barely understood, or the heightened or feverish — which we find here, the task is likely to prove impossible except in the most competent of hands. Carswell unfortunately cannot provide these. Thus we find a prose ruined by muddled imprecision, by the use of ten words where one would be more effective. We frequently get, then, passages that are difficult to accept, like the one where she describes the girl's response to beauty: "For the first time since she had lain by the margin of the upper pond at Duntarvie she found herself able to look full upon beauty without

³⁴Ibid. p.51.

grieving. In the interval there had always been a discord between herself and the apprehension of beauty outside herself. Sunsets, the faces of flowers, the evening star raised steadily like a torch above a screen of cloud - these had been hardly endurable, always lacking the consummation they called for."³⁵

It is interesting to note Carswell's attitude to religion for it is significantly in keeping with modern trends. We find it stripped of its magic and subjected to psychological analysis. The author sees Belief not as the natural relationship of man with God, but as a symptom of certain personality traits. Joanna's mother had a temperamental need to feel spiritual, and thus married Mr. Bannerman, a man who above all manifested a religious presence. Throughout her future life however she is to be troubled by religious doubts, and drifts from one creed to another. It becomes clear that this is partly a result at her guilt at marrying at all, and partly an innate compulsion to look for something she can never find.

Open The Door is altogether too serious. The unrelievedly heavy tone spoils it, but the author's second novel The Camomile (1922) is more successful. By being more lightweight, and attempting less, it has remained more readable. Again it is the exploration of a female personality, but the approach is very different.

³⁵Ibid. p.59.

Writing in the form of a journal the heroine - Ellen Carstairs - recounts her actions and thoughts during a crucial year of her life. She is a bright intelligent girl, a little irreverent, and with a sense of humour. She never becomes tediously introspective, so the book is free from the sort of suffocating emotional intensities of Open The Door. What had been a matter for serious treatment in the latter is allowed in The Camomile to become humorous, like the religious enthusiasm of Joanna's mother when transferred to Ellen's aunt. Nevertheless the dominating theme is the sacredness of the individual personality. Ellen is very aware of herself as having a distinct and separate identity, and so much of what she does is designed to preserve it. Thus when given the choice of a piano tutor she prefers a second rank figure to a great master, because the latter she feels saw her just as a task and not as a person in her own right. "As if to oblige me he was willing to gobble me up without so much as chewing me, something in my Scotch blood rebelled."³⁶ Similarly her relationship with Duncan is coloured by this sense of uniqueness. She revolts at the way he tries to mould her personality into the image he desires - that of the perfect Anglo-Indian lady who will be a credit to him when they marry and emigrate. We can see her fear - rather crudely expressed - in this entry in the journal:

³⁶Carswell, Catherine. The Camomile 1922 p.10.

"Sept. 5 - had a horrible dream about Duncan last night. He was coming towards me to kiss me, and all his face was mouth - one huge vociferous mouth. In my terror at being devoured I woke up. Did not sleep again for a long time."³⁷

She breaks her engagement to Duncan off but later admits that while she will not marry him she would be prepared to live with him - presumably because to do so would not involve sacrificing her individuality.

The novel shows other instances of how a person's self can be subverted by other people. On a visit to her friends, Laura and Wilfred, she notices the suffocating link between them:

"She is conscious of every movement he makes, every expression that crosses his face. When he is depressed (as he often seems to be to me now) she gets hatefully cheerful watching him all the while out of the corners of her eyes, and when he forgets himself for a moment, and begins to laugh and chat in his natural good-natured way, her face freezes under her smiling."³⁸

When Ellen tries her hand at fiction, characteristically she produces a story that exhibits this sort of concern. Entitled The Angel it tells of a girl who marries a "fleshy young man and by her insistent gentleness and spirituality puts a double share of wickedness upon him, turning him eventually into something like a devil while she keeps all the public sympathy."³⁹ In contrast to these types however, Carswell introduces

³⁷Ibid. p.239.

³⁸Ibid. p.273.

³⁹Ibid. p.138.

the figure of old John, the writer Ellen befriends in the Mitchell Library, and who becomes in her mind a symbol of self determination. To the world's eyes he is a worn out nonentity, but at least he had had the courage to do what he wanted in life, even to the extent of giving up the priesthood to do it.

In both her novels Carswell inhabits a middle class, semi-artistic world peopled by all sorts of odd characters trying, or pretending to be creative, or free, or something intellectually fashionable. This is hardly surprising for it was the kind of environment the author herself knew, the kind where modern psychological thought had most currency. What is important however is the way she makes her central characters engage in artistic endeavour - Joanna Bannerman becomes an art student, Ellen Carstairs a writer - for a number of Glasgow novelists have chosen to associate the theme with this sort of self expression. Niven's Martin Moir becomes an artist, as did Stewart Hunter's John Strang in This Good Company (1946). It is a point worth mentioning because this last novel clearly illustrates how the cult of personality became a substitute for a religious concern. In it the artist is invested with mystical, almost divine qualities. The theme is the search for some kind of spiritual freedom, which John elects to find through art. The idea of the prison looms large in the book and this is John's escape route from the personal one everyone is confronted with. As a character

named Merton says: "Lust hate greed cruelty there are many prisons."⁴⁰ John's crippled friend Anna for example is trapped by her paralysis, while Merton and his daughter are caught up by the fear that the latter will go mad like her mother. As the novel progresses the half baked psychology develops into a thoroughly spurious strain of religious mysticism:

" "I feel" John continued at last "that I'm being driven to look for something that should not be looked on No man should look on the face of God - isn't that the belief? But I can't help myself It may become worse. I know that I shall go anywhere that I've any hope of finding it, or turn to anyone who can help me to see it."⁴¹

Again notice John's reaction to the confession of a fellow artist:

" "Unfortunately, I'm an ordinary mortal. I don't see miracles."

"Don't you?" John asked. There was ⁴² honest surprise in his voice."

It is not so much that the thought is objectionable in itself, but that the sheer bad writing of the book sets it out as false and pretentious. Indeed it is a work of intellectual laziness and dishonesty typified by the worn out cliches about the artistic life he is so fond of using. Thus: "He had learnt that Lassiter still kept on his first studio, a grim attic, in a decaying part of the city but which to Lassiter had some spiritual significance."⁴³ Or: "She has a face I'd like to paint."⁴⁴

⁴⁰Hunter, Stewart. This Good Company 1946 p.104.

⁴¹Ibid. p.266. ⁴²Ibid. p.167.

⁴³Ibid. p.65. ⁴⁴Ibid. p.236.

The novel's conclusion is completely unsatisfactory. John is temperamentally suited to a life in the art world and all the indications are that he will find fulfilment in this line; however, when this is achieved it is of all things as a pilot in the R.A.F. "If ever I've seen a man at peace," a friend comments, "John is, His devils have been cast out and he has a single spirit confronting a single reality."⁴⁵ This is nothing more than a pandering to topicality.

The two most celebrated figures to have set novels in Glasgow, Neil Gunn and Edwin Muir are in many ways similar in their fictional response to the city. Both had a rural background and reacted to urban society, unfavourably, and both were interested primarily not in the city but in the individual. Muir's novel Poor Tom (1932) is gloomier than either Gunn's Wild Geese Overhead (1939) or his The Lost Chart (1949). In terms of plot Poor Tom is simple. Mansie Manson's family moves from the country to Glasgow, where they have difficulty adapting to the new ways. His brother Tom falls off a tram while drunk and the accident causes a tumour to the brain which occasions a physical degeneration and eventually kills him. Mansie, depressed enough by city life, and by conflict with his brother, has to watch this disintegration. The events of the novel are extensively, though not completely, derived from Muir's own life. His brother Johnny for example died in

⁴⁵Ibid. p.311.

exactly the same circumstances as Tom; on the other hand the triangular relationship between Mansie, Tom and the girl called Helen is purely fictional. It is not only the outward facts of Muir's life which are used but his emotional and spiritual experiences, and indeed it is these which are the book's primary concern. Poor Tom is of interest as a psychological study on two counts; firstly for the insight into the fictional characters, in particular Mansie; secondly for what it tells us about Muir himself, not so much about him when he was Mansie's age but about his later attitude to this stage of his life. For the novel is something of an exorcism designed to rid himself of his guilt about the neglect and hostility that dominated his relationship with Johnnie before the latter's death.⁸ However it must be stressed that the thought of the novel is far from clear. The complex pattern of emotions, the deep probing of the inner life and the philosophical musings, unite in a blend of gloomy obscurity. We are aware of several layers of significance, but identification and interpretation are extremely difficult. Yet certain themes are apparent. On the one hand there is alienation, something peculiarly associated with city life, and springing from Mansie's perplexity at the difference between rural and urban society. He can find nothing

⁸"In thinking about the past, recreating it and trying to transform it into fiction he was seeking to release himself from it." - P.H. Butter Edwin Muir Man & Poet 1966 p.33.

to relate to, or feel part of; nothing is secure. "His old dread of chaos returned, for chaos is universal separation."⁴⁶ Similarly the feeling is expressed in Mansie's vision of his divided self, of "a rich and bright cloud in which, as in a trance some part for ever beyond his reach still lay imprisoned; so that the memory awoke in him of a vague need to struggle and free himself from something or other, he did not know what."⁴⁷ One of the few positive notes in the novel comes in the scene where Mansie gets caught up with the May Day crowd and we see his alienation replaced by a measure of fulfilment. Walking among the throng of people he experiences a strange exultation and he is totally at one with them and the world. "He was not now an isolated human being walking with other isolated human beings from a definite place to a definite place, but part of a rhythm that had arisen, he did not know how."⁴⁸ Another major theme is guilt. It is particularly obvious in Part 3 of the novel, where we find Mansie blaming himself for Tom's plight. If he had not gone with Helen, he thinks, perhaps Tom would not have drunk so much, and the accident might never have happened. The thought is a recurring one. Even while walking in the street it jumps up to confront him.

"Was he to blame for Tom's death? Oh God, could he be to blame was it his fault that Tom took a glass too much that night and stumbled off the tramcar?"⁴⁹

⁴⁶Muir, Edwin. Poor Tom 1932 p.235.

⁴⁷Ibid. p.121.

⁴⁸Ibid. p.104.

⁴⁹Ibid. p.243.

Another perspective on guilt however is given in the way Muir evinces an unsure attitude to childhood remembrances. Certain events which were at the time entirely innocent, viewed in retrospect from an adult standpoint, become morally suspect. Similarly there is a different sexual attitude between the country and the city which is confusing to the newcomer. As Butter writes "outward propriety combined with secret, sterile and guilt ridden sex he regarded as especially characteristic of urban puritan communities,"⁵⁰ and we see Mansie led on by a girl who satisfies her whim, then cuts him coldly off, leaving him feeling guilty and confused.

This unhappy novel is not good fiction. The over concentration on the inner man makes it heavy and slow moving. The persistent use of autobiography, without any attempt to rework it in an interesting or creative manner, is mere self indulgence which clogs up the story like untreated sewage. However it is interesting to note how Muir uses the city as a scapegoat for the personal troubles of the characters. Mrs. Manson for example:

"Jean's action was to her only another proof of the corrupting influence of Glasgow. In her heart she blamed Glasgow for all the misfortunes that had happened since she came South.... " 51

It marks a very important attitude to the city in that the author does not dwell for over long on the

⁵⁰Butter, P.H. Edwin Muir: Man and Poet 1966 p.45.

⁵¹Poor Tom op. cit. p.93.

physical background - although there is sufficient, and often vivid, description, like the scene in Eglinton Street - but that it is the spiritual atmosphere of the place that concerns him: the gloom. This means that the background is largely taken for granted. We do not find the kind of tedious drawn out description that occurs in so much of the genre, especially in the works of the social realists like McKechnie. In qualitative terms this has been the great problem of the Glasgow novel. Writers have reacted to industrialism with wonder or disgust, both of which meant a painstaking attention to even the most trivial details of the city's face. As a new interest to the Scottish novelist the urban world was understandably overdone. Thus a Glasgow backyard excited a disproportionate attention just because it was in Glasgow, whereas the country counterpart would have been passed by with a nod of the head. Moreover, a concentration on externals also leads to parochialism, of which the city's fiction has more than its fair share. What was needed was for writers using the city to take their setting for granted, sketch in what was necessary to the telling of their tale, and ruthlessly ignore the irrelevancies. This is what often happened with those whose concern was the individual. The very effort to focus on personality necessitates less attention to physical background. It is to a large extent true to say then, that the best expression of industrialism was achieved not by pursuing it directly, but by going beyond it into universals, such as character and individuality.

When the industrial world occurs as a by product of this interest in people it is often better realised than in those books which try to build it up brick by brick. The spirit as embodied in the type of people it has produced is as important for the feel of a place as the outward characteristics. It is no accident for example that Justice Of The Peace, which portrays the development of an artist, is the best expression we have of the commercial city. Again in Wild Geese Overhead, while Gunn's main purpose is to depict a journalist's search for fulfilment, the most effective aspect of the novel is not this, but the way he evokes certain features of Glasgow life. It is a complicated book, and like Muir's inclined to be vague and obscure. In thought it has affinities with his Highland River for, just as the struggle with the salmon there sparks off some kind of momentary insight into life, which leads to a search for fulfilment, so the sight of the flying geese has the same sort of effect on the journalist. It is a search however which as far as the reader is concerned is to remain inconclusive. Gunn's point is never clear. What is the meaning of Will's escape from the city? How are we to interpret his relationship with the various figures who inhabit it? We are prevented from answering these questions satisfactorily by the muddle of pseudo mysticism and spurious philosophy which infects so much of what this author writes. Indeed his impulse to try and invest almost everything with significance becomes increasingly ridiculous. For

example the common sight of boys in a back court burning paper calls forth: "It was Pagan, the response of young hearts to the spring, the same response that at this very time was moving country boys to burn whins and heather."⁵² Nevertheless, on an obvious level there is the contrast between city and country. The life weary journalist is rejuvenated by his move to rural surroundings. The city is a dark place of violence and squalor, the country the home of rest and peace. Gunn takes this idea beyond Glasgow into a vision which does say something meaningful about the 'City' in general. It is a place dominated by the unpleasant.

"The city itself became a dark mythological city; a city wherein man wandered, seeking escape, and yet not seeking escape, desiring it and yet afraid of it appearing for a moment and then disappearing in the shadows of the dark wall entrapped by the dark walls; trapped ⁵³ and forever committed."

It is an idea, echoed in the personalities of Will's two girlfriends; one is identified with the city, the other with the country. Significantly when Will loses his memory it is the sight of Jenny, the country girl, which restores it to him. Bound up with this is Gunn's use of the River; again not merely the Clyde, but a symbolic one. It is linked with nastiness: the slums are near it; Will is always depressed while walking beside it, and he has several unpleasant experiences close to its banks. Eventually it assumes mythic

⁵²Gunn, Neil Miller. Wild Geese Overhead 1939 p.86.

⁵³Ibid. p.259.

proportions of life and death. Yet the novel does not integrate these ideas into any sort of definite or satisfying vision. Gunn is obviously groping to express something with phrases like 'seeking to escape and yet not seeking to escape' but what, is impossible to say. It is of course tempting to find some sort of neat interpretation, but as written the book just does not provide this, and to assert otherwise is to manipulate, and forsake any standards of critical honesty.

What we do find however are a number of fine glimpses of Glasgow life which, as critics⁵⁴ have been quick to point out, show that Gunn is able to handle not only the Highlands but urban society also. The scene in the pub toilet has been noted for its authenticity:

"Men's backs and shoulders, one or two swaying in their drink. The fellow next to him was leaning forward, supported by the forehead which pressed against the flagstone wall. All at once, the horizontal pipe a few inches above the man's head noisily gushed out water through its small perforations. The water descended upon his cap, soaked it and trickled down his face. His whole body convulsed, and his mouth ejected a violent gush of vomit which hit the flagstone, and spat back upon 55 Will's clothes."

If these last two writers only produced unsuccessful novels about the city others have fared better. The Fifties and Sixties saw a number of fine works centering on personality, marked not only by an improvement in

⁵⁴See Morrison, David E (ed) Essays on Neil M. Gunn 1971.

⁵⁵Wild Geese Overhead op. cit. p. 99.

the standard of writing in general but by the fact that Glasgow itself has been much better realised. One can only speculate as to why this should be so, but it is reasonable to assume that the welfare state was partially responsible. The erasion of many social problems meant less drama and less obvious subjects for fiction in the outer world, so writers increasingly looked at man on a more personal level. Also, by this time the genre had been in existence for a good number of years, and it would have been surprising had it not attained some kind of maturity. Having gorged itself on social details it seems as if the movement realised that it should move on to something new. This was of course more a gradual drift than a sharp break with previous trends, an intensifying of the development seen in Gunn, Muir, Carswell By this I do not mean that the novel probed deeper and deeper into the human consciousness but that a growing number of writers were to see the exploration of the individual rather than of society, as their goal. Indeed the intensive exploration of personality to the extent where it becomes difficult and obscure was not a feature. A better awareness of the entertainment role, as well as the visionary role of the novel, and thus the need for artistry, was apparent. We find many different types of reaction to the question of the individual. In some it is merely the depiction of colourful characters, in others the examination of emotional problems, while yet again the focus may be on relationships, or on the peculiarities of human nature. If we take for example the specific situation of the

failed marriage we can see something of the type of change that came over the genre. In the 1930s it was made use of for its social implications. It will be remembered that in The Shipbuilders and in Major Operation the trials of Danny Shiels and George Anderson are primarily evidence of certain social trends: in the former the subversion of traditional Scottish culture by a cheap and facile Americanisation that is associated with Danny's wife; in the latter of the faithlessness and venality of the middle classes. When we turn to Robert Mirvish's Woman In A Room (1959) and Alastair Mair's The Ripening Time (1970) however, we are aware not of particular instances of the general, but of relationships that are of interest in their own right. Briefly Woman In A Room presents us with a young woman living a lonely life in a small private hotel in Glasgow. Through a series of flashbacks her past is revealed - she left home as a girl, found a job in a shoe shop, found a bedsitter, met a boy, drifted into an unhappy marriage, then left her husband. She meets an American and at the end of the book, marries him and accompanies him to a happier life abroad. The main concern of the novel is with the circumstances of her first marriage, which founders because of the emotional background of the two participants. Mirvish establishes a sort of psychological cause and effect. Moira Frazer, the heroine, is herself the child of a broken marriage, which was complicated by the fact that her grandfather had attempted to seduce her mother, and Moira consequently retains an uncertain attitude to sex. In her relationship with the selfish

and unfeeling Arthur this turns into actual disgust and repulsion, fed by the peculiar circumstances of their life together. Lack of means forces them to live with relatives, where, due to Arthur's supposed ill health, they have separate rooms. Every night however finds him creeping furtively to hers, and immediately retreating after they have made love. Despite the apparent sensationalism of the bald facts however, Mirvish handles everything with taste and restraint, and competently leads us to an understanding of how certain types of relationship are inevitably doomed to failure. Woman In A Room, though by no means remarkable, is a good novel. Perhaps more interesting than the central situation however is the author's description of the loneliness of life in a bed-sitting room, and the way he perceives it as being particularly bleak for women.

James Kenn^aoway's The Cost Of Living Like This (1969) presents us with a more complex situation. The central character, an English economist who is dying of cancer, is having an affair with a swimming star. He follows her when she travels to Glasgow from London for a competition, and is in turn followed by his wife. In Glasgow they become involved with a football referee named Mozart Anderson, to whom the women unburden themselves in turn, and who referees between them. Kenn^aoway uses a flashback technique to mix the past with the present, and show the roots of the affair as well as an act of infidelity by the wife. What, however, is the point of it all? One critic, Hugh MacKay interpreted it thus:

"The Cost Of Living Like This, Kennaway's last work, is an affirmation of the necessity of acting in truth, for that is the price of the 'great, extraordinary moments in life.'"⁵⁶ It is a vague and somewhat spurious reading never justified by the text as a whole. Critics have been full in their praise of the novel but I cannot agree. It seems to have no real point other than a demonstration of the use of language. Kenn^away seems to be shouting 'look how modern I am', for the novel is riddled with glib, and 'smart' dialogue - self consciously so. Again, philosophising - particularly that of Mozart Anderson - never quite rings true. It is apparent that the hero clings to his young mistress in a kind of act of death-defying - while he has her, and she does not know the full seriousness of his ill health, he has some hope. Yet we cannot believe wholly in the characters, and as a study of an affair, or a marriage on the rocks, it is neither convincing nor satisfying.

A more lurid treatment of marital disharmony is to be found in The Ripening Time (1970) by Alastair Mair. This time the sexual affairs are described in frank detail, yet behind the titillation lies a serious and valid point, for Mair shows how repression is ultimately destructive to the formation of any kind of meaningful relationship. When two people who are sexually and emotionally inexperienced marry, without any real bond of love, the results are disastrous. To Mary Muldoon

⁵⁶ Mackay, Hugh. Library Review. Summer 1972 Vol. 23 No. 6 p.232.

sex with her lifeless husband is merely a way of securing from him the material goods her calculating personality demands. Tom, conversely, finds his wife's frigidity a source of despair. In a torrid scene of virtual rape however, Mary is awakened by a young hooligan, whose love making, significantly, has its decidedly perverted side. It would seem that when repressed feelings do burst forth they take on an unhealthy and unnatural form.

From then on her relationship with her husband deteriorates as he proves unable, and unwilling, to respond to her sterile demands. Mair confronts us with episodes that are the nearest thing to obscenity to be found in the genre, and which come perilously close to the ridiculous in their overall conception. For example the scene where Tom resists Mary's advances on the night of his mother's funeral:

"Watch me! See if that'll get your wee prick up!"

He watched her, aghast. He pleaded with her.

"No, Mary, stop it! Please stop it!"

"Watch me!"

"We'll do it tomorrow night, Mary. I promise. But don't do it like that."

Her fingers stopped. She raised her head to look at his, wide-eyed with glee.

"No!" she cried. "I won't do it like that!" She jumped from the bed. "I'll get a banana!"

"No!" He sat up his arm outstretched in appeal. "Mary, don't!"

But she had gone. He heard her in the kitchen. He heard a cupboard door. Then she was back. She was lying beside him, laughing. He saw

the yellow fruit slide in.

"No, please - !"

"Yes! Oh, yes! That's better than anything you've got!"

"Oh, Christ!"

He turned over, crushing his face into the pillow. Beneath him, the bed moved to the rhythm of her manipulating hand. He heard her breathing quicken at last, heard the moan come from her throat and felt the convulsive movement of her body in the moment of orgasm. Later, the light went out. Later still, he heard her weeping.

In the morning, the salt of his own tears still stained his cheeks and she was already gone. But she had set the plate for his breakfast, with a spoon for his porridge, a side plate for his toast, a glass of milk, and a banana." 57

As the book progresses the action becomes more and more unreal culminating in an ending where Tom in a fit of rage batters his wife to death with a garden spade. We have obviously come a long road here, from religion to pornography, but our original submission that the cult of personality has increasingly become a substitute for faith, both socially and in literary terms, remains valid. It will be noticed that what the couple so obviously lack is something to give their lives meaning. Both of them in their own way are involved in a search for personal fulfilment. For Mary it takes the form of an adulterous love affair, while Tom retreats into the role of a fanatical gardener, finding some sort of self justification in the cultivation of tomatoes and the wait for them to ripen. Without any great subtlety Mair draws

⁵⁷Mair, Alistair. The Ripening Time 1970 p.132.

from their different experiences reverberations about growth and fertility.

The central situation of The Ripening Time bears a remarkable similarity to what we find in Hugh C. Rae's Night Pillow (1967). Again it is about a young couple trapped in a loveless marriage and emotionally isolated from each other, and again the wife finds no physical attraction in her husband but can only respond to a sadistic hooligan who had once raped her. This becomes more than coincidental when we realise that the same sort of pattern is being worked out elsewhere in the genre. Marie Muir's Leezie Lindsay (1955) and Robin Jenkins' A Very Scotch Affair (1968) are once more portraits of crumbling marriages where the element of sexual incompatability looms large. When Muir tells us about Leezie's initial rigidity she is describing something common to so many of these modern characters: "Physical contact still made Elizabeth shrink. She reared back from the warm embrace, caught the affronted look in her mother's eyes and submitted."⁵⁸ This emotional flaw leads her into a rotten marriage, as she shrinks from a relationship with the virile Rob Andrews in favour of the emasculated Colin Carswell, who does not seem to present the same threat to the sanctity of her emotions. She realises her mistake too late to save herself from considerable unhappiness. Carswell is a writer of sentimental slush for women's magazines, a

⁵⁸Muir, Marie. Leezie Lindsay 1955 p.24.

homosexual with a mother fixation whose literary efforts are an extension of this personality. He is incapable of forming any unselfish meaningful relationship, and indeed has something of the vampire in his nature, using the feelings and experiences of both Leezie and his mother as the basis for his sick writings. Muir's success in equating this sexual and emotional perversion with the sort of school of writing that produces obscenities like the Francis Gay column in The Sunday Post (which Carswell's work brings most immediately to mind) is the best feature of an otherwise lightweight romantic novel.

In comparison with the kind of people we have met in the books immediately above, Mungo Niven in A Very Scotch Affair seems almost respectable. Yet he leaves his wife of over twenty years, now dying, for an arid, short lived affair with a wealthy woman. It has been suggested by some observers that there is significance in the hero's name, that Jenkins intended to identify him with Glasgow itself and to make some sort of association between his situation and that of the city, but this is never made concrete enough to have any validity. Rather the novel is an assertion of the dualistic nature of the human spirit, of man's strengths and his weaknesses. Ultimately it is an optimistic vision which is in contrast to the gloom of Mair and Rae. Mungo is an unattractive character, selfish and conceited, yet he never loses our sympathy altogether. He blames his wife for his own inadequacies, for his failure to get on in life, resents her cheerful anti-intellectual good

humour, and sees her as holding back his higher qualities. When he decides to run off he justifies his decision to himself on the most dubious of grounds, seeing it almost as a social duty to demonstrate that,

"every man, however lowly in the world's hierarchies, was his own master capable of surprising his creator himself.

Yes much depended on him. If he shrank back now, no one would be saved; all, including Bess herself, would sink 59 deeper into the morass."

Yet however insincere the thought may be it is significant that it takes this shape - the idea of fulfilment - for despite his failings Mungo has still the strength to pursue it. Jenkins understands that there are two sides to every question, that the world is writ in greys rather than blacks and whites. Thus Bessie, an otherwise ideal figure is flawed in that she hates Catholics. Similarly old Mrs. Ralston, something of a moral touchstone, resists all attempts to blacken Mungo completely: "So I just canna bring myself to condemn him Flo, though it was a terrible thing he did. A mair terrible thing must hae driven him to it."⁶⁰

A Very Scotch Affair helps us at this stage to make two important points; firstly to repeat that it is in books like this, dealing with the individual, that the city is often seen the clearest; secondly, to observe that Mungo's activities are only one symptom of a wider

⁵⁹Jenkins, Robin. A Very Scotch Affair 1968 p.62.

⁶⁰Ibid. p.126.

movement that views sexual discontent and chaos as an integral part of Scottish urban society. As a portrait of Glasgow this novel has some success precisely because physical detail is kept at a minimum. The closemouths and street corners are there, but it is the spirit of the inhabitants that gives the place its atmosphere: the neighbours in a group for example discussing Mungo's wrongdoings. Glasgow people are drab, but enduring, and with unexpected feelings. At his wife's funeral:

"It was no common sight to see public, or even private tears on those grim, resolute, workworn faces. They read no books, appreciated no sculptures, saw no plays, and were more at home among lamp posts than among trees. Their imaginations, lively enough in infancy, had long ago been starved to death. Where therefore did those tears spring from?"

61

Similarly the final value of Night Pillow lies not in the melodrama of rape and violence but in the way Rae establishes the changing physical face of the city and how it affects the people. It is a picture of contemporary Glasgow under the shadow of the bulldozer, of tenements coming down and high flats going up. But it is also a comment on the close association between people and their setting, on how a place can be part of the individual psyche. Mr. Leishman is mortified at having to exchange his old home for a new one in a tower block. It is much more than just leaving a place he had been happy in for a generation, he realises that a whole phase

⁶¹Ibid. p. 162.

of his existence is being ended, and contentment gives way to bewilderment and disorientation. For the young the position is no different. The Farrels, although they live in a different area, are also to be uprooted and it is with regret that George "heard his parents talk of moving house come the spring, and all the pleasant dirty comforts of the two room and kitchen in the canyon like security of Anchor Street would be behind."⁶² It is not going too far to suggest that the author shows how the identification with place can have an almost spiritual significance. A sense of belonging to a particular locale can provide an essential stability that can give meaning to life. The name of the street the Farrels live in is no accident:

"Anchor Street had not only been Jacko's home for the first twelve years of his life but his playground and his college, his lodge and his asylum from the restrictions of his family. He knew the district in spite of recent changes, like the back of his hand. Only the rubble of once familiar tenements disconcerted him a little, and he was annoyed by the haste with which the demolishers moved, as if their prime intention was to confuse and throw him off his bearings." 63

The city is in a state of flux, and so are the personalities of its inhabitants. (Nor, incidentally, is it a thought isolated to this one novelist. When Nicolson's Mrs. Ross is temporarily removed from her crumbling tenement she becomes a pale shadow of herself;

⁶²Rae, Hugh C. Night Pillow 1967 p.126.

⁶³Ibid. p.140.

when she leaves it permanently she dies.)

However we must return to the question of sex, and its difficult, indecipherable problems for the commentator. What is certain is that taken all together the Glasgow writers of the last twenty years have created a world filled not with well balanced characters, but with people with a variety of sexual and emotional problems and idiosyncracies. Apart from those already seen we find examples in Friel's *Miss Partridge* and Nicolson's *Mrs. Ross*, both of whose marriages have long since broken up leaving them lonely and slightly mad. *Miss Partridge* in particular has repressed her feelings and developed an intense hatred of men. Similarly in Friel's *The Bank Of Time* (1959) we find a further perspective on the unhealthy side of sex in the figure of Mary Ruthven, the hero's childhood friend, who, as she grows older becomes increasingly furtive and unnatural in her sexual activities, and ends up posing for obscene photographs. The obvious questions which all this raises are, why should this be so? What implications can we draw from it? There are no obvious answers in the novels themselves, however, and despite the similarities nowhere do the writers express any kind of wider vision which would link individual apprehensions of sex to a more general stream of thought. Thus Mair for example never indicates that the problems of Mary and Tom are symptoms of, say, the fragmentation of traditional values by urban society, nor does Rae take the line that Malcolm and Alice have anything universal to tell us about its role in city life.

While it is apparent that something must be driving them to express the same sort of idea if not consciously, then unconsciously, we are forced to look outwith the book for an explanation. Society itself however leaves us equally at a loss for anything definite. Increasing permissiveness is of course one reason why sex is talked about more openly, but it does not tell us why it should take the form it does in the genre. Edwin Muir's attitude perhaps gives us a clue. In seeing the city as the home of sterile guilt-ridden sex and the country as the opposite, he is subscribing to the long running argument which differentiates between the physical and emotional responses of the countryman and the city dweller. The instincts of the former, so the theory goes, are natural and spontaneous, part of the very cycle of rural life; of the land; fertility. But when these become transferred to a background of artificially lit streets and dark close mouths somehow they become corrupted.^h It is essentially a romantic notion - and to the present writer nonsensical - yet it has been given wide currency and many modern Glasgow novelists can be seen as writing in this vein, though not it would seem as a final interpretation of city life but as a convenient way - a motif - of expressing their more basic vision of the city as the home of chaos, anxiety and destructive complexity. That this is the case is apparent when we

^hSee A.L. Lloyd. Folk Song In England 1967 for an expression of this idea p.197. "... the erotic folklore of the soil with its clean joy and acceptance of the realities of virginity and desire, passion and growing belongs to a country people living an integrated deeply-communal life in tune with natural events....."

see that something the same exists even in those writers who are not really concerned with sex at all. The central characters in all George Friel's novels are out of the ordinary. His later ones in particular are pathetic defeated creatures. Similarly, the heroine of Nicolson's Mrs. Ross (1961) and A Flight Of Steps (1966) which continues her tale, is an outcast living on the periphery of normal life. Tom Curdie, the schoolboy malcontent in Robin Jenkins' The Changeling is perhaps^{*} the classic example of the type, a tormented creature completely out of tune with the rest of humanity. Their personalities are peculiar and their relationships with others distorted and irregular, and together they imply a vision of the urban world as basically diseased.

In Friel interest in the individual is always evident - although The Boy Who Wanted Peace, as we noted in an earlier chapter, is primarily political allegory. His first novel is one of his best. It is an admirable piece of work which in the quality of the writing - the quiet and thoughtful tone - and the central situation of a hero who observes rather than participates in life, is very close to Niven's A Tale That Is Told. It is the story of three brothers, the changes in the personalities over the years, the changes in their relationships with one another and with those in their immediate circle. In the section of the novel which deals with childhood Friel uses the play of boys, as he

^{*}See Chapter One above.

will use it in The Boy Who Wanted Peace, to say something universal. In this case the world of the back courts is a stage where certain moral problems are played out. David for example knows inner conflict when "the instincts of self preservation and duty jostled each other within him,"⁶⁴ and he has the choice of running away and hiding from the impending attack of a rival gang, or risking capture to warn his friends. He takes the risk and pays the price. Again, the issue of honour is raised in the incident of a boxing match where he is called upon to defend the family name. He does so - and loses an eye in the process. David's early life is a succession of such problems, and he inevitably does the 'right' thing and inevitably comes off worse. Yet he never regrets his decisions. They are necessary stages on his journey to maturity. At one point when he is older however he is called upon to make a trivial decision involving a childhood enemy - should he tell Carter, now a shopkeeper, that he has been given too much change? - again he does the moral thing, and from it comes a crucial revelation. It is a long passage but very important, for there expressed, are the ideas the book revolves around:

"There came into David's mind then, dimly and inarticulately, what he learnt later more precisely from experience, that in certain circumstances and at certain times in our life, those who were our rivals and even seemed our most bitter enemies become naturally and inevitably our friends, or at least come to feel sympathetic towards us, hatred being as much a bond

⁶⁴Friel, George. The Bank of Time 1959 p.20.

as love, and when the hatred is gone the bond itself remains, as it doesn't always do when love goes, for the death of love is accompanied usually by feelings of disappointment, disillusion, and finally disinterest. But our vanity can't hurt when we find we are no longer hated, nor is our ideal shattered when we discover we no longer hate. In the latter situation the heart, instead of feeling empty, feels a mild impulse towards the person it once abhorred and desires to make up for what has come to seem a misjudgement, however excusable the error was, and it wishes not only that the dead should bury the dead but the living should live in amity. We have oftener a common past with those we have long hated than those we have briefly loved." 65

The change in the relationship with Carter is a rehearsal for what will happen between the brothers. As a boy David disliked the one brother, Mark, and was close to the other, Paul. However not only does David change, but so do they, and the way he relates to them. As he reflects: "Yet David remembered that when they were boys together it was he who was rash and Paul who was prudent. Now they seemed to have exchanged natures, and it was Paul who was keen to fight the world, while all he himself wanted was peace and quiet."⁶⁶ Paul becomes greedy, underhand, and treacherous, while the hated Mark reveals himself as open, brave and generous. After many years abroad Mark arrives on the doorstep:

"As he stood there he felt no hostility at all. Fire drives out fire, love drives out love, and no doubt his hatred of Paul had driven out his earlier hatred of Mark. Or maybe he had just grown out of it." 67

⁶⁵Ibid. p.71.

⁶⁶Ibid. p.100.

⁶⁷Ibid. p.198.

The change in the boys is echoed in that of Mary Ruthven. "As a boy he had marvelled at the fullness and frankness of her conversation with her mother Now she who once had told her mother everything was telling her nothing. She was even guilty of deceit now."⁶⁸ What we have then is an assertion of the mutability of personalities and relationships. Individuals are subject to contradictory changes - they live their lives in a state of flux, so that the comment Mrs. Ruthven makes early on in the book comes to seem very true: "Never judge people Davie. Nobody knows enough to judge anyone."⁶⁹

Although analysis shows the thought to be clear cut and definite a reading of the novel does not impress it on the mind as starkly as we see it here. Friel is a considerable artist and rings the changes gradually and with subtlety, keeping his characters completely alive and entirely convincing. The background is admirably drawn and once again we are moved to remark on how well Glasgow life can be shown when it is done discreetly as part of something else and not obsessively for its own sake. What we are most aware of is the vigour and variety of tenement life - the children in particular - that stands in contrast to the gloom of the earlier writers. The same is true in Grace And Miss Partridge. Another aspect of Glasgow - the drinking - is also very vivid here. It is not clouded in an atmosphere

⁶⁸Ibid. p.148.

⁶⁹Ibid. p.68.

of the morally reprehensible but taken for granted as an ordinary part of life. The pub where Bobo, Dross, and Yoyo drink is no filthy den, but realistically a garish haunt exuding phoney class:

"The brewers squandered a barrel of money to modernise the enlarged premises to a fashionable modern-antique style, and the part where Bobo and Dross liked to drink had a low ceiling with imitation oak rafters, plastic panelled walls, gawky little tables, and portraits of laughing cavaliers, simpering bareshouldered beauties in Louis Quatorze dress Above the lintel a neon light blushingly whispered TUDOR LOUNGE in simplified gothic."⁷⁰

It will be obvious from the tone that Friel's attitude in the novel has a strong humorous element. Yet there is also a very serious side. Miss Partridge, embittered and a bit mad, is a figure of fun to all the children in the area. The absurd, twisted view of life held in her strange mind is funny - yet potentially tragic, not only for herself, but for the little girl Grace who becomes the focus of her attentions, and whose soul she determines to save. "Any child that grows up is doomed to damnation today."⁷¹ The world is full of sin and corruption - not least the influence of male coarseness - and to grow up is to be infected. So she plans to do Grace a favour and kill her while she is still innocent. That her objective is foiled by an accident exposes the sentimentality that is Friel's major flaw in the book. The seeds of Grace's destruction

⁷⁰Friel, George. Grace And Miss Partridge 1969 p.36.

⁷¹Ibid. p.71.

have been so firmly sown, the tone is so portentous throughout, that anything less than the tragic fulfilment is unsatisfactory. Despite her queer psychology however, Miss Partridge elicits our sympathy. Indeed her state of mind becomes comprehensible when we see her past - a G.I. bride hurt by a terrible marriage, refusing to acknowledge her painful memories, and yearning for her lost childhood. She is a pathetic figure:

"I wanted to die and go to heaven and be an angel, and learn everything. Not spelling or sums or all about science. I don't mean that. They don't count that's not real wisdom. But it was too late. And you see there was a man. He came out of the jungle and pretended I was married to him but I wasn't, not really. And he held me back too "72

Miss Partridge is living proof of how inseparable are the serious and comic in life; Donald Duthie is another. The big slow Highlander with his absurd love for Bobo cuts a comic figure, but the fun turns sour when, by the mindless abuse of her sexuality, she leads him on to such an extent that he has to go out and hire a prostitute, only to be killed by two of her men friends. Friel skilfully weaves an element of violence and petty crime in with the main plot, but his other technical procedures are less successful. He plays a running joke with words throughout the book, both in the dialogue and the narrative, punning, using ironical phrases - "The little lamb wolfed them and felt better."73

⁷²Ibid. p.97.

⁷³Ibid. p.16.

However much the reader may appreciate their ingenuity, in their self conscious cleverness, they detract from the overall sincerity of the novel.

The sort of verbal jokes Friel plays here were to become an unmistakable mark of his later fiction. However, besides the stylistic similarities we are aware of certain persistent themes running through the whole body of his work, namely the relationships between adults and children, and the gulf between aspirations on the one hand and ability and opportunity on the other. Both themes are apparent in his fourth and best novel, Mr. Alfred M.A. (1972). Mr. Alfred is a middle aged Glasgow schoolmaster who has missed out on life. Like Miss Partridge or the hero of The Bank Of Time he is destined never to be a full member of society. He never married. He has only an ordinary degree and has never been promoted in his profession. He once wrote a volume of poems but it was never published. He has no friends and only a bleak future:

"It was his weakness to stand always on the fringe of company, smiling into the middle distance, happy only with a glass in his hand. He had been a wall-flower since puberty. He wanted to love his fellowmen. When he was young he even hoped to love women. Now every door seemed locked, and without a key he was afraid to knock." 74

The novel traces the last stages of his career when his loneliness, his heavy drinking, and circumstances in

⁷⁴Friel, George. Mr. Alfred M.A. 1972 p.9.

general conspire towards his demotion at work and his eventual mental decay. The spark of his downfall is his innocent though unwise relationship with two children. Firstly he arouses the displeasure of his superiors through the unwelcome publicity that stems from his attempt at disciplining a malicious thug. Secondly his need for love manifests itself in an obsession with a young girl pupil. There is never any question of impropriety, yet a ruinous scandal occurs. In the background there is the spectre of teenage violence which increasingly impinges on Mr. Alfred's consciousness and he ends up with a morbid fear of children. In The Boy Who Wanted Peace Percy felt that he could become a poet if only he was given peace, Miss Partridge believed she could have gained heavenly wisdom had not a man entered her life. Similarly Mr. Alfred sees himself capable of greater things:

"He was convinced he was better equipped to be Head of the English Department than the man in the job. He had read more widely the principal Teacher of English, a portly man prematurely bald and Deputy Head Master, was just a dunce who had never written a poem in his life. He was only a teaching machine " 75

Despite its similarities with the rest of Friel's work however Mr. Alfred M.A. is on a higher level of artistic achievement. It has a depth the others never quite reach. It is the fullest expression of something that so many of the post-war Glasgow novels have been

⁷⁵Ibid. p.14.

groping towards - a vision of the atomism of the city. Throughout literature writers have seen the city as a place of corruption and falsety. As early as Juvenal for example: "What can I do in Rome? I never learnt how/to lie." Yet the Glasgow novel never reflected this kind of distrust. To begin with Glasgow was glorious. When disillusionment set in the focus was on social evils rather than on a moral view of the city as the home of wickedness, corruption, cynicism. Now we find something different again. Notwithstanding the wickedness, the city of characters like Jonathan Wild for example, is dynamic and full of energy - a positive force. The city of the mature response of the Glasgow novel however is a city of decay. This is what we meet in Mr. Alfred M.A. We are given a vision of society running towards chaos and barbarism. It is a vision glimpsed fragmentedly and hinted at indirectly in the 'universal separation' of Poor Tom, the alienation and flux of Night Pillow, and the marital disharmony and personality problems of many of the other novels of the post-war era. We may find illuminating a remark made by Lewis Mumford in The Culture Of Cities:

"When the city ceases to be a symbol of art and order it acts in a negative fashion: it expresses and helps to make more universal the fact of disintegration. In the close quarters of the city, perversities and evils spread more quickly; and in the stones of the city these anti-social forces become embedded."⁷⁶

What Mumford observed from a study of cities and the

⁷⁶Mumford, Lewis. The Culture Of Cities 1936 p.6
(1948 edition)

human response to them throughout the ages describes exactly the movement from a typical Victorian reaction to Glasgow to Friel's in Mr. Alfred M.A. The novel is dominated by teenage violence and vandalism. One night Mr. Alfred is waiting for a bus:

"He stood in a bus-shelter and a rainy draught annoyed his legs. He felt his turnups getting soaked. He wondered why. Then he saw the glass panels along the upper half and the metal panels along the lower half were all missing. He fretted as he waited. Two schoolboys across the street stopped a while and kicked at a litter basket till it tumbled from its post. The wind took up their sport and played along the gutter with cigarette packets, bus tickets, orange peel, pokes, cartons and a vinegar-drenched newspaper that still remembered the fish and chips it had wrapped. A coca-cola bottle broke where it fell. The schoolboys 77 slouched on the next litter basket."

This incident is merely one in a chain that becomes increasingly menacing as the novel progresses. This youth-inspired chaos is mirrored in the chaos which Mr. Alfred's mind and personality are becoming. The second section of the novel is entitled The Writing On The Wall and refers both to the hero's decline and the physical background. Chapter 29 is crucial: we find here the climax. Mr. Alfred has had a knock on the head and wakes up in a close attended by Tod, a one time pupil. They have a long conversation in which Friel blends the thoughts and fears in the hero's troubled mind with the familiar 'wall culture' of hooliganism in a superb piece of surrealist writing. In Mr. Alfred's consciousness Tod

⁷⁷Mr. Alfred M.A. op. cit. p.59.

becomes the originator and manipulator of the wall slogans, which are in turn a subtle plot to undermine society. What is the purpose of the most frequent slogan, 'Ya Bass'?

"Disorder" said Tod. "You can't have a revolution without disorder, now can you?"

"No, I suppose not", said Mr. Alfred.

"What we want", said Tod "is liberty. And there's no liberty in order. And you just think for a minute. The wars of religion were fought with men screaming Ya Bass at each other. In their own language of course. The same with wars of nationalism. All I've did is reduce human conflict to its simplest terms. My boys from the north get killed fighting my boys from the south? So what? Dulce et decorum est pro housing-scheme mori." " 78

Friel's achievement is that, what is on the one hand the nightmare of a sick man - perfectly developed using the hero's fears and obsessions as we have seen them grow in the novel, coloured by his pedantry and mixed up with external signs of menace - becomes an articulation of a general unease about the drift of modern society. They are inseparable yet clear in their own right. It is Mr. Alfred's regret that as a teacher he has not had one fraction of the influence of a gang slogan. Culture, as he represents it, is on the run. The enemy is winning - as Tod tells him:

"I'm a teacher as well as you only better
 I gave a course of lectures to a few
 of the lads. I told them what to do
 Three principles. Deride, deface, destroy
 it's the end of the printed word.
 Everything's a scribble now. The writing's
 on the wall. I know. I got it put there." 79

⁷⁸Ibid. pp.192-3.

⁷⁹Ibid. pp.193-5.

Mr. Alfred M.A. is a very fine novel, perhaps the best to have come out of Glasgow in the last twenty years. However Friel's next novel - his fifth and last - An Empty House (1974), is something of a disappointment. It concerns a youth whose sister is left an old mansion house in a relative's will. It lies empty and he steals the keys, goes and lives in it and becomes involved with a group of young vagrants. Their activities culminate in the murder of an old tramp. The novel closely resembles Friel's other works, in particular The Boy Who Wanted Peace. Adam Abbot, the hero, is in fact a milder version of Percy. He is an inadequate, and like him believes he could have amounted to something had luck only favoured him:

"If he hadn't had Mr. Bulloch (classics master) for three years, he could have learned Latin properly and gone on to take Modern Languages at university. A good school would

One reason for the power of Mr. Alfred M.A. is that Friel's inspiration came from one of the most vital and strongly felt issues of his world. He was not the only writer to be concerned with the violence of youth during the late 60s and early 70s. In 1970 Hugh C. Rae wrote The Saturday Epic. It is a sensational and badly written work about gangs in Lanarkshire but the author's comments on the cover flap are revealing. They express the mood of the time:

"What went into this book was a measure of cold fear and a lot of disgust. You see, I needed no imagination to concoct the incidents only a fistful of newspapers every morning to help stoke the creative fires It is no longer a game for gangsters and psychopaths played out in dark alleys and back streets shut off and secret. It is in the open now and in broad daylight and STILL we try to ignore it in the hope that it will go away I've no answers to give to the complex problem of violence as a pastime, and I refuse to mutter provincially the campy sociological platitudes Like most Glasgow folk I resist facing up to the fact that nobody has really framed the true nature of the question yet. I suppose that's why I wrote the novel."

never have let him waste three years in a class of fools who were far beneath him." 80

Like Percy he escapes into fantasies where his imagined abilities enable him to reach great heights:

"He walked into town, surprised at the welcome in the winter air, a tang suggesting he ought to rise early every morning and make better use of the time he wasted curled in bed till noon inventing erotic adventures for himself. He could perhaps write a novel about something or maybe his autobiography, or at least an exposure for some Sunday paper of the leaks in an educational system that allowed youths of high intelligence to drop out."⁸¹

One important similarity is the way Abbot creates a code for the structuring of reality that resembles Percy's conception of the God El and the rules of worship. In this case it is the 'ABBOT-KITE FRATERNITY' - a rigid set of regulations for the running of the house in the fashion of a monastery. At the end Abbot, like Percy, gets a measure of self knowledge from the ordeals he is taken through. Friel paints his picture of a weak adolescent with humour and pathos, creating an entertaining novel, yet it lacks the extra dimension of Mr. Alfred M.A. Moreover it is too much a repetition of what he has written before. He brings nothing new to the themes he deals with.

Robert Nicolson's Mrs. Ross is in many ways like Friel's Miss Partridge. She is a lonely old woman

⁸⁰Friel, George. An Empty House 1974 p.34.

⁸¹Ibid. p.84.

living in squalor, one of life's casualties who finds it impossible to live up to reality. Instead of shielding herself in a layer of perverted religion however she retreats into a world of delusions, unable to distinguish between what is real and what is in her own mind. The opening paragraph of Mrs. Ross for example, sets the tone, in the mixture of truth and nonsense that is the essence of her personality. Here it is captured in the form of a letter heading. Note the absurd titles, which, getting more and more grandiose as the book goes on, provide much of Nicolson's humour:

"Margaret Ross, nee Cattanach, 47
Shawl Street, 2 up left, Hereditary
Countess of Aird and all the Islands
to the West, Comtesse de la Bruyere,
Laird (on father's side) of Struther
and the Adjoining lands, Lady of
the Manor of Great d'Arcy, with other
titles and assistance book reference 82
number 86-27946 "

Mrs. Ross is a far more likeable character than Miss Partridge. She has courage and dignity and is entirely without self pity (when she hears on the radio for example that many old folk are lonely she thinks "Poor old souls", not connecting it with herself). The two novels about her are primarily humorous, although like Friel's they have their serious touches. The humour comes from Mrs. Ross's airs and graces, which are paraded with complete solemnity; from her multiplicity of complaints to official bodies of one kind or another,

⁸²Nicolson, Robert. Mrs. Ross 1961 p.7.

either in person or by letter, and by the way we see her assimilate true facts heard on the radio, or read in magazines, into her delusions. In the library reading room for example: "She opened a magazine and began to read. 'How touching is the spectacle of the crowd of clerks and shop girls coming in to lunch at twelve o'clock in the vast Restaurant Lemeunier, rue de la' ".⁸³ Later on we see her at a charity meal at a mission hall:

" 'Did you enjoy your meal?' the bull-necked man asked.

She looked at him. 'When I lived in Paris' she said 'I always dined at the vast restaurant Lemeunier. But your soup was very good.' "⁸⁴

His other characters are equally well drawn; her shiftless no good husband, who turns up temporarily after years of desertion, Mr. Conrad the assistance board man, and her criminal son, are all very vivid. So too is the background, crumbling tenements - some empty, some housing Indians - and the general atmosphere of decay in her neighbourhood. The communal spirit of the area comes over clearly in the police investigations that follow the murder of a child - the inquisitiveness mixed with genuine shock, the sorry shaking heads. He shows insight for example in the scene where the police question the children:

⁸³Ibid. p.11.

⁸⁴Ibid. p.15.

" 'You knew Nellie Soutar didn't you?'
a detective asked a boy of about
nine years old.

'Aye. An I didnie like her'.

'You did!' said his scandalised mother. 'Of
course you did! The poor wee lassie's deid'."⁸⁵

Mrs. Ross and A Flight of Steps are really fine writing. Nicolson has a good light touch, writes simply with brevity and restraint, and shows great control of his material. It is easy to see why the former was so suitable for filming,^k given the short sharp scenes, crisp dialogue, and the comedy. Mrs. Ross's harmless delusions sustain her, and when psychiatric treatment strips them from her she is drained of life. Only when she is allowed to revert to them does she recover. Similarly when her home is knocked down and she is installed instead in an Old Folk's Home she just wanders off and dies, unable to exist without the place that was such an integral part of her mental world. In Nicolson's books we find a plea for the individual's right to live as he or she pleases, and an assertion of the vigour of the human spirit even in the most adverse circumstances.

It is interesting to note that something similar exists in the two novels by Clifford Hanley. A Taste Of Too Much (1958) and The Red Haired Bitch (1969) are not really about personality as such, but are studies of

⁸⁵Nicolson, Robert. A Flight Of Steps 1966 p.108.

^kUnder the title of The Whisperers - starring Edith Evans.

aspects of modern Glasgow society, yet in both, the same notion of the individual spirit as something thriving on variety and chaos is apparent. Hanley is a bit of a salesman for disorder here. In The Red Haired Bitch for example he comments that:

"if life were mechanically perfect, a theatre production would go like a chronometer. The script would be delivered in complete playable condition and everybody would be happy all the time. It would be hell."⁸⁶

This finds an echo in the dialogue between Peter and his father at the end of the earlier novel:

" 'The trouble wi' me' said Peter 'is that too many things happen to me.'

'Well you're bloody lucky. Bloody lucky.' Peter caught an intonation of wistfulness and regret, and it jolted him. He didn't want to think about it." 87

Finally, it is useful to conclude our examination of the modern interest in the individual with a consideration of three books published in the mid Sixties, for among them they sum up what has been the main characteristics of the trend: The Bitter Lollipop (1964) by John Quigley, The Dear Green Place (1966) by Archie Hind, and Chaim Bermant's Jericho Sleep Alone (1964). Quigley's novel is very much a representative of that school of writers - noted in Stewart Hunter's This Good

⁸⁶Hanley, Clifford. The Red Haired Bitch 1969 p.76.

⁸⁷Hanley, Clifford. The Taste Of Too Much 1960 p.206.

Company - which has an urge to write about the individual but which has essentially nothing to say, so they sink into the spurious and the pretentious. The hero is a misanthropic, world weary, young journalist who is utterly unconvincing in his exaggerated disgust with life. "There was so much to regret: that you had been born, that you had to die and meantime you had to live."⁸⁸ His bitterness has no satisfactory explanation and it is difficult to credit a 22 year old with such feelings - other than as a pose. Yet the whole background becomes coloured by his diseased eye, and time and time again we get passages like:

"The chips looked like grey phials of poison, and through the steam on the car windows the moronic youths who scuffed outside Mario's appeared to him like orang outangs. When they tired of tearing at each other's jackets they would slouch off in search of glass to break, an animal to torture "⁸⁹

If Quigley overdoes the gloom he does not indicate how it can be lifted. He never makes clear what the journalist is searching for. There is a religious element but this is as facile as everything else in the book. The hero, a one time 'Believer' supposedly driven to atheism by all the troubles in the world, goes about drawing adolescent religious parallels and inveighing against God:

"God also invented red hot poker, iron maidens and burning matchsticks under the

⁸⁸Quigley, John. The Bitter Lollipop 1964 p.24.

⁸⁹Ibid. p.70.

fingernails. He invented moments of madness so that there could be lifetimes of remorse. He invented hunger, thirst, ambition and desire, so that we could never know peace. It was God who invented adultery " 90

It is a sign of the times that this is present not as a vitally felt issue but as an attempt to add substance to something totally false and shallow. The one good thing about the novel is the way the newspaper world is very effectively shown as corrupt and corruptive.

Jericho Sleep Alone by contrast, while again essentially light, does give a valid expression to the individual dilemma. The theme is the quest for some purpose in life. Jerry is rooted in a strong Jewish background where religious conviction, though never overwhelming, is always evident, but significantly this does not satisfy his inner needs. Religion is just not enough for the modern Scot. The book is more a conventional portrait of a restless, uncertain youth, than a deep psychological study, but the boy's indecisiveness, his puzzlement about life, and his search for contentment are well observed. The colourful semi-exotic world of Glasgow middle class Jewry - "then the soup then the cholent, a complex dish of potatoes, beans, prunes treacle and meats,"⁹¹ - and the wider background of Glasgow itself are perhaps the novel's best feature. At the end of the book, after his travels abroad, his return to Glasgow brings Jerry a measure of contentment.

⁹⁰Ibid. p.86.

⁹¹Bermant, Chaim. Jericho Sleep Alone 1964. p.59.

The city has life giving properties which become essential to any inner peace he may find:

"I would leave for Glasgow on the afternoon train. There would be good meals at home, and walks through the park, and bus rides to Loch Lomond and tea in Skinners and watching the trams career into Woodlands Road, and study on the glass topped tables of the Mitchell Library, and concerts in St. Andrew's Hall and the Cosmo on Wednesday afternoons, and the doze during the sermon on Sabbath mornings, and arguments with Benny, and visiting relatives, and the pigeons by the duck-pond, and the flat-faced houses by the side of the Clyde and the bracing breezes, and the view of the city from Camphill, and the sunsets behind the Langside monument. All was well with the world and the world was well with me."⁹²

Like this book The Dear Green Place is also intimately concerned with Glasgow. It blends together the 'feel' of the city, the observable background and the thoughts of the hero Mat Craig, a working class figure who is engaged in writing his first novel. Hind's major aim is to probe the personality of the working class writer in general, and to examine the problems which beset him - the philosophical, cultural and technical ones more so than the practical ones. He is successful only up to a point. Mat's personality is admirably rendered, especially his deep regret at the realisation that life's possibilities are for him forever decreasing. So many boyhood hopes are beyond his reach. Equally well done is his alternating enthusiasm and despair for the task he has set himself, but Hind becomes bogged down by the very depth and detail

⁹²Ibid. p.218.

with which he approaches the workings of the writer's mind. Too much of the book is a recitation of half digested philosophy and musing on the mechanics of composition, e.g.

"He was captivated by the idea that the act of being may be connected with the act of forming, that consciousness might be form; and another idea which almost bounced him out of his seat so that he rocked back and forth with excitement as he read that his discrete, undivided nature might depend on the fact of morality."⁹³

Hind shows considerable insight in snatches but never really succeeds in welding personality and background in a way that is artistically satisfying. The novel is too much of an exercise in self examination - perhaps self absorption - for it to achieve any kind of wider meaningfulness. Yet, it is nevertheless a fine honest picture of modern Glasgow working class life, that shows a perceptive understanding of what their world is like:

"This was a typical period in the working class family when the children had grown up and there was more money coming into the house. They were additionally lucky in the fact that this period in their lives coincided with the Labour Government's first term of office, with the initiation of the Health Service and decent social security. All his life up till then Matt had thought of domestic family life, as a life of sordidness and squalor. Then all of a sudden it had become decent." ⁹⁴

Moreover as a description of Glasgow it is perhaps the classic example of how the by product of an interest

⁹³Hind, Archie. The Dear Green Place 1966 p.66.

⁹⁴Ibid. p.40.

in the individual can outshine a more direct approach to background. Some of his scenes set for example in the slaughterhouse where Mat gets work, are wonderfully evocative, while his observation of the differences between areas, and the peculiarities of each is acute and authentic.

"But the street with the council houses. Stand there on a Saturday morning and you'll see women coming back from the shops with their messages, their shopping baskets heavy laden, small tidy middle aged women who clasp their purses as if they were weapons and can still tell a joint from a joint and stewing steak from brisket and make pots of broth from flank mutton. The children playing in the street are well clothed and reasonably polite. The young girl walking up towards the tram stop carries a long canvas case with a hockey stick in it and wears a fee-paying school blazer. The young men passing are mostly apprentices, the men mostly tradesmen. At eleven o'clock the group of men standing at the corner will disappear into the pub. These are the punters, the bookie and his runners. A quiet circumspect lot. You'll see an occasional brief-case belonging to one or two young men who go to the University on a Glasgow Corporation grant. Later in the afternoon the men will appear wearing their blue scarves on their way to see the Rangers playing at home at Ibrox. If these middle-aged women have to scrape a bit at least they don't have to pinch, the men can afford a pint and there are Christmas trees in the windows during the festive season. A quiet street. As streets go a prosperous one."

95

Despite this however The Dear Green Place is an over-rated novel. A number of critics have acclaimed it, yet it has never unreservedly deserved it. There is a

static quality about the novel. It never seems to get anywhere either in terms of plot or philosophy. At one point Mat articulates a view of writing: "What a writer should do is wrench his whole world up and put the mark of his thumb on it. Shove it into the violent torrent of events. Make things happen. Disturb the peace."⁹⁶ Yet this Hind never does. He spends his time covering the same ground again and again - agonising over the problems of authorship and never resolving them. The end of the book brings no satisfactory conclusion. Mat forsakes his novel but Hind fails to draw any meaningful insights from this. Ultimately The Dear Green Place fails because it is more concerned with theories about writing than with portraying life itself.

What we have seen in this chapter then is a movement away from religion within the Glasgow novel to an interest in the individual. This started with a dissatisfaction with conventional religion, became a lack of concern with religion at all, except as a source of the picturesque, and then moved into an increasing trend towards examining personality and character. This culminated in the post-war era in a vision of the city as a centre of chaos, particularly in the fine novels of George Friel.

⁹⁶ Ibid. p.83.

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOCAL PRIDE AND NATIONALISM IN
THE GLASGOW NOVEL

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOCAL PRIDE AND NATIONALISM IN THE GLASGOW NOVEL

It will be apparent by this stage that overall the world of the Glasgow novel, like the city itself, is drab, ugly and unpleasant. A comprehensive reading leaves primarily an impression of grey streets and dreary people. Curiously, however, what also emerges is the existence at the same time of a contradictory theme: a strong and widespread determination to champion Glasgow. There is something of a split consciousness here, and very often those who show the most distaste for the city also exhibit the greatest appreciation. This takes many forms and exists in different degrees of enthusiasm and sincerity. It may be a pride in the achievements of the city and its people, or, on a less parochial level, an awareness of nationality. Yet on the whole it really amounts to a more thoughtful, literate and extended expression of the kind of favourable myths about Glasgow that appear periodically in the city's press. Usually they take the line that while Glasgow may be dirty and deprived it has a heart of gold. Glasgow people are tough but honest, know their football and like their drink, have a sense of humour and are friendly to G.I.s during wars. It is a narrow self congratulatory attitude that celebrates not the existence of any universal human trait but the supposed special qualities of the Glaswegian that make his city famous

throughout the world. We can see a typical example in an article Cliff Hanley produced for a local newspaper which moves one to doubt, if not the author's sanity, at least his integrity:

"It takes a brave child to dare to be born in Glasgow at all, and a tough specimen to survive the experience. Keelie is the same word as courage. The stranger may fancy the Glaswegian as dull and dour, just because he can't understand the strange gibberish poetry the native is speaking. The wee women lining up for the joyless nunnery of the bingo parlour are engaged in their own wild theatrical experience, and the unquenchable poetry of their patter would burn through five layers of enamel."¹

It is tempting to see sinister political motives behind the innumerable examples of this kind of bumptious hack journalism. If you convince people they are the envy and admiration of men from Peking to Boston they will be more inclined to accept bad housing and poor wages; and there may well be an element of this behind the myths about Glasgow, for writers generally are middle class and have the interests of the middle class at heart. Yet there can be no doubt that whether or not we believe what they say, on the whole the novelists' good will towards the city is genuine and strongly felt. It is a natural and understandable affection for a place they know well and have close links with; there are too many testimonies from too wide a variety of sources for it to be anything else. It is not that the novels show

¹Hanley, Clifford. Evening Times 8 March 1976.

Glaswegians as nice people (indeed if anything they do the opposite), but that the authors go out of their way to make complimentary remarks about the place. One of the earliest examples is in Fred Arnold's Alfred Leslie (1856):

"We stood for a few minutes on one of the noble bridges arched over the Clyde. Below us lay a forest of masts and we knew that away and away and away miles and miles down the grand old river, and out into the broad ocean lay navies of all countries under heaven. And I felt at that moment that it was something that I should be a denizen of so great a city, a city teeming with such spirit and intelligence, with such boundless wealth and countless numbers and rich in such brilliant memories² and in so glorious a future."

This statement appearing as an authorial outburst which is never integrated into the fabric of the novel is entirely typical of the usual approach. Only a few novels like The Shipbuilders and Deepening River devote themselves directly to singing the praises of Glasgow; in the rest it crops up incidentally. That Arnold, an Englishman, was not merely patronising the locals but acting as a barometer of the general optimistic spirit of the age becomes clear when we see it matched elsewhere. George Mills for example, the sternest critic of Glasgow society, is moved to observe with admiration the changes in the physical face of the city. The harbour:

"Large vessels in fleets lay crowding alongside of magnificent piers, where formerly there had only been small

²Arnold, Frederick. Alfred Leslie 1856 p.43.

river craft and mean Highland wherries
 Nothing could have presented to my
 mind a surer indication of the truth that
 the rise and progress of this City of
 the West were of the most substantial
 description than what I now viewed." ³

Again, in the same breath as she laments the spread
 of materialism, Sarah Tytler salutes the many civic
 improvements "worthy of the public spirit of the mediaeval
 Italian cities."⁴ Even its stature as a place of learning,
 it would seem, is exceptional: "The renowned and far
 famed University of Glasgow, holding a high and powerful
 position in the world of literature science and art."⁵
 Some years earlier in Cyril Thornton (1827) by Thomas
 Hamilton we find an allied thought. An old merchant
 says with pride:

"Our colleges here are no bund down
 like yours in the south by a wheen
 auld and fizzionless rules, and we
 dinna say to ilka student, either
 bring three hundred pounds in your
 pouch, or gang about your business.
 We dinna lock the door o' learning,
 as they do at Oxford and Cambridge,
 and shut out a' that canna bring a
 gouden key in their hand, but keep
 it on the sneck and onybody that
 likes may open it." ⁶

It will be obvious that the main emphasis with these
 writers is on achievement on the grand scale, on greatness
 as manifested in imposing bricks and mortar. It is
 essentially a materialistic vision springing from the
 Victorian ethos of trade; a middle class rather than a

³Mills, George. The Beggar's Benison 1866 Vol. 2.p.39.

⁴Tytler, Sarah. St. Mungo's City 1885 p.139.

⁵Alexander, Thomas. Charles Gordon or The Mask Of
 Friendship 1865 p.32.

⁶Hamilton, Thomas. The Youth And Manhood Of Cyril
 Thornton 1827 Vol. 1 p.60.

working class notion since it was the former which determined such things. We have already noted the split between the idea of Glasgow as a fine city, and the idea of it as an industrial centre with terrible social problems.* This Victorian pride is an expression of the former. We encountered it in the blinkered smugness of J.A. Hammerton** and can find it in the screeds of bombastic verse eulogising the city produced in the nineteenth century. William Harriston's The City Mirror: or A Glasgow Minature (1824) is typical. He writes with pride:

"Where late were fields and gardens green,
Lofty tenements are seen,
Churches wide and steeples rise,
Pointing far into the skies,
Pleasant mansions round I see, 7
In elegant simplicity."

However like ambition with which it is linked, pride changes its face over the years. In the nineteenth century both are middle class and grandiose, but as time passes and society changes they become much more modest. The Victorian Glaswegian living in the great days of expansion and of the building of the West End congratulates himself on large possessions, private and public, on the tangible rewards of enterprise. When we move into the twentieth century however marked by commercial and industrial decline, this optimism abates. Coupled with the increasing assertion of a working class presence this produces new values which are more identifiable with

*See Introduction.

**See Chapter Five above.

⁷Harriston, William. The City Mirror: or A Glasgow Minature 1824 p.45.

with the lower regions of society. Thus a pride in manual work becomes important, and one of the great features of the Glasgow novel has been the way in which the craftsmanship and technical skill that loom so large in the Glasgow psyche have been raised to an epic status. It is a pride in those qualities which made Clydeside's reputation as the world's foremost shipbuilding area. The Shipbuilders is of course the classic example, with Blake drawing his whole conception of industrial Scotland from it. (See Chapter Three.) But the same notions continually appear in a variety of works. Gael Over Glasgow in particular expresses the heroic quality of the engineer. The apprentices:

"some day they hoped to stand in an engine room platform, with the cranks and piston rods moving above them, the hiss of steam, the hot oily air; the strained anxious look of men with the responsibility of controlling tremendous power; the telegraph would ring, quick skilful movements of bare arms, the answering heavier thudding of the screw, the slight heaving of the first kiss of the sea - and the pride of being a man at last taking your watch with the engineers of the world." 8

The relationship with mechanical things can become almost sensuous:

"The love of craft was there. The delight in skill, the joy of muscles working in perfect co-ordination with eye and brain, the pride in a job well done. These things went deep into a man's nature." 9

⁸Shiels, Edward. Gael Over Glasgow 1937 p.4.

⁹Ibid. p.24.

In David and Joanna the hero's relationship with his new bicycle is presented in this vein:

"For him there was a positive state of ecstasy in watching the shuddering rhythmic flashing of his front wheel spokes and the controlled dip of his well sprung forks, in hearing the purr of the free wheel, in testing now and again the sure grip of his brakes, and in merely knowing that every moving and bearing part of his machine was sweetly fluent with oil." ¹⁰

Again on a grander scale we have the powerful majesty of the industrial process: the foundry in He Must So Live:

"The pulsing beat of the foundry in motion roared pleasantly in his ears. The cast was in progress. In the centre the tall furnace flared. Round it agile figures danced, were lost in grey-yellow sulphur fumes that swirled around like a river of fog To a stranger this was a meaningless jungle of sound and movement. To him it was a glorious symphony, vibrant harmonic, a single false note was apparent. True it was a dark savage theme, appalling in its sheer brutality. For here, in the dark womb of industry, men wrestled with rough nature to give life and form to the finest creations of a mechanical age." ¹¹

Even Stewart Hunter's insipid tale of middle class life, The Happiest Hour, admits a pride in the shipbuilding achievements of the Clyde:

"Now were justified all the efforts of the men who had first, beneath the fluorescent lights of the drawing office conceived this ship; the tradesmen who, under the rearing gangtries had wrought from dead

¹⁰Blake, George. David And Joanna 1936 p.11.

¹¹Lambert, David. He Must So Live 1956 p.19.

steel a certain living beauty; the turners whose seemingly casual skill had given a mathematical precision to shafts large and small; the electrician; the coppersmith; the many sub contractors - these now had had knowledge and skill and workmanship tested, and the success of the movement was theirs."

12

One could go on for a considerable time pointing out examples like these, so numerous are they in the genre. The idea of giving birth, of helping in a natural process is very frequently evident. What is important to notice, however is the way this kind of pride transcends class barriers. Lambert, the Marxist, sees no inconsistency in glorifying the actual mechanics of industry while flaying the economic system which governs them, for after all they are a testament to the skill of the workers. Hunter's roll call of honour, one of the rare notes of real feeling in the bourgeois nonsense of The Happiest Hour shows satisfaction not in actual contact with tools but in contemplating from the stance of the entrepreneur, the skills of other men. Each identifies in his own way with the peculiar traditions of Clydeside.

While Maurice Lindsay is doing no more than state the obvious relationship of anyone to his home town when he says that "it is difficult for Glaswegians to be dispassionate either about themselves or their city"¹³, it is something worth bearing in mind. For there is an element of self indulgence in all this celebration of

¹²Hunter, Stewart. The Happiest Hour 1953 p.190.

¹³Lindsay, Maurice, Portrait of Glasgow 1972 p.17.

Glasgow ability which mitigates against artistic success.

Reference to a passage in Glasgow In 1901 is helpful:

"Those wonderful caves of romance, her industrial workshops, the shipyards, the foundries, the kilns where strenuous figures wreath themselves in intricate evolutions, where light prowls up and down transforming in an instant black silhouettes into sheeted ghosts, where life moves to a resonance of changing rhythm, and fire and steam appear in almost elemental power in the service of pigmy men." 14

However admirable the thought may be we are aware of a definite lack of restraint in the self-conscious lyricism. We must remember that while the tone is completely typical of what we found in the novels this eulogy comes from a work of non-fiction. Here it is acceptable but in the former it often sits ill with the rest of the work, appearing as an irresponsible imposition.

If craftsmanship is the main source of pride in the city there are also other less obvious features. Blake sees Glasgow as the home of particularly good baking. Niven has a more surprising claim: it is a centre of the arts.

"Amazingly good things in the way of paint and canvas came out of Glasgow. Glasgow - the commercial capital - not Edinburgh - the political capital was winning respect for Scottish artists beyond the country's borders. Pride instead of self-satisfaction inspired the young men in Glasgow." 15

¹⁴Muir, James Hamilton. Glasgow In 1901 1901 p.11.

¹⁵Niven, Frederick. Justice Of The Peace 1914 p.254.

This indeed has an element of truth in it for Justice of The Peace is set at a time when Hornel, Lavery and others were active in the city. However, pride of any kind in a specific place carries within itself the seeds of parochialism, and the Glasgow novel has not shown itself free from this. The kailyard works, as we have seen, are particularly prone to this, and we find Jeems Kaye for example extolling the superiority of the Govan Parish Wash-house, above the splendours of Egypt. Yet later writers are not blameless. In W.C. Tait's The Wise Thrush (1937) we see a debasement of the Victorian attitude which amounts to the same thing. "The Great Western Road, noblest of Glasgow's roads, runs straight and majestic into the heart of the sunset. A road for the marching of conquering armies or the beginnings of high adventure."¹⁶ Whereas the pride of the earlier writers was wide and reflected a genuinely dramatic expansion of the city, Tait's is focused on a single street and is less sincere admiration than the desire to say something nice about it just because it is in Glasgow. It is the Cliff Hanley attitude again. It will be noticed that Tait asserts the charms of Great Western Road rather than describes them. We are not allowed to see it in any detail. It is a significant point for it shows an attitude to place typical of most of the novels praising the city. The inspiration stems from pride rather than love - Glasgow becomes a catalogue of possessions. There is rarely any feeling for place that is personal and

¹⁶Tait, W. Cumming. The Wise Thrush 1937 p.20.

intimate - such as a countryman may have for the fields of his boyhood - the spiritual dimension that comes from a close acquaintance with a certain area. The novelists are essentially putting on a public show.

Nearly as important as the impulse to adulate Glasgow is the genre's strong expression of patriotism - which is not quite the same thing. It is a wider vision which stresses Scotland as a whole, and while it does often run alongside the love for the city this is not always the case. Lucy Flockhart (1931) for example exhibits a concern for our national literature but has little to say about Glasgow itself. Of course this is only to be expected as so many of the writers who set novels in Glasgow were not natives of the place and never made it their exclusive interest. This patriotism expresses itself in several ways, frequently within the one novel: firstly as a drive to formulate some idea of "Scottishness", to establish the distinctive characteristics of the race; secondly in the use of Scots language; thirdly, at times in an acute fear of the erosion of Scottish traditions by alien influences. There is also a less pleasant under-belly: a hatred of foreigners. One should make it clear from the start that rarely do we find any of this expressed artistically but that here we are in the realm of crude slogans and simplicities.

The characteristic most often attributed by these writers to the Scot is emotional reticence. Like craftsmanship the examples are innumerable. Blake says

it in David and Joanna: "There was nothing he could compass in the way of reply. What he felt it was beyond the power of a Scots tongue to express. Love and pity held him in thrall."¹⁷

Lucy's boyfriend says it in Lucy Flockhart: "I don't want to talk like a fool, and it seems ridiculous to talk openly about love in here. That sort of thing is all right for English people and folk who are sloppy."¹⁸

The Wild Men and The Setons vary it a bit: "the hidden but rich vein of emotionalism in the Scot,"¹⁹ and as O. Douglas says: "We have all of us, we Scots, a queer daftness in our blood. We pretend to be dour and cautious, but the fact is that at heart we are the most emotional and sentimental people on earth."²⁰

They are less unanimous about the other qualities of the race; many are suggested and at times they are contradictory. One of the favourite practices is to latch on to anything and everything as being particularly Scottish, to attach a proprietorial label to a multiplicity of diverse qualities. Take one book for example, J.W. Ecott's The Second City (1912), where a variety of unimportant things are given the status of national characteristics:

"A modest glass of milk and a scone
.... is the Scotsman's favourite supper 21
when he has one."

- ¹⁷David And Joanna op. cit. p.45.
¹⁸Craig, Robert. Lucy Flockhart 1931 p.115.
¹⁹Blake, George. The Wild Men 1925 p.56.
²⁰Douglas, O. The Setons 1917 p.94.
²¹Ecott, W.J. The Second City 1912 p.57.

Again:

"He's one of those Scots boys who start by winning bursaries and finish by being cabinet ministers."²²

Similarly:

"The young Scotsman's tea is his chief meal"²³

"In Scotland even in a great city like Second City it is wonderful how many good people there are to remember one's origins."²⁴

Several writers would have it that the Scot is an able, driving, no-nonsense character; there may be no frills on him but he can tackle anything. He revels in austerity:

"There is something soft about London. A vast feather bed this Metropolis which atrophied feeling, sapped ambition Glasgow with its clammy cold, its keen winds and hilly streets 'braced you for the ring'."²⁵

Similarly:

"the canteen was not a place of luxury, for on Clydeside luxury is neither given nor expected."²⁶

Yet in The Deans Dot Allan would have the opposite. Scots may be dour but they are not attuned to a commercial age, they are not positive or hard enough to be successful. Mrs. Deans, an Englishwoman notices this in her husband

²²Ibid. p.68. ²³Ibid. p.119. ²⁴Ibid. p.174.

²⁵Allan, Dot. Deepening River. 1932 p.230.

²⁶The Happiest Hour op. cit. p.82.

and her children:

"In her children Mrs. Dean had always been aware of an alien strain, a strain that made them appear shy and awkward at times when it most behoved them to behave with suavity and grace. And recalling dimly an almost forgotten chapter of Scottish history she attributed these lapses of theirs to the possession of an ancestry which had resisted to the last the refining influences of civilisation. Had she dared there were times such as now when she would have hurled the derogatory epithet "Scotty" at her daughter. Guy she rejoiced to think had less of the Celt in his disposition than any of them. He was less dour, more of an opportunist, facile in his speech. Nell with her fanciful ideas was a direct descendant of those spoilt children of the North who had warred with the Roman roadmakers, resisted with the sword the schooling they so badly required." 27

It is a romantic notion but here we see implied one of the mainstays of this type of nationalist consciousness - the drawing of comparisons with the English. Throughout the genre it comes up. For example:

"Scots girls were different from English. More reserved; astoundingly frank up to a point, but beyond that point infernally stand offish." 28

In Young Malcolm:

"Malcolm thrilled responsively to the democratic cheerfulness of the Londoner. A Scot, he knew, would have remained watchful for weeks, unbending grudgingly." 29

In The Shipbuilders:

"This was England indeed! A Scot would have gone into the most exact detail" 30

27 Allan, Dot. The Deans 1929 p.52.
 28 Deepening River op. cit. p.259.
 29 Blake, George. Young Malcolm 1926 pp.161-2.
 30 Blake, George. The Shipbuilders 1935 p.206.

Here we have obviously been dealing with classic examples of what David Craig has aptly called "forced Scotticising" and Raymond Williams more generally "a self definition for contemporary reasons, which draws on any element however improbable that can be made to inhere in a particular land."³¹ Anything will do as long as it can be described as peculiarly characteristic of Glasgow or of Scotland. Artistically it is an unnatural and unsuccessful practice. Qualities are self consciously chosen then imposed on the novels from the outside. The results are the kind of patchy and superficial observations which become laughable at times and are rarely integrated into the fabric of the writing. One can believe that a rendering of Scottishness may be better served by writing sincerely, from the depths of feeling and experience, and allowing what qualities that may exist to emerge by themselves. Williams' point about contemporary reasons is important for undoubtedly many of the cases we have met are a direct consequence of the idea of a Scottish Renaissance. The deliberate decision to participate in the regeneration of our national literature can force on the writer the need for a concept of what constitutes Scottishness. The English writer can sit down and write a novel about life - without any restrictions - the nationalist Scot must first find a Scottish identity. Moreover, we cannot ignore the implications of the Glasgow dimension. The praise we have seen heaped on the city, whether for its architecture

³¹Williams, Raymond. The Country And The City 1973 p. 269

or its native craftsmanship, can at times be accompanied by inhibition. In stressing one aspect the writer may ignore another and in consequence present only a one sided view of Glasgow life. This is what happens in The Shipbuilders and many of the middle class novels in the genre. It is difficult however to know how far this point should be stressed in individual cases.

Language is perhaps the most obviously distinctive national quality - and the most useful to the writer. By taking Scots as his medium he may reveal Scottish characteristics without directly trying to. Again, as I will indicate, merely to use Scots may be an expression of patriotism. The Glasgow writer's use of language is one of the most complex features of the genre. There are several problems which make any examination of the subject extremely difficult. Firstly, while there is general awareness of the existence of a specific Glasgow accent, and of a number of words and phrases particularly associated with the city, there is no definitive record of Glasgow language such as is available for Scots in general. The Glasgow accent has aroused comment from early on in the century. In 1905 for example an unnamed contributor to the Saint Mungo expressed what was a mixture of disgust and pride:

"We are certain that, if He had liked, the Creator could have devised a worse accent; but we are equally certain that He never did. There is not a single redeeming feature in it. It is coarse, unmusical, slobbery, slipshod; it simply takes every one of our finer instincts by the throat. There is nothing in

nature with which it can be compared, save, perhaps, the barking of an ill conditioned dog with a cold in its head to the Glasgow accent can be assigned neither a definite origin nor a plausible explanation. It is not the accent of the country, nor even of the district. Its province is bounded by the outermost plaster tub of the jerry builder " 32

It is interesting to note that even this in its way can be made to celebrate Glasgow, for the writer goes on to testify to the enduring quality of the accent, and remind us that after all, it is the one which built such splendours as Buchanan Street Station and Queen Street Tunnel. Yet an accent is not a dialect or a language, and the compilation of any sort of record of Glasgow language is made virtually impossible by social circumstances. As a racial melting pot Glasgow's linguistic pattern is fragmented, although there is some kind of norm to which the majority of Glasgow speech approximates. This is not so much Scots, as a sloppy, mispronounced form of English, sprinkled with occasional dialect words. As David Murison points out "the one thing that gets rarer nowadays in Glasgow is someone speaking good old fashioned West Country Scots, the speech used by Burns and Galt, George Douglas Brown and Neil Munro, and the Glasgow writers of as late as the 1920s."³³ Secondly there is no satisfactory way of checking the authenticity of the language produced by writers in the past. How do we evaluate for example Martha Spreull (1884), where today's reader is aware

³²St. Mungo Nov. 2 1905 p.111.

³³Murison, David. Evening Times March 3 1976.

in the heroine's dialect not only of differences between it and what is spoken in the modern city, but of a somewhat stilted unnatural quality? Is the latter merely the result of the passage of time or is it indeed an inaccurate reflection of Glasgow speech as it existed then? Is it perhaps the dialect of another area, or even a mixture of dialects? Again it could be substantially the product of the author's imagination. The contemporary work Jeems Kaye uses a Scots which is perceptibly different from Martha Spreull yet both of them purport to present the language of a typical Glaswegian. In the absence of any objective standard it is impossible to say with any certainty which one approaches the truth more closely.^a What is clear however is that the novels do reflect a progressive dilution of the Scots language over the years. At the same time we are aware of it altering from a largely lowland Scots to the Glasgow tongue we know today. Jeems Kaye for example recounts his adventures in the former, and uses a heavy quota of vernacular expressions:

^aFurther complications arise with the debate about geographical differences. Some natives of the city claim it is possible as a general rule (or it was at one time) to distinguish between inhabitants from different parts of the city by the way they speak e.g. Govan speech they argue is perceptively different from Maryhill speech. Fred Niven gives credence to this idea in the Justice Of The Peace, although he never develops any real case:

"'What is a skitcher?' He premised it was some slang from the neighbourhood of north-easterly Springburn. Archie's vocabulary was racily north eastern."(p.43). A less extreme contention is that there are differences

"The rising generation is a kittle ane, Bailie, they're awfu' genteel."³⁴ By the time we come to Mince Collop Close (1923) not only is the speech more anglified but it is more characteristic of the city. (This is hardly surprising. The conditions of urban society cause language to develop differently from what would be the case in rural areas, however similar it was at one time.) The dialogue is understandable to the outsider in a way Jeems Kaye is not. It is a twisted English: "Daein' onything on Se'erday."³⁵ This sort of dialect becomes more frequent in the genre as time passes. No Mean City (1935) is notable for its use of distinctively Glasgow dialogue:

" "You an me can go thegither, and chuck one another whenever we like, and nae sherrickin' or anything like that, eh." The word was out and Ella shivered in spite of herself. For a 'sherricking' is a public showing up of which none can foretell the consequences." 36

Again: " "She's fairly coming on at the burlin'" he boasted. "She's a pure treat at the one-steps an' aw." "³⁷

³⁴McMillan, Archibald. Jeems Kaye 188- Vol. 3 p.14.

³⁵Blake, George. Mince Collop Close 1923 p.191.

³⁶McArthur, A. & Long, H.K. No Mean City 1935 p.46.

³⁷Ibid. p.34.

a(contd)

between Southside and Northside city dwellers, if not in language in intonation; that the Southside shows a sharper pitch. Another argument says that Glasgow Catholics and Protestants show differences in the way they pronounce certain words and phrases. These it must be stressed do not result from any traces of an Irish accent in the former, but spring from, and are perpetuated by certain religious rituals of the Catholic Church. Often the "a" sound becomes an "e". Thus "prayer" for example becomes "prerr". Equally, however, some observers flatly deny that any of these differences exist and point merely to the obvious class ones - like the infamous "Kelvinside".

(Note the bracketing of Scots words in inverted commas - a common and persistent practice among Scottish writers which itself is symptomatic of the general uncertainty in attitude towards the use of the vernacular.)

Growing Up (1942) and The Dance Of The Apprentices (1948) deal with the Gorbals area of the city at about the same time as No Mean City. Yet despite the geographical affinity the language is not the same. The dialogue of Gaitens' characters is less harsh, has a greater fluidity and warmth than that in No Mean City. It is not entirely ridiculous to suggest that there may be some religious reasons contributing to this. The main figures of No Mean City are Protestant, those of Growong Up are Catholic, and the latter do show certain linguistic idiosyncrasies often associated with Catholics. For example the word for the father: "Yer da's asleep",³⁸ instead of the usual "dad". However there are also technical reasons. The language springs directly from the type of characters the respective authors created. With McArthur it was the hard, semi criminal characters of the slums, and they speak the terse, hard language appropriate to their condition. There is a large element in their speech of words peculiarly associated with the Glasgow slums: "Hairies" or " "Nit the jorrie" (leave the girl alone) he yelled. "Nark it! Nark it!"³⁹

Gaitens' people, like the author, enjoy talk for its own sake, relishing the colourful use of language.

³⁸Gaitens, Edward. The Dance Of The Apprentices 1948 p.61: of Irish origin. Note the use of it in Synge's Playboy Of The Western World.

³⁹No Mean City op. cit. p.14.

He has a better ear than McArthur and is able to catch the nuances of speech. He uses not so much dialect words, as English as pronounced by the Glaswegian:

"Ah widnae foarbid ony man the plaishir o' sharin' his proaperty wi' me. It wouldna be actin' like a cumrade."⁴⁰

His is one of the best (and the first) examples of the attempt to convey Glasgow speech phonetically^b in order to differentiate between the speech of the city and general Scots:

"Name your poison boays"

"Evenchilly! Evenchilly".⁴¹

George Friel carries on the idea in Grace And Miss Partridge (1969) and Mr. Alfred M.A. (1972): "Whadijamean"; "Glashnapine furma frenhere".⁴²

This awareness of sound also prompts a technical analysis of class differences in Glasgow speech. He compares a boy from a well off family, with a girl from a poorer one:

⁴⁰The Dance Of The Apprentices op. cit. p.129.

⁴¹Ibid. p.117

^bHe does not however take this approach as far as some modern writers have done, where it becomes if not unintelligible, at least difficult to follow. This has not occurred in the novels but can be seen in short stories by writers like James Kelman and Tom Leonard, who have tried using it not only in dialogue but as their narrative medium.

⁴²Friel, George. Grace And Miss Partridge 1964 pp. 101 and 125.

"He made one syllable where she made two. Her speech was looser than his. She was more Scotch, he was more anglified. She was apt to say fillim for film, to make no distinction between hire and higher. She could even insert a neutral vowel between the two consonants at the end of warm, and learn and such words. It was the way she trilled the r made her do it." 43

The McFlannel series (1947-51) gives a good approximation of what Glasgow speech is like today. It is something less broad than either of the two preceding examples. This is understandable, for originally conceived as radio scripts they had to be comprehensible to a national audience. Pryde captures particularly well, in the figure of Mrs. McCotton, the much mocked affectations of the Kelvinside tones: "Good evening, Mrs. McFlehnnel. Isn't this naice weathah for this tehm of the yah."⁴⁴ Mrs. McCotton has a predecessor in Aunt Purdie in the Macgregor stories, whose craving for gentility produces the most ludicrous sentences, which contrast with the simple broad Scots of her relations. Indeed the kailyard novels produced some of the best examples of the use of Scots both because they appeared at a time before the rot had completely set in the language, and because originally produced as sketches in the local press for the restricted market of the city, they didn't require the dilution necessary for a more universal audience. Neil Munro's Erichie (1904), though not of much note in literary terms, can be seen as perhaps the most authentic record of how the Glaswegian

⁴³Friel, George. Mr. Alfred M.A. 1972 p.41..

⁴⁴Pryde, Helen. McFlannels United 1948 p.88.

spoke at this time, since Munro was a native of Gaelic speaking Argyll and what lowland Scots he knew would have been learned specifically in Glasgow.^c

Of course these developments are only apparent as a general trend in the genre and not as something which affects every novel. There is no consistent approach to language, the particular use in each novel depends on the personal inclinations of the individual writer. Thus while it is true that Scots is more in evidence in the earlier works than those nearest our own time there are books throughout the period which do not use the vernacular. In The Beggar's Benison (1866) for example it is rare. Indeed it does not occur extensively in the mid Victorian era, although the late Victorian and the Edwardian periods are its heyday. The best nineteenth century example of the use of Scots is Sarah Tytler's St. Mungo's City (1885) where it colours and enriches the dialogue to a memorable degree. However it is rural and not city Scots (the author herself did not grow up in Glasgow). For example we can see the country nature of the language from the allusions in this lyrical comment:

"She's not dreaming of lads, and you may catch her leal licht heart, and brush the bloom off, like the dew from the gowans in the morning, and break it before she's well in her teens." 45

^cIt is in the kailyard works that we see the best examples of the idiomatic peculiarities associated with Glasgow. e.g. "The folk that live in the terraces where the nae stairs is" (Erchie p.28).

"He's gotten thirty days an' we'll ha'e a wee peace or he comes oot." (The Guinea Stamp p.55.)

⁴⁵St. Mungo's City op. cit. p.139.

Perhaps the best way of trying to understand how a writer uses Scots is to question why he uses it, and we find two basic reasons - both of which often work at the same time - pride and authenticity. The second is simple enough, the attempt by writers to reproduce as near as possible the actual speech they hear around them. This is what we find in No Mean City. The first however involves a theory of Scots as something more than just the way a particular group of people happen to speak. To some writers it has qualities which exalt it above English. The most obvious and frequently heard view is that it is more expressive. This is McMillan's in Jeems Kaye. As Jeems says in the essay entitled Our Scotch Tongue, "Maist Scotch words are so expressive that it wid tak' aboot ten English words tae express the meaning o' ony one o' them."⁴⁶ It is a patriotic dissertation lamenting the disappearance of Scots under the onslaught of the social climbers who "turn up their noses at the guid Scotch o' their gran'fathers."⁴⁷ To write in the vernacular then is almost a duty. Other writers take a somewhat less practical attitude, valuing it for its moral associations. In St. Mungo's City and The Factory Girl for example Scots at times becomes a mark of integrity. It is more than coincidence that the only character in the latter who speaks it, Hugh the organ grinder, is also the moral touchstone of the book, a man of courage, humanity and honesty, who towers above

⁴⁶ Jeems Kaye. op. cit. Vol. 3. p.15.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p.14.

the motley collection of rogues who surround him. Of Tam Drysdale's family in St. Mungo's City only young Effie has traces of Scots in her tongue, her brother and sister speak "as if they were reading out of a printed book,"⁴⁸ and she is their superior in everything. The Beggar's Benison also identifies it with special qualities. The prophecy which the beggar gives the hero is told in one of the rare snatches of Scots in the novel. Scots then is the tongue of truth, sincerity, and warmth. It is slipped into when there is something emotional or strongly felt to say:

" "And mind ye when I first gaed into the council I was like a speldron wi' a head o' hair that Samson would have envied." It should be noted, by the way, that in these days the Bailie drops into the Doric only when deeply 49 moved or in homely surroundings."

It is not the tongue of snobbery or conceit: that is English. The McFlannel women's drive for politeness and a higher social status clashes with the broadness of their menfolk's speech. Maisie approves of her brother's night class: "Oh, but Dad if this class helps him to get rid of his awful Glasgow drawl then you shouldn't discourage him."⁵⁰ Bill Broon resents the posing which this impulse demands: ".... lyin' in the HALL - I maun drap lobby noo Bailie: Hall is mair polite, they say, and up to date."⁵¹

⁴⁸St. Mungo's City op. cit. p.30.

⁴⁹Bell, John Joy. The Braw Bailie 1925 p.9.

⁵⁰Pryde, Helen. McFlannel Family Affairs 1950 p.14.

⁵¹Fergus, J.W. Bill Broon Territorial C.1911 p.17.

Niven shows a particularly sensitive awareness of these qualities of language in Mrs. Barry. The wealthy Mrs. Kincaid sets an old friend at rest by slipping out of her usual English:

" "I'm all alone today" said Mrs. Kincaid. "The girls are out. We can have a RALE GUID CRACK" (Niven's italics). It was as if she hinted that if blood was not thicker than water there was such a thing as sentiment for place." 52

In The Staff At Simson's however his appreciation of the historical significance of language implies an over consciousness bred from its very disintegration:

"People of Andy's type, when some supposed they were merely mispronouncing a word, were often less doing that to the ears of a listening entymologist than speaking history though themselves unaware of it. VEELON - was that just a crotchet of Andy's or had it come down so in his family from the days when Mary was queen or Prince Charles Edward afoot in the heather." 53

Something the same can be found in Hendry's Fernie Brae (1947), where the hero grows up intrigued by certain words:

"There was 'fankled'. His kite's tail was often 'fankled'. It was wound in such tightness in confusion that it was almost impossible to unravel and perhaps a knife would have to be used. That was 'fankled'. A lot of things in the world were 'fankled'." 54

It is often said that we really only appreciate things when they are lost, and it is a sad but undeniable

⁵²Niven, Frederick, Mrs. Barry 1933 p.73.

⁵³Niven, Frederick. The Staff At Simson's 1937 p.65.

⁵⁴Hendry, J.F. Fernie Brae 1947 p.43.

fact that this deliberate, rather than natural usage, this mulling over Scots is largely a symptom of its decay. The Glasgow experience though not important in itself is an interesting instance of this. In it we have also seen how the use of Scots may be a projection of an author's patriotism, but the fact remains that the language picture in the genre as a whole is too big a mess to yield anything more significant.

Apart from language the Glasgow novel shows a more general concern for the fate of Scottish culture in a lament for the passing of old traditions, and the changing tenor of Scottish life. The Shipbuilders, it will be remembered, is the prime example, but the same regrets - about Americanisation, plastic culture of the films, cheap slick foreign ways - are seen elsewhere. Glasgow Keelie claimed a link between slum violence and American gangster films. Major Operation points to a less dramatic, but equally pernicious influence:

"A sixpence gets a packet of fags and leaves enough for a seat at the cinema. There the wise-cracking of Hollywood gets into the brain and the blues rhythm gets into the blood for there's nothing else to keep them out. So America becomes the cultural centre of the world. Even the Jap can tell you about Charlie Chaplin and Greta Garbo. /And Garbo the Swede is somebody, while Flora MacDonald might be a skivvy in Milngavie."⁵⁵

Earlier on the kailyarders took much the same stance, although at a more lighthearted level. Both

⁵⁵Barke, James, Major Operation 1936 p.109.

Jeems Kaye and Erchie watch with regret the adoption of English customs:

"We're following so hard in the wake
o' the English that we're throwing
aside oor auld notions o' the New Year,
and bless ye "hauding Christmas"
Me a Scotchman an' an elder o' the 56
kirk an' haud Christmas."

Similarly:

"The bubbly Jock is the symbol o'
Scotland's decline and fa'. We
maybe bate the English at Bannockburn,
noo they're haein' their revenge and
underminin' oor constitution wi' the 57
aid o' a bird."

Such complaints stem from good intentions but they never achieve any kind of artistic expression because none of the writers are themselves sure what traditional Scottish culture is really like. The situation is summed up in the figure of Mark Ker in Lucy Flockhart, a poet writing in Scots. "I want to divert Scottish literature into new channels" he says. "I want to hit on a subject that will appeal to all Scottish people and make them think furiously. I want to delineate the decay of the countryside, the horror of the slums"⁵⁸ The patriotism is there, and the feeling that some kind of positive, challenging approach is required, and the will to provide it - but the artistic talent is lacking.

Finally, related to this fear of cultural corruption

⁵⁶ Jeems Kaye op. cit. Vol. I p.63.

⁵⁷ Munro, Neil. Erchie My Droll Friend 1904 p.4.

⁵⁸ Lucy Flockhart op. cit. p.272.

is a vein of racialism which doesn't quite square with the myth of Glasgow as the friendliest place on earth. It is an attitude largely, though not completely, confined to the pre-war novel, but it appears often enough in unmistakable notes of prejudice and vicious gibes to need comment. It should be understood that this is not peculiar to Glasgow fiction, but that Victorian and Edwardian literature in general frequently took the line that foreigners, if they were white, were funny, and if not were sub human and savage. It is a tradition which survives today in children's comics and also in areas of the folk consciousness. Against this background remarks like this seem less odious:

" 'Sergeant' said he 'I can smell niggers. Come with me for a minute'

We shot, bayoneted, killed, battered, and cursed through a thousand dirty-smelling Dacoits." 59

R.W. Campbell seems to despise anyone who is not a white, Scottish, Boy's Brigade member. In Winnie McLeod "a swarthy man of alien mould was leering in the filthy manner of his breed."⁶⁰ Moral decay moreover is a direct result of foreign immigration. As a character in the same novel says:

"This is north. North winds chill the passions. In the sunny south there's more bother. That's why Portugal and Spain are petering out. But the alien invasion is turning our city into a cosmopolitan affair. Foreign restaurants,

⁵⁹Campbell, Robert W. Private Spud Tamson 1916 p.31.

⁶⁰Campbell, Robert W. Winnie McLeod 1920 p.24.

shady picture houses, legs and busts in those rotten reviews appeal to the sensual instincts. It makes me mad, for I'm proud of Bonny Scotland."⁶¹

More common victims however are the Irish and the Jews. Not that there is any sustained attack on them, but time and time again they arouse outbursts of bigotry:

"Oily young jewesses from the Gorbals ambled along quite sure of themselves, and perspiring under the weight of pearls and furs made out of pawn shops, old clothes and gold painted watches."⁶²

In Glasgow Keelie "a short fat Jewboy was playing the piano The Jewboy had lank greasy black hair, and two boils above his collar."⁶³ Even in George Blake who is normally liberal in his social views, the note of physical disgust creeps in. "It hurt some racial sense in him to see among the people in the lighted streets so many Jews in clothes altogether too fashionable."⁶⁴

Blake's prejudices go beyond anti semitism to take in other alien races.

"It pleased him exceedingly that the race in her was not complicated by the blood of Irish, Lithuanian, Italian or German - Jewish elements from which he had so often recoiled in his contacts with the bastard underworld of Glasgow."⁶⁵

Writing in a descriptive work, The Land I Love (1936) Annie S. Swan expressed a typical resentment about

⁶¹Ibid. pp.86-7.

⁶²Ibid. p.24.

⁶³McNeillie, John. Glasgow Keelie 1940 p.82.

⁶⁴Young Malcolm op. cit. p.162.

⁶⁵Mince Collop Close op. cit. p.16.

foreigners in our midst that has a very modern ring.

In this case it was directed at the Irish:

"To those on the outside the stiffest problem Glasgow has to face is the presence in her midst of what now amounts to a considerable section of the Irish nation, who bring with them race prejudices, strong religious differences and other disabilities, who do not merge well with the life of the city. Why they should be allowed to plant themselves like a monstrous growth on Glasgow is a question which becomes more acute every day. It requires an answer. If the Irish, by some miraculous stroke of the pen could all be repatriated to their own country there would be more room for Glasgow folks to breathe, and many avenues of employment would be released. The policy of the ever open door, on which Britain has prided herself, can be carried too far. It certainly has been in Glasgow to the city's hurt."⁶⁶

Like the Jews in so many countries the Irish have assumed in the folklore of the West of Scotland something of the role of scapegoats for the ills of society. The anti-Irish comment then is by no means rare in Glasgow fiction :

" "We employ only Scottish trade unionists, we do not employ Irishmen."

"Why"

"They're politicians, not workers." "⁶⁷

Hugh Munro is more subtle. His criticism in The Clydesiders is by implication, showing Irishmen up as unpleasant characters. Big Mick, the chargehand who

⁶⁶ Swan, Annie S. The Land I Love 1936 pp.242-3.

⁶⁷ Winnie McLeod op. cit. p.173.

gets the hero sacked, is a foul-mouthed, ignorant oaf. Terry Flanagan, the Haigs' neighbour, is a sleeket ne'er-do-well who figures as an evil influence on Collie, and a shadow hanging over their family life.

It will be noticed that the majority of books referred to in this chapter appeared before World War II. This is not accidental, for as we have seen the individual, and not society, is the primary concern of the more modern writers. Patriotism, civic pride and the consciousness of a national and regional identity however are social virtues, and while the impulse to express them has survived to recent years it is by no means of any great importance. (We see it for example in the title of Robin Jenkins' A Very Scotch Affair (1968), although it is difficult to see what is peculiarly Scottish about the story itself.) They did tend to coincide with certain moods in society; in the late nineteenth century with a wave of nationalism that found political expression in bodies such as the Scottish Home Rule Association (formed 1886), and in the Twenties and Thirties with the hopes of a renaissance in Scottish literature. Moreover the Jewish note did reflect an anti-semitism that was actually present in the city during these years. On the whole what we have seen however is a strong and continuing urge to celebrate and defend Glasgow, and a certain insularity of outlook

which reveals the city as not so wholeheartedly friendly and tolerant as many commentators would have us believe. If their arguments at times smack of superficiality it is because the writers lack a strongly felt understanding of what qualities are particularly inherent in Glasgow.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WOMEN AND THE GLASGOW NOVEL

CHAPTER EIGHT

WOMEN AND THE GLASGOW NOVEL

A separate look at the contribution of the women writers who have worked in the Glasgow tradition can only be justified if it exposes some otherwise uncovered facets of the urban and industrial worlds. Most of their work is mediocre and there is little point in raking through it for its own sake. What we find however is that overall the woman novelist is temperamentally disinclined to take a wide look at the city's experience, preferring to limit her vision to the immediate and personal. This is not to say that she ignores everything else; it is a matter of emphasis. Moreover, what spills from the pens of the women themselves is strongly complemented by the attitudes taken by many of the male novelists to the role of women in industrial society, and a look at their female characters proves useful.

Most Glasgow novelists are men. When compared with the women in terms of output we find a figure of about seven to one in their favour. Allowing that a somewhat larger number of novels deal with women than this ratio implies the figure is not without significance if we bear in mind an observation of critic Ian Watt.

"It is surely time," he writes, "that the dominance of women readers in the public for the novel is connected with the characteristic kind of weakness and

unreality to which the form is liable - its tendency to restrict the field in which its psychological and intellectual discriminations operate to a small and arbitrary selection of human situations "1

If the influence of women is so great on the novel in general, why then is this not overwhelmingly the case in the particular collection we are dealing with? The answer is that the Glasgow experience appeals far more to men than to women. The reasons are fairly simple, but reference to David Cecil's assessment of Mrs. Gaskell is instructive as it expands somewhat on the point Watt makes.

"Her work was wholly lacking in virile qualities. Her genius is so purely feminine that it excludes from her achievement not only specifically masculine items, but all the more masculine qualities of thought and feeling. She is very clever; but with a feminine cleverness instinctive rule of thumb; showing itself in illuminations of the particular, not in general intellectual stature. The conscious reason plays little part in her creative process Her emotional capacity is no less feminine than her intellectual. She is not a powerful writer. She could no more express the crude, the harsh or the violent, than she could speak in a bass voice." 2

In other words she exhibits the qualities of women readers and writers alike; an obsession with personal relationship, with domesticity, sentiment and romance. It is a tenor of mind which eschews the vulgar, the

¹Watt, Ian. The Rise Of The Novel 1957 p.311.

²Cecil, David. Early Victorian Novelists 1934 pp.153-4.

menacing and the violent. In good writers it can produce taste and restraint, but in bad ones it leads to the trivial and insipid. The grand designs are not for them; the making and breaking of nations; tales of heroism and treachery. They care little about the development of social and economic systems although they may have a compulsive interest in social life and family finances. They will turn their backs on the fate of empires to gossip over the tea-cups. For Margaret Davis in A Baby Might Be Crying Glasgow in wartime is primarily a city of pregnancies and mal-treated women.

It is obvious then why Glasgow with its turbulent history of industrial expansion, its football, drink, and craftsmanship should have no immediate attraction for the female novelist. The themes of trade, ambition and political unrest which dominate the genre are masculine themes. But every bit as important as the female temperament is the way in which the development of an industrial society in Britain changed the social status of women. In the pre-industrial world there was a community of interest between men and women. Each played their part in the provision of the family's income. The man in outside work, the woman supplementing her domestic duties in cottage industry and periodic spells of agricultural labour. She was an integral part of the economic set up. With the new order however her role changed from partnership to dependance. Successful men :

"sought to express their wealth and developing power first through the finery and then through the idleness of their women This spiritual and physical isolation from work marked a break with the past and the beginning of a new and perhaps less honourable tradition." 3

The legacy for the poor was no less different. Expanding industry increasingly demanded female labour, but it was of a different kind - unskilled and lowly paid - in factories, mines and sweat shops. The female's role then was changing from that of the centre of family life to that of a cog in an industrial machine.^a Moreover for the first time men and women were forced to compete. Work that had been previously been undertaken by a few skilled men was now often carried out by a horde of female labourers. Under the old system there were restrictions on the kind of work done by women so that they did not undercut men - these no longer applied. There was thus built up a body of resentment against the employment of women workers, (particularly when times were bad) that manifested itself in men-only trade unions

³ Davies, Ross. Women And Work London p.39.

^aSee E.P. Thomson. The Making Of the English Working Class (Pelican 1968) p.455. "According to conventions which were deeply felt, the woman's status turned upon her success as a housewife in the family economy, in domestic management and forethought, baking and brewing, cleanliness and child care. The new independence, in the mill or full time at the loom, which made new claims possible, was felt simultaneously as a loss in status and in personal independence. Women became more dependent upon the employer or labour market, and they looked back to a 'golden' past in which home earnings from spinning, poultry and the like, could be gained around their own door. In good times the domestic economy, like the peasant economy, supported a way of life centred upon the home, in which external whims and compulsions were more obvious than external discipline. Each stage in

and even anti-female rioting.^b Similarly their translation from the very human world of cottage industry to the impersonality of the factory did nothing to highlight their femininity in the eyes of men. While it will not do to exaggerate this hostility, it is true to say that a vein of unease and suspicion about the role of women deeply ingrained itself into the psyche of industrial society, and filtered out indirectly into the literature of that society. This is what we find in the Glasgow novel - or at any rate in the work of the male novelists. With the women writers themselves the other trend is apparent. Working women rarely write novels, and the middle class ones who did had little knowledge of the working world. In their writing then, as a rule - though of course there are exceptions - they retreated into a shell of personal relationships which is spiritually rooted in the pre-industrial world. Our examples are taken from Glasgow fiction but there is no reason why the conclusions should not be of a wider relevance.

a (Contd)

industrial differentiation and specialisation struck also at the family economy, disturbing customary relations between man and wife, parents and children and differentiating more sharply between 'work' and 'life'. It was to be a full hundred years before this differentiation was to bring returns, in the form of labour-saving devices, back into the working woman's home."

b

As late as 1877 for example the T.U.C. argued that "the duty of men and husbands is to bring about a condition of things when their wives should be in their proper sphere of home instead of being dragged into competition of livelihood with the great and strong men of the world." quoted Women And Work p.63.

Sarah Tytler is the only woman writer in the Glasgow tradition to have worked on the male themes thrown up by the city with any success, but even in her St. Mungo's City family affairs are of overriding importance. It is from the interplay of personalities and particularly the problems of a few related characters that the book's dynamism comes. She keeps such a sure grip on her material precisely because the larger social forces, while always present in the background, are subordinated to them. Indeed she uses them to express her themes - like money for example - on a domestic level, and nowhere more effectively than in the scene where the impoverished McKinnon sisters await the arrival of a visitor, and Tytler's feminine eye for domestic detail shows how they re-arrange their furniture to disguise the absence of all the pieces they have been forced to sell. She is well aware that the world outside the home where the great social forces are moulded is man's world.

"At such early hours as are devoted to the patron saint of business - shall we say St. Luke? - few women, even when tucked under the wing, or following in the wake of husband, brother, or son, venture to bring the light incongruous flutter of their gowns and the disturbing element of their unleashed faces into the rank and files of the workers." 4

In contrast her contemporary, George Mills, worked the same themes from a masculine standpoint. We actually see the rising fortunes of the hero of The Beggar's Benison,

⁴Tytler, Sarah. St. Mungo's City 1885 pp.14-15.

for it is his fight to the top which interests the author; his business deals, and the squalid side of the public as well as the private world. Love and marriage are tagged on only at the end for conventional reasons, whereas they are part of the central situation of St. Mungo's City.

However, if women are ill-equipped, through a combination of nature and upbringing^c, to handle the themes thrown up by a growing industrial city it did not stop some of them trying. Annie S. Swan was as aware of the money ethos of nineteenth century Glasgow as anyone else, and it is a major concern in The Guinea Stamp. We have noted elsewhere the repugnance with which she viewed the avaricious side of the city's character, as well as her religious and moral sense, but it should also be realised that she had a strong feminist streak in her that manifested itself in indignation at the way society treats women. Not that she was anything but conventional in her writings. The standards of respectable Victorian society are strictly observed, and the wayward Liz is punished for her sins; but there is an attempt to understand the pressure that drove Liz to her fall, as well as a call for compassion for those who transgress. It is from a distinctly female standpoint. As Miss Peck says, "I have felt quite wicked at the

^cJohn Stuart Mill wrote: "All the education that women receive from society incubates in them the feeling that the individuals connected with them are the only ones to whom they owe any duty."
The Subjection Of Women p.105.

inequality of the punishment meted out to men and women in this world. Women are the burden bearers and the scapegoats always."⁵ While Swan's sentiments are not peculiarly aimed at urban industrial society but society in general, her treatment does reflect on the former in the way in which Liz's plight is a direct consequence of her background. It is the attempt to escape from the depths of the city slums that inspires the course of action that finally lands her on the streets. Swan, while not one herself, is working out here one of the staple situations of social-protest novelists throughout world literature. In its worst manifestations industrialism has made beggars of men and whores of women,^d but it is the latter case with all the moral complications and opportunities for drama which have appealed particularly to the writer who wishes to expose the ills of society. Like ragged children, innocent girls ruined by social circumstances are ready made for pathos. This is why Swan's male contemporaries John Blair and Patrick MacGill, while far removed from her in philosophy, chose a similar story to Liz's for propaganda purposes. Jean and The Ratpit are about the oppression of the working classes, and the central figures are women not because either writer has Swan's concern for the female

⁵Swan, Annie S. The Guinea Stamp 1892 p.350.

^dWomen in fact often suffered the most. Henry Fielding in his capacity as a magistrate commented on the numbers of female suicides in the city. "Hardly a week passes without one or more instances of that kind and few or no men have for some time been known to have committed the same. Perhaps the distress to which some females have been lately reduced may in some measure account for it." Covent Garden Journal June 26 1752 - quoted by I. Pinchbeck - Women Workers And The Industrial Rev.

role, but because women are more vulnerable than men in a harsh exploiting industrial system. Despite a declared concern for social questions, however, personal relationships dominate The Guinea Stamp and the author expends most of her time on the complications of love and marriage. Everybody is in one way or another intimately involved in some kind of matrimonial problem. Teen's standpoint is just one of many:

"Some lassies mairry, thinkin' they'll hae an easier time an' a man to work for them, an' they sometimes fin' oot they've only ta'en somebody to keep; some mairry for spite an' some because they'd rather dee than be auld maids. I dinna think myself, love - if there be sic a thing 6 - has ony thing to do wi't."

An important point about the whole body of Swan's work is its escapist element. James Drawbell in an article in The Scots Magazine sums up the quality.

"She lived through a period of almost continuous depression as did her readers, and she knew the need in their hard, frugal and often dreary lives of a glimpse of a larger life in which women were rewarded for their devotion and made happy. To be taken out of themselves, to escape the household duties for a brief spell, to turn aside from the daily anxieties and be able to identify themselves with a background where living was pleasant and people were kind and considerate and loving. Was there anything so dreadful about that? Was it so much to ask for?" 7

This is only partly true of The Guinea Stamp. While

⁶The Guinea Stamp op. cit. p.226.

⁷Drawbell, James. The Scots Magazine. New Series Vol. 89 No.1 April 1968.

there is a good deal of glamour and of course a happy ending we have seen a glimpse of the seamier side of life. This is not without significance for it is her city setting which is responsible. Awareness has been forced on her. Drawbell is a remarkably illiterate and insensitive critic (what kind of man is it who admits to being a regular, and sympathetic, reader of *The People's Friend*?), yet in his determination to give a glowing report on Swan he sums up well the kind of world she is most at home in. "No one is going to produce a revolver, or try to peddle drugs, or introduce politics, and there will be no dead body in the library."⁸ At bottom it is comforting.

Although set in Glasgow, as far as the novel's essentials are concerned it could take place anywhere. This goes for most of the women writers who have located stories in the city. Why they bother when they will go on to filter out most of the Glasgow background anyway, is uncertain. It may just be a natural desire to paint a place they know well. It is also true that in most cases only a small proportion of the total work turned out by each of the women writers has Glasgow connections. The city is grey and unromantic, not the sort of setting normally associated with affairs of the heart. In terms of popularity and financial success, A.S. Swan was the most successful writer in the Glasgow tradition, but in some ways her work also represents a caricature - though a pretty accurate one - of what the female novelist is

⁸Ibid. p.22.

supposed to be like. She is the archetypal women's magazine contributor, and her tales are superficial, lacking in imagination, and loaded with unrestrained sentimentality. Her prose is dull; at times it becomes overwritten, and heavy handed. Primarily she is just a bad writer. Note this passage for instance:

" "Eh sic lees there is in papers. It shouldna be printed. Things like yon never happen in real life - never, never!" She spoke with a passionate emphasis, which indicated that she keenly felt what she said." 9

This is what is wrong with all the women novelists with the exception of Tytler; not that their vision is limited, nor their interests domestic or emotional, but that they just cannot write well.

Of those other female novelists who dealt at all with issues - as opposed to merely entertaining - only Dot Allan and Catherine Gavin look for them in their Glasgow background. The development of Gavin's Clyde Valley (1938) illustrates the fact that the wider social questions do not really interest women. The book is a product of the depression years and opens with an awareness of what the period has meant for Clydeside. Her social conscience however is not active for long and Gavin soon follows her inclination to create a conventional love story. Dot Allan is a more interesting case. Her work is a mixture of the worst features of hack romances, and a genuine

⁹The Guinea Stamp op. cit. p.287.

desire to understand certain aspects of the Glasgow experience. The Deans for example looks at the question of what is Scottish, and Deepening River on the qualities on which Glasgow's commercial success was founded. In this novel we find a revealing comment. "It was strange to think that no woman's name was associated publicly with the history of Glasgow."¹⁰ Understanding this, Allan goes on to champion the claims of her sex and creates two heroines who stand equal with men in the world of trade. It is more of a token gesture than anything else however, for her presentation of their public activities is slight, and we again find the inevitable concentration on human relationships. Her style is no better than Annie S. Swan's. Every one of her novels is packed with highly coloured love scenes and gushing sentiment.

"Her face she realised was breaking into hot little quivers. Her muscles were dissolving in a palsy of trembling. She dreaded lest she should lose consciousness, lose control, and he would have his way with her. His way! God! What would that way be?" 11

But what we also find at times is the same concern as in Swan with specifically female problems. With Allan the issue is summed up in her use of the phrase "surplus women." Makeshift for example focuses on the woman's fear that she will be left on the shelf. It is a fear which makes them settle for second best, and forces them into makeshift marriages. To Jacqueline, the heroine,

¹⁰Allan, Dot. Deepening River 1932 p.225.

¹¹Allan, Dot. Makeshift 1928 p.83.

old Miss Price is a symbol of the woman left alone - "a tragic caricature of debased womanhood,"¹² and it is her example that drives Jacqueline against her true feelings into a relationship with William. In this novel men as a group assume something of the status of villains. Nessie's husband turns out to be a drunkard; Terrance the writer treats women as disposable objects. While Makeshift is little more than a superficial whine of grievance it is easy to understand the feelings behind it, as it appeared at a time when this fear was particularly acute due to the loss of so many young men in the First World War.

Catherine Carswell is a far more serious writer than Allan. Her novels Open The Door (1920), and The Camomile (1922), are, as we have seen, about the individual.* Again the point of view is feminine. Both deal with the growth and maturity of girls - particularly their relationships with men. The humour and irreverence of The Camomile is particularly girlish. Carswell is an intellectual, and the nearest thing to be found in the Glasgow tradition to a "women's libber." Her books are serious attempts at relating the inner life of a female to her social experience, and there is no frivolity and no pandering to notions of glamour and sentiment. Marriage is a key topic, but not in the way it is in Swan or Allan, to whom a woman without a man is an object of pity. The conventional role

¹²Ibid. p.206.

*See Chapter Six above.

of the woman as the centre of family life does not arise, rather the author looks to an idea of personal fulfilment which may or may not involve a solitary course. The central figure of The Camomile is aware of her own femininity. She wants love and marriage, yet finds it difficult to reconcile these hopes with the consciousness that they entail a surrender of individuality. While Carswell is more aggressively feminine than her female colleagues - being more thoughtful - her work is at the same time of wider relevance, as her central issue is of universal (not merely female) application. Yet again it must be realised that Glasgow is of little importance. This is not because she did not know, or care, about industrialism and urban squalor, for her autobiography shows that she had first hand experience of the unpleasant side of city life. As a child she saw

"ragged, bare-legged, blue footed
verminous and valguschildren" in
slum streets, and drunken crowds
where "shawled women fought,
screaming and tearing out each
other's hair while the men stood
roaring them on with laughter." 13

It left her a convinced life-long socialist, but it did not provide material she felt able to use for fiction. Again it is an example of the priorities of the female sensibility.

The above writers all have some serious elements in their work, however badly they handle them, but the same

¹³Carswell, Catherine. Lying Awake 1950 pp.15-19.

cannot be said about the rest of the Glasgow school of female writers. Their intentions are merely to entertain. They never stepped out of their shell. It is not the place here to deal with their historical novels^{*}, but their contemporary works we shall see are a tedious round of similar characters and situations that are little more than mindless fodder for the market. The Glasgow of O. Douglas is genteel, middle class, and feeble. The action is set largely in a collection of cosy manses which may as well be standing on the moon, for all the emphasis the author lays on the outside city background. There is no imaginative quality - but a good deal of pious sentiment. There are plenty marriages, plenty loving hearts, and plenty boring domestic details. Her work is so mechanical that the same plot and the same characters appear in her three Glasgow novels with virtually only the names changed. Compare for example two quotations from respectively The Setons (1917) and Eliza For Common (1928):

"Mr. Seton often remarked that he never saw a house or garden he liked so well, but then it was James Seton's way to admire sincerely everything that was his."¹⁴

And:

" "A well proportioned room: I seldom see a nicer!" That was of course her father's way with everything that was his."¹⁵

O. Douglas is blind to everything that does not fit

^{*}See Chapter Ten below.

¹⁴Douglas, O. The Setons 1917 p.49.

¹⁵Douglas, O. Eliza For Common 1928 p.102.

her narrow pattern, and dishonest enough to present obvious exceptions as general truths:

"Mrs. Forsyth was a typical Glasgow woman, large, healthy, prosperous, her face beaming with contentment."¹⁶

A typical over-fed middle class matron perhaps, but is she typical of the city as a whole?

N.B. Morrison is scarcely better. The Following Wind (1954) and Thea (1963) have the same tired atmosphere of faded curtains and prayer books. It is a world of the decaying middle classes, West End Glasgow on its last legs. The first book is simply the account of the unexceptional marriages of various members of the Garnett family. In the second a middle aged woman examines her own life and that of her dead sister, and through the experience realises her own selfishness. This supposedly leads to a measure of regeneration, but it is unconvincing. However, the reader does not care since not one of the characters has any life. The efforts to spin these weak ideas out into the length of a novel is probably responsible for the note of fatigue which dominates both books. Her style is cliched:

"They moved imperceptibly towards each other as if drawn, until she was in his arms. There was a wildness in the ecstasy of that first kiss, as though to bridge all the years that had brought them to this moment." 17

¹⁶The Setons op. cit. p.109.

¹⁷Morrison, Nancy Bryson. The Following Wind 1954 p.177.

In her use of padding perhaps more than anywhere else however, we see the feminine sensibility. Descriptions of clothing, rooms, — full of needless detail — fill up many pages. Mrs. Chetwude goes for tea and this necessitates a long drawn out account of the company for no apparent reason. For example: "The waitress was so raven dark Greta felt sure her hair was dyed. She was competent, wore pink pearls and a wedding ring — probably part time."¹⁸

In Thea Morrison brings in the figure of an unfaithful husband but this is as far as she goes in this sphere. Despite social and literary trends she is too mealy-mouthed to let sex intrude. Margaret Thomson Davis however has no such hesitation. Her books are based on it. The Breadmakers, her first, appeared in 1972 and was followed by A Baby Might Be Crying (1973) and A Sort Of Peace (1974). Together they constitute a trilogy which focuses, through a period from the late 1930s to the immediate post war era, on the lives of a number of people all in some way connected with a Glasgow bakehouse. Unfortunately Davis is a hack and her books have little to commend them. She has an obsession with women being ill treated; battered wives, wronged lovers, verbally abused daughters. This is in no way a serious look at the condition of women, but is a deliberate sensationalism. She sets out both to titillate her female audience with a mixture of the lurid and the banal, and to play up to their discontent and sense

¹⁸Morrison, Nancy Bryson. Thea 1963 p.54.

of grievance by confirming that men are brutes.

"She had no idea of the law but had never needed to look further than her immediate surroundings in Clydend for example to illustrate the Scottish tradition that the man was the boss, the proverbial 'Lord and master', the privileged one, and a woman was merely part of his goods and chattels with which he was perfectly¹⁹ entitled to do whatever he liked."

However similar this may seem to the concern of A.S. Swan or even Carswell, they are really worlds apart. With Davis it is an assumed attitude, present to provide an excuse for the violence, sex - prolific though not explicit - and unpleasant male behaviour. In the second novel of the trilogy Davis exposes the key to her approach in the account of Catriona's impressions during child-birth, where a lengthy comparison is made between life as Catriona knows it, full of pain and unhappiness, and life as she reads about it in women's magazines. The inference of course is that Davis regards her work as so much more open and true to life than the magazines, that she calls a spade a spade and shows humanity as it is, warts and all. In fact she substitutes one kind of rubbish for another. Blind romance gives way to wild exaggeration. None of her characters are convincing, especially the men, who come over as crude parodies. Melvin on his wedding night for example: having escorted his new wife over the threshold and commanded her to wipe her feet he gets down

¹⁹Davis, Margaret Thomson. A Baby Might Be Crying
1973 p.169.

to business:

" "See that polish" Melvin switched on the light and proudly surveyed the hall floor. "Maybe you think that's a good shine. Lizzie MacGuffie thinks it's perfect and I've never bothered to contradict her but you should have seen that floor when my Betty was alive." "20

But even the sympathetic male figures are nonsensical. Jimmy Gordon has read a book about the Highland Clearances.

"After reading all this and more, Jimmy had locked himself in the bathroom and wept All day his anguished eyes saw the suffering of the Highlanders in the mixing machine, in the fondant bin, in both Scotch ovens and in the proving press."21

Her character drawing is not only incompetent but inconsistent. Throughout the first two novels and up until the final stages of the third Melvin has been shown as an unfeeling lout past all redemption. Suddenly, faced with the prospect of having to end the trilogy on a happy note, she springs on us a new reformed Melvin who is now seemingly the perfect husband. Similarly out of the blue we are entertained to the sight of Catriona, who has been consistently shown as little better than a simpleton, reading psychology books and recalling verses of poetry.

At other times Davis indulges in the sort of banal female trivia that could have come from the pages of N.B. Morrison.

²⁰Davis, Margaret Thomson. The Breadmakers 1972 p.65.

²¹Ibid. pp.72-3.

"They both liked to look smart. Ruth always wore high-heeled shoes and Sammy changed his shirt and put on a fresh starched collar every day of his life. Ruth was very particular about his clothes and about hers. They always went shopping for clothes together, although going into the ladies department of a shop even with Ruth hanging on his 22 arm was always an agony to Sammy."

Her style moreover is abominable. How can anyone take seriously a writer whose descriptive powers rest on comments like "excitement crowded the Glasgow streets like fast-bouncing footballs."²³

Having made a mess of these three novels Davis turned to contemporary Glasgow for her material and the result was The Prisoner (1974). It is as shallow and badly written as the rest. Mrs. Celia King is a middle-aged, yet attractive, housewife. She is married to a prosperous ladies hairdresser and lives comfortably in Bearsden. But there are two clouds on her blue horizon. Firstly, her teenage daughter has an unsuitable boyfriend. Not only is he a Catholic, but he is working class, and Mrs. King does everything she can to discourage the relationship. The girl however becomes pregnant, and by the end of the book an abortion has been arranged. Secondly, her own sex life is far from perfect. "Peter had not made love to her for months and she couldn't pluck up the courage to speak to him about it."²⁴ It transpires that her husband is a homosexual and has been for years

²²A Baby Might Be Crying op. cit. p.26.

²³Ibid. p.1.

²⁴Davis, Margaret Thomson. The Prisoner 1974 p.27.

(though why she has not found out earlier is unexplained). His partner in the hairdressing business, whom he had met when they were both prisoners of war, is also his lover, and he prefers him to his wife. Having had glimpses of them dressing up in women's clothes the heroine at last finds the two men in bed together and determines to leave and make a new life for herself. The novel is as ridiculous as the summary suggests - and there is not much more to it. There is no attempt to look at the problem in depth, and sensitive subjects which some years earlier would have been considered a bit risqué in novels for women, may as well be a shopping list for all the perception and understanding the author shows. Marie Muir, notwithstanding a degree of reticence and superficiality in her approach, at least managed to convey a sense of bewilderment and suffering when she dealt with the subject of a homosexual husband in Leezie Lindsay (1955). Davis never achieves this.

Before leaving the women writers mention must be made of Dorothy K. Haynes. Her contribution to the Glasgow genre is slight, one small novel - The Gibsons Of Glasgow (1947) - but she is a curious case as her approach to the city is almost masculine. Her book is a family story which covers a period from the First World War into the 1939-45 war. It is not a good novel, both the plot and the characterisation are crude and unconvincing, but her outlook is radically different from the other women writers in the school. Working class life is the

subject, but we find instead of the cloying sentiment of A.S. Swan, or the titillation of Davis, a hard and critical attitude which reverses the normal role of the woman as a figure wronged and oppressed. Indeed there is something of a theme of betrayal associated with them, which as we shall see, is a characteristic of many of the male visions of the female in the city. John Gibson's wife Ada for example runs off with another man, leaving him ill, and unemployed, to look after three children. Years later his daughter Isa forces her future husband to forsake his ideals and join the army, although the idea is abhorrent to him. He returns home a broken man. The Gibsons Of Glasgow is an unromantic book which also presents a picture of city squalor and degradation unusual for a woman. We get substantial looks at stinking, rat infested slums and, of a central character reduced to singing for pennies in the gutter. There is no pathos in this - Haynes keeps the action very much at a distance.

Alongside the school of women writers who have produced Glasgow novels there is a group of men whose names only distinguish them from the women - Guy McCrone, George Woden, A.J. Cronin and Stewart Hunter. The appeal of these female impersonators is to the women's market, and their characteristics, whether consciously or unconsciously determined, are distinctly feminine. This is probably truest of McCrone. His Moorehouse saga is set in a largely domestic world where the ins and outs of family life, fashion, and personal relationships, occupy the centre

of the stage. It is not a commercial world. Prosperity means bigger houses and better marriage prospects for the characters who make up what is essentially a chronicle of weddings and genealogical complexities, not bigger warehouses. As we have seen, the strain of female sensibility becomes stronger as the saga progresses, and the writing becomes more mechanical. It never becomes as bad however as we find it in McCrone's The Striped Umbrella (1937) and his An Independent Young Man (1961), two books that are similar to what can be found in the worst of women's magazines. They are orientated towards genteel, but none too intelligent, middle aged women, presenting family intrigues of the most superficial nature and the usual love interest. Both are peopled with cliched paper characters. "You play tennis of course"²⁵ remarks one of the characters, and this is the level of the novels' seriousness. They exist in a cocoon where the urban and industrial environments have no place. James And Charlotte (1955) is a simple love story.

Hunter and Cronin are no more inspiring. The former's The Happiest Hour (1953) is about a middle aged marriage and the problems (romantic, naturally) of the grown up children of one of the partners' previous marriage. Again the Glasgow background is purely arbitrary. Cronin's Song Of Sixpence (1964) is an appeal to the maternal instincts of women. The hero is a lovelorn boy whose

²⁵ McCrone, Guy. An Independent Young Man 1961 p.65.

life story, as he recognises himself, is dominated by women. His soft and sentimental emotions colour the book. Similarly a major element in Shannon's Way is a love affair which is little more than a version of the doctor-nurse romances featured in much of the pulp fiction turned out for women.

Woden's books are different, though qualitatively no better. There is an impression of substance which proves to be illusory when the books are looked at closely. Apart from Mungo, his Glasgow novels are all built to a similar pattern, which takes the family as the central area of concern and examines the affairs of its members and their acquaintances. Indeed each novel is little more than a jumble of small potted life stories. Human relationships then, are the major concern. Yet certain themes come out strongly and consistently. He has an obsession with age and growing old. Time and time again characters reflect on it. Old Mrs. Garth in Happiness Has No Story is in her own words "learning to die."²⁶ In Dusk For Dreams the narrator comes to a new vision of life: "Before my operation it didn't occur to me that one has to learn to grow old, and it's not easy. I don't mean merely to be overtaken by old age and to suffer it in querulous impotence."²⁷ In one novel the decline of a character is mirrored in her garden:

²⁶Woden, George. Happiness Has No Story 1938 p.327.

²⁷Woden, George. Dusk For Dreams 1941 p.22.

"She had not been out of doors since the dahlias were at their best. They were dead long ago, one day blooming gorgeously, the ravages of age carefully hidden by the gardener's skill; and the next, when the sun melted the white frost, the flowers are sodden balls of brown pulp." 28

By the late 1930s Woden was himself well into middle age and his concern is understandable, as is his concern with the past, and in particular with the theme of love experienced long ago. Both the narrator of Dusk For Dreams and his Aunt Rosa relive, in their memories, long lost romances. In Happiness Has No Story old Mr. Macrae recalls the passionate affair he had as a young man living in France. In every book, parallel with the past romances of the old, is a tangle of similar relationships involving the young. Despite the feminine leanings in his work however Woden's books cannot be considered light reading. They are slow moving and tedious, written in a style that is dull and unattractive. Much more important than these writers however is how those men who may be said to represent the mainstream of the Glasgow tradition have seen the role of women in industrial society. What emerges is the identification of women with a theme of dubiety and disloyalty which hardens at times into outright betrayal. One must be selective here and guard against interpreting every nagging wife and unfaithful girlfriend as symbolic figures with a place in a wider pattern. However, even allowing for the sort of cliches

²⁸Woden, George. Tannenbrae 1935 p.23.

about the 'battle of the sexes' to be expected in any group of novels, it is possible to see a persistent and significant feeling that the women of the city are in some way suspect. It is a theme that can be seen starting in a crude and naive form in the late nineteenth century kailyard novels and developing fully by the mid 1930s. In Jeems Kaye and later in Erchie it is women who ruin the old traditions, who, with their ideas of fashion start keeping Christmas instead of the New Year, and urge their husbands to move to new houses . A stronger statement comes in David Levenax's (C.E. Beckett) Plain Tales Of The City And Suburbs (c.1900), a collection of heavily humorous sketches about Glasgow life, many of which deal with the female threat to the masculine way of life. The first for example is entitled Deserted By His Womankind and features a widower whose grown up daughters distress him by leaving home against his wishes and going into business. They are representatives of the new modern type of women with progressive attitudes who want to be independent and who support the Suffragettes. Again in one called Ivie Linskill's Return the author regrets the suffocating influence that women have in the world of men. Ivie has spent a globetrotting life of adventure, a life of drinking, gambling and excitement, but when he returns home to Glasgow his two long lost sisters put a stop to his old ways. They civilize him - but at the same time destroy him. Another story expresses Levenax's dismay at the thought of women at university. It should be understood that at this period the idea is not peculiarly Glaswegian or even Scottish, but characteristic of a wider

trend in the English fiction of the late Victorian and Edwardian era. It is a version of the gentleman's club syndrome which found expression in Conan Doyle, Kipling and H.G. Wells.

As the twentieth century progresses the theme becomes heightened and more sophisticated. A catalogue of sins are laid at the door of women. Not only do they forsake the past, deceive and betray their men, but they oppose male idealism and stifle ambition.

"Wimmin hiv nae souls," says Jimmie in The Dance Of The Apprentices,
 "their only purpose in creation is tae breed the race an' when they've done that they're aboot as interestin' as stripped bean-puds. There's nut wan o' thim is fit mate for a superman. They don't know the meanin' o' the words 'Freedom an' Independence'." 29

This is no isolated outburst, but a comment that goes to the core of much of the male novelist's thought. The writer and mystic, Hugo Black, who appears in This Good Company expresses similar sentiments.

"Women understand one thing only - the flesh. They distrust and fear every spiritual act. If an idea stands between them and a man they'll set out to destroy the idea - even if they destroy the man in doing so." 30

This anti-idealistic quality is dramatised in a number of novels. In The Wild Men it is the women who

²⁹Gaitens, Edward. The Dance Of The Apprentices 1948 p.127.

³⁰Hunter, Stewart. This Good Company 1946 p.179.

are most opposed to the revolution and, characteristically, on emotional not political grounds. Quiet respectability is all they care about. Ilma makes Paddy promise to give up his political activities, while the political career of Dan Dalveen is ended by the authorities with the aid of a middle aged prostitute. George Anderson finds the same trait in Major Operation. His marriage has broken up but his secretary cushions the blow for him. "Sophia had stuck to him when his wife had deserted him: another example of working class superiority."³¹ Yet she distrusts and fears his new found socialist convictions, just as she cannot sympathise when her brother expounds the same philosophy. "As long as Anderson made love to her she was happy. But when he sat and argued he became distasteful."³² Perhaps what emerges most emphatically is that women lack imagination. Just as we have seen that the women novelists are on uncertain ground when they deal with matters outside the home and the sphere of relationships, so their fictional sisters prefer personalities to ideas - they cannot conceive of anything abstract that matters.

It is thus no accident that Martin Moir's conflict in Justice Of The Peace is with his mother - not his father. Yet it is Mr. Moir who has more reason to be disappointed with his son, since it is his hopes of seeing Martin in the family business that are dashed when

³¹ Barke, James. Major Operation 1936 p.355.

³² Ibid. p.450.

the boy chooses art as a career. As Martin's ability becomes obvious, and his success assured Mr. Moir encourages his son and takes a great pride in his work, but his relationship with his mother is marked by a widening gulf. It is specifically his art which is the cause. She conceives an irrational and vitriolic hatred for anything to do with it, and what maternal instincts she possesses vanish as he persists in his work.

"His father, in a friendly way, came much nearer to him than did his mother - and yet it was her affection that he craved, because she was his mother, perhaps. That affection she seemed to demand - and ignore He gave her love - but she did not seem satisfied with that love." 33

It is her denial of her son that eventually kills him. Yet she is not alone in prejudices. Around her is gathered a group of women equally narrow in their outlook, equally arid in their response to life. Niven catches admirably the nature of these over-enthusiastic prudes who are continually forming societies for the prevention of nearly everything. They are, in fact, perfect examples of the type of women for whom society as it developed in the urban world, provided no outlet for their energies.

The Dance Of The Apprentices shows a more traditional brand of feminine antagonism - the use of sex for blackmail:

33 Niven, Frederick. Justice Of The Peace 1914 p.82.

"Their hot bodies pulsing with the desire they were afraid to satisfy. And Norah kept on tiresomely refusing him, saying she could only stay out another half hour as she had to be up at five, saying again it would look better if he joined up.

"But Ah'm oan work o' National Importance" said John. "Aye but ye see" said Norah "there's three o' ye'se at hame an' they're sayin' that aulder men can dae the joab that young men are daein'. Of course Ah don't want ye tae go but it would look better." "34

Note again the defective imagination involved in Norah's readiness to sacrifice her man on the altar of public opinion. The possible consequences do not occur to her. In their married life later on the same impulses are at work and she forces him to give up a job he likes "because she thought labouring at building work wasn't a respectable job."³⁵

While this theme is essentially a pre-war phenomenon we do find it occurring as late as 1966 in The Dear Green Place. No-one can fault the behaviour of Mat's wife, she helps and encourages him in his literary efforts, but his mother (a member of the older pre-war generation) misunderstands and resents his aspirations. Her materialism revolts at his appetite for learning and his attempts at self-expression. "A clever boy like yourself" she says "shouldn't be reading a lot of daft books if it isn't going to get him anywhere."³⁶

³⁴The Dance Of The Apprentices op. cit. p.122.

³⁵Ibid. p.171.

³⁶Hind, Archie. The Dear Green Place 1968 p.84.

The extent to which this view of women is a major theme in the Glasgow novel is seen in the way it penetrates even the trashiest examples of the genre - the Gang School - where of course it takes on a form appropriate to the novels' already suspect morality. The schemes of the hero of Glasgow Keelie are persistently challenged by his girlfriend, an inhibiting influence who discourages his more grandiose ambitions and radically cuts down his others. When he decides to start a protection racket she will not agree. When he contemplates armed robbery she urges a smash and grab operation instead. "Christ here was a fine thing. He was trying to be a big shot and all the time she was trying to hold him back. He was making the plans and she was saying they were no good."³⁷

At this point it is necessary to pause and proceed on a somewhat different tack, for important as the theme of women is in the books mentioned above it is not the predominant interest of the novelists. It is one strand in the whole fabric of their work. Two novels however appeared in the Thirties which took the female's role as their central issue: Robert Craig's Lucy Flockhart (1931) and J.M. Reid's Homeward Journey (1934). They can be seen largely as a male response to the sort of problem Dot Allan raised in Makeshift (1928) and indeed Craig

³⁷McNeillie, John. Glasgow Keelie 1940 p.218.

expresses Lucy's position with the same phrase: "Now I must either get a respectable situation or be respectably wed. Preferably the situation should be carefully chosen but the husband must. There are three million SURPLUS WOMEN in the country."³⁸ But where Allan sympathised wholly with the female predicament Craig reacts with distrust and resentment at what he sees as female guile and ruthlessness.

"A man" he says, "will do a cowardly cruel or dishonourable act and he knows that it is the act of a coward a monster or a cur. He is aware of his own contemplability, even while he commits it, even when he contemplates committing it. But a woman is otherwise. Impervious in armour of self-exculpation, she goes her course reasoning her wrongdoings into right, her cruelties into righteousness, her meannesses into public spirit." 39

Lucy is built to these specifications and becomes a cross between Madame Bovary and Hogg's Justified Sinner. She has the romanticising glamour-craving nature of the one, and the religious self-justification of the other. She has also a remorseless determination to get her own way. The passage where she works out her plans for Mark Ker sums her up perfectly:

"I shall shape him. I will force him and goad him and jeer him to work. He shall toil like a galley slave, increasingly without rest, without repose. I shall discipline him, I will not allow myself to sink into working class wretchedness. I will not be poverty-stricken and marry

³⁸Craig, Robert. Lucy Flockhart 1931 p.198.

³⁹Ibid. p.90.

a poverty-stricken man, and grow old and moth-eaten and misshapen crawling through life like some intimidated dull eyed ox. I would rather be singed and die in a flame. I could not bear the cursed prosiness, the insufferable wretchedness. He has fluttered to my hand like a bird, weary, restless, and I am the instrument to make a man of him. It is God's will, I think." 40

There is a certain staginess and melodrama in Craig's presentation of his heroine. It cannot be said that he is subtle. Yet he manages to stay on the right side of credibility and produces in Lucy a memorable portrait of a supreme egotist.

Homeward Journey is less clear cut and less effective. The heroine's real nature is obscure for much of the book, hidden both by her plausibility and the ineffectuality of David, the foil to her dissembling. Yet her character is entirely in Lucy Flockhart's mould. She tells David a pack of lies about her home life to win his sympathy, representing her parents as cruel and demanding. Unlike Lucy's case however the end of the novel brings no change or reform, and she deceives David to the last. Having promised to marry him she leaves him in the lurch and runs off to London to become a chorus girl. It is more than coincidental that these books should have appeared in the 1930s. While the industrial revolution was well under way more than a century earlier, it is only now that the theme is coming to the fore, but it must be remembered

⁴⁰Ibid. p. 259.

that Scotland was late in developing any fiction at all which dealt with the urban industrial scene. Again, there were contemporary changes in the status of women which undoubtedly made it a topical subject for fiction. The First World War of course proved a great liberating force^e, but the post-war years also saw social and legislative advances in female freedom which expressed themselves in the most extreme form, for example in the figure of the 'flapper'. Yet however much there was a feeling of change in the air there was bound to be male disquiet. More important however were economic conditions. Given the tensions and frustrations aroused by the Depression it is not unreasonable to suggest that the crisis saw the surfacing of old fears buried in the consciousness of the industrial world, and that the status of women was among them. So we find our theme particularly apparent in the novels thrown up by these years. Some aspects have been examined, but we should also note the way in which marriage becomes an institution as subject to disintegration as anything else, and that the female partners are responsible. In Major Operation Jock McKelvie's wife stands solidly beside him in his struggle for socialism; her support is absolute. She is a remarkable woman, but exists more as a symbol of

^e"The number of women employed in commercial activities almost doubled between 1914 and 1918 as did the number in government and education, the number in industry increased sharply while the largest proportion increase was in transport By the end of the war there were about three million employed in munitions factories alone." Janet Roebuck The Making Of Modern English Society From 1850 (1973). p.98.

working class solidarity than as a comment on women. It is in other characters that we find Barke's attitude to the latter, and socialist ideals about the equality of the sexes do not enter into it. His picture is the typical male reaction. The marriage of George Anderson breaks up on the rocks of his wife's faithlessness.

"She longed for the company of interesting men. Men with a past, with a sense of illicit passion: men with a streak of naughtiness in them: men who had the courage to sow wild oats and were still able to keep on sowing them. The Modern Man of Fiction: of Hollywood, in fact,"⁴¹

She fails also in her maternal role. "More than ever now Beatrice (her daughter) did not matter - was a drag, a hindrance: a perpetual reminder of her husband and her age."⁴² Yet the fact that this is not the isolated behaviour of a bored middle class housewife, but typical of her sex, is made clear in the way Barke parallels it with an incident involving a working class woman. Some men sitting on the side of the Clyde witness a scene on the opposite bank:

"A woman with a child in her arms was lying in the grass making love and being made love to by a man. Presently she laid the infant aside.

The encounter was not unduly prolonged. Soon the man was sitting up and lighting a cigarette. Then he rose hurriedly and walked away: leaving the woman to nurse the child It was a scene lacking in all the decencies of human life: especially the thrusting aside of the child."

43

⁴¹Major Operation op. cit. p.35.

⁴²Ibid. p.36.

⁴³Ibid. p.33-34.

Having no ramifications as far as the plot is concerned this incident is patently symbolic. Barke's treatment is crude and lacking in art, but his attitude is in no doubt.

Published in the same year as Major Operation - 1935 - George Blake's The Shipbuilders, as far as the role of women is concerned, is the most important novel in the Glasgow tradition. Several things are involved. However much the work of Blake's contemporaries might owe to their immediate society they were in fact tapping and emphasising what was a long continuing undercurrent of feeling. In The Shipbuilders this boiled over into its fullest expression. This is not to say that Blake provided an artistic, or imaginative, working of the theme, but that his is the sharpest and most determined query about the status of women. (This is even taking Lucy Flockhart into consideration.) Unlike all the others it has implications which force us out of the Glasgow tradition to a view of other Scottish fiction.

Blake's position is unmistakeable. The wives of both worker Danny Shields and businessman Leslie Pagan betray the values and aspirations of their husbands. Neither of them understand the traditions of craftsmanship cherished by the men, or their love for the city. Blanche Pagan thinks only of escape. "He knew that the end of Pagan's or the end of his connections with it would naturally and inevitably delight her. Farewell to dirty Clydeside,

to drab unpolished Glasgow."⁴⁴ In the end she gets her way and drags Pagan to a soft useless life in Southern England. Similarly Danny's wife and sister-in-law become identified with a new shabby order which is supplanting the pride and achievement of old Scotland. Like Barke's Mrs. Anderson their horizons are bounded by cheap tawdry images of Hollywood. It is a fast living, hollow, worthless world which reduces Agnes Shields to little more than a third rate 'flapper". The lure of false glitter proves too strong and she deserts Danny. The latter however is not to be left alone to continue what amounts to a crusade for Scottish industrial skill, for Blake pairs him off with Jess Stirling, the widow of an old friend and the only admirable female character in the book. This is important, for Jess, loyal, uncomplaining, and steady, is not the normal city woman. The description of her home is one of the most crucial passages in the genre and has far reaching implications. She lives in a yard that is off the main thoroughfares.

"It was a veritable hamlet in the heart of Glasgow a nook in which primitive and unexpected avocations were busily pursued. It smelt of the country, of base feeding, coarse-mannered animals. Its buildings were whitewashed. It seemed to defy the city that had grown about it...."

45

Jess then has rural associations. This becomes all the more significant when we remember that Blake's

⁴⁴Blake, George. The Shipbuilders 1935 p.8.

⁴⁵Ibid. p.32.

general philosophy does not involve a romantic notion of the countryside, but glorifies the opposite - the city and industrial virtue. It is specifically where women are concerned that the pre-industrial world is invoked. This assumes a distinctly Scottish importance when we realise that other Scottish novels complement this vision. The great female figures of Scottish fiction - Chris Guthrie and Jeannie Deans - are intimately connected with the land and with an older Scotland. They are 'whole' women, symbols of regeneration, and of the essence of Scotland, and could not have been conceived in an industrial setting. Jeannie cannot tell a lie - many of the typical women of the city do little else. Chris has all the female qualities of character and mind. What matters to her are human relationships and the life of the land, not abstract theories or the affairs of a wider, remote, society. Yet, whereas this is a defect in urban women, in her it is a positive quality. It is natural and right. It is also a measure of how much women with their procreative function have an affinity with the country rather than the city. Chris is very much a pre-industrial woman. When the First World War comes she sees it as no concern of hers, the important things are at home.

"Chris didn't care sitting there at Blawearie with young Ewan at her breast, her man beside her, Blawearie was theirs and the grain a fine price, forbye that the stirks sold well in the marts. Maybe there was war and bloodshed and that was awful but far off also" 46

⁴⁶Gibbon, Lewis Grassie. Sunset Song 1932 p.195.

Her desire that Ewan stay at home is exactly the opposite to Norah's in The Dance Of The Apprentices. The healthy attitudes then are with the women of the country, not the rootless redundant females of the city.

Glasgow has not thrown up any women characters immediately comparable to Chris or Jeannie Deans, either as living portraits, or in moral and symbolic stature. We do find however three figures seen in much the same terms although only successful on a minor level. In Robin Jenkins' Guests Of War we meet Bel McShelvie, a slum housewife whom the author paints as a remarkable character, a tower of strength, compassion, and understanding, who proves a help and inspiration to her fellow slum dwellers. She is completely unbroken by her circumstances. Yet it is important to note that her strength comes not from the city but the country. It was there she was born and lived out her childhood, and it is there she returns in the course of the novel to get a breath of air to sustain her in the city for the next twenty years. The book opens with these words: "At the mouth of her close, dreaming of buttercupped meadows and green hills, Mrs. McShelvie watched" ⁴⁷ And it ends with her cleansed and renewed, and prepared to go back and face the slums, after a painful climb of Brack Fell in which she takes something from her surroundings:

⁴⁷Jenkins, Robin. Guests Of War 1956 p.7.

"Even before she had left the road, all these inward anxieties, self-accusations, scruples, and forebodings, had begun as usual to be made appear less sinister and formidable simply by contact with such outward things as rocks, trees, dykes, and even the wobbling gate she had to climb over to reach the path which, her map indicated, would lead her to the shoulder of the mountain. All these inanimate things when she laid her hand upon them, appeared to have some quality of endurance and confidence which they drew like sap from the earth, and which they were able in some way to communicate to her."⁴⁸

Moira Burgess admired the portrait of Jenkins' heroine, and in her The Day Before Tomorrow (1971) we find an attempt at creating a similar figure. This is a poor novel which never evokes the life of the decaying Glasgow community on which it focuses. It is superficial and at times badly overwritten. The only character with any life is significantly Mrs. Sheehan who, like Bel McShelvie, grew up outside the city. She "had been a country child. She had learned to walk stotting about among the legs of the big soft cows while her father mucked and milked. On the hill behind the farm cottage, in the long sweet summer days, her bare feet had browned and toughened as they sank into bog-myrtle or skilled over ... turf."⁴⁹ She becomes obsessed with the idea of moving back to the country and tries to win, by betting, enough money to buy a cottage. She is almost successful, but a friend fails to back a horse for her at a crucial time and her hopes are dashed. We see then her inner strength and

⁴⁸Ibid. p.283.

⁴⁹Burgess, Moira. The Day Before Tomorrow 1971 p.29.

resilience in the way she takes her disappointment with dignity and resignation, and in her refusal to blame the culprit. Yet Burgess is not completely successful even here. It is obvious what kind of character Mrs. Sheehan is - the author's conception is clear - but she fails to bring a full artistic expression to her portrait and her heroine remains only three quarters realised.

In Dot Allan's The Deans, a less substantial novel, we meet the figure of Mrs. Dean, who in her own way complements the theme we have been following. She is a strong character, but a dubious one; and her dubiety is a direct result of her existing in a modern (or at any rate Edwardian) city. Her husband is weak and unable properly to support his family, and the role of provider falls largely on her shoulders. She does this very well, ostensibly working as a seamstress, and saves enough money to set her son up in business. However what we find is that she is able to assume this male role successfully only through a perversion of normal morality. It transpires that her earnings really come from allowing a room in the tenement flat to be used for prostitution when the rest of the family are out during the day. Women, the author suggests, are not comfortable in what is really a man's role. Indeed there is an element of economic truth in the novel's situation for the urban world of the time in which it is set just did not provide women with the opportunities to make much money in conventional enterprise.

This chapter then, has set out to demonstrate that

there is a very definite way in which the fiction produced by, for, and about women, as seen in Glasgow examples responds to urban and industrial development. It is something which affects all classes - though differently. As is usual social trends take a long time to express themselves in literature and do so at a very diluted level, yet their influence is undeniably there. Women writers have shunned an industrial society, which gave them only a dubious status, for a comfortable world of romance and domesticity, and at times expressed grievances about the role which their lack of status involved. Male writers also felt that women did not exist comfortably in the new world, and reacted with suspicion. That this was specifically an urban characteristic is made clear by the country connection we find in Blake and Jenkins.

From a perspective given on the novel through looking at it from the point of view of sex we will now examine it with reference to age i.e. the mark made on the genre by the apprehension of childhood.

CHAPTER NINE

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

CHAPTER NINE

CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Nothing demonstrates more clearly the strong autobiographical element in the novelist's art than those books which feature children in prominent roles. The reason is obvious, for the writer's memories of his early years (like anyone else's), whether nostalgic or painful, are generally vivid. Experiences are often more deeply felt at this time than at any other, impressions more striking and lasting. While much of the material thrown up by these years finds its way into the novel only indirectly, in the cast of certain characters or incidents, there have been a remarkable number of fine works in English from Dickens to J.D. Salinger dealing in various ways with the states of childhood and adolescence. Indeed it has been almost an obsession. However, while many writers have produced their best books while working in this vein, the mediocre and the bad - as in the general output of literature - outweigh the good. The Glasgow scene here is typical of the wider literary world, indeed something of a microcosm where the differences in quality and approach are represented. The spectrum ranges from drivelling moralising to excellently written books like Robert Watson's Me And Peter; from books which focus on the child as a spectacle to those which take us into the mind of the child to view the world through its eyes. We

find a small core of good novels, a larger group of novels of less merit, though still of reasonable distinction, then an increase in numbers as the writing becomes progressively inferior. Sometimes the child is important as an individual, at others merely as a narrative link, or an example of social conditions. What is significant however is that a large proportion of those novels that rank as the best in the genre feature children as figures of major importance.

The first two, Jet Ford (1880) and City Echoes (1884), are completely without literary merit. As we have seen* they are moral tracts which use their child heroes to demonstrate certain social and religious ideals. What one should also recognise however is that they draw directly on the Victorian tradition of the pathetic child popularised by Dickens. We find a collection of neglected urchins forced to care for themselves in a hostile world. As individuals they are unrealistic, exhibiting qualities of character, and delicacies of feeling, not reasonably compatible with their squalid surroundings, from which the authors wring the maximum sentimentality. The death bed scene is a favourite. The first of the following quotations comes from Jet Ford, the second from City Echoes:

"One afternoon Johnie had seemed brighter than usual, and when Jet had sung the hymn 'There's a Friend for little children beyond the bright blue sky' the little feeble voice had tried to join her. His mother and Jet looked on and listened delightedly. When the hymn was finished

*Above Chapters One and Six.

a smile overspread his face; " a light that never was on land or sea", and stretching out his arms, as if to reach someone, the child spirit passed away to the world¹ unseen."

Secondly:

" "O Jim I'm glad I'm goin' tae dee! - I hear a voice like somebody spakin an saying to me - Sandie dinna fear. Jesus is beside ye." "

He hears singing and sees a 'bonny licht' then:

" "O mither, mither! is that you up there in the licht, tak me up aside ye; what crood o' white an' shining folk is² that wi ye." "

A further example of this appears in David Pae's The Factory Girl (1885) where the street waif Willie not only follows a career similar to Jo in Bleak House, but dies like him:

"Immediately a radiant light beamed from Willie's eyes, and a seraphic smile o'erspread his countenance.

"Peace, peace!" he articulated; then he held out his wasted hand, and said - "Farewell." "³

By coincidence, just at this point angelic music starts to filter in from a nearby chapel.

In situations like this more than anywhere else we see just how derivative these novels are. The overall concept, the sentimental attitude, and even the details are similar to what we find in Dickens. Compare the

¹Gordon. C.M. Jet Ford 1880 p.28.

²Naismith, Alexander. City Echoes 1884 pp.97-8.

³Pae, David. The Factory Girl 1885 p.185.

Glasgow examples with these extracts from respectively
Bleak House and The Old Curiosity Shop:

"Jo my poor fellow!"

"I hear you sir, sir, in the dark, but I'm
a-gropin - a-gropin - let me catch hold
of your hand."

"Jo can you say what I say?"

"I'll say anythink as you say sir, for I
knows it's good."

"OUR FATHER"

"OUR FATHER! Yes, that's very good sir."

"WHICH ART IN HEAVEN."

"Art in heaven - is the light a-comin sir?"

"It is close at hand. HALLOWED BE THY NAME!"

"Hallowed by - thy - "

The light is come upon the dark benighted way.⁴
Dead."

Again just after her death Dickens recalls a comment
of Little Nell. "When I die, put near me something that
has loved the light, and had the sky above it always."⁵

We find a crucial element of religious consolation
common to all, and a persistent playing on the idea of
light. The Scottish writers then, with their pious
children dropping like flies, were working in a wider
tradition with Dickens in particular as their model.
This is not surprising, for not only was he an over-
whelmingly popular success throughout the English speaking

⁴Dickens, Charles. Bleak House 1852 Vol. 2 p.251.

⁵Dickens, Charles. The Old Curiosity Shop 1841 Vol.
2 p.132.

world but he was the foremost novelist of the city at a time when the Scottish scene produced little indigenous writing about urbanisation of any worth. It is regrettable however that the moving spirit should in the latter have become so debased. Only the bad points of Dickens are taken up; the excessive sentimentality, not the breadth of vision, sense of humour, nor powerful social insight.

Yet an essential feature of the moral tracts is that they are optimistic about the prospects of children in this world as well as the next. It is an attitude apparent in their direct descendant - R.W. Campbell - whose depiction of childhood is no better. Jimmy McCallum is no more a credible flesh and blood character than Jet Ford, or Jock, Jim, or Sandie in City Echoes. Despite a genuine concern for their welfare, these writers never really understand children, or are interested in them as individuals. They are objects in need not only of protection, but direction - into the sort of activities of which the conservative adult world approves. The Boy's Brigade provides this in Jimmy McCallum, as do the missions in the earlier works. The characters are idealised and inevitably become one sided and lifeless. Boys do not lie, swear, fight, bully or shoplift, and while sport and playing soldiers are acceptable as healthy and character building, their presentation lacks authenticity because of the excessive enthusiasm with which they are characterised. The Tom Brown's Schooldays tradition sits uneasily in narratives about the Glasgow slums. For example in

Jimmy McCallum the losing team in a Boy's Brigade Cup Final show more joy at their opponents' victory than they could possibly have felt had they won themselves. In Snooker Tam the commitment of the spectators is in the same vein. "A thousand boys burst into rolling cheers."⁶ However, that the kailyard need not rob childhood completely of its credibility is witnessed by the relative success of Wee Macgreegor. Certainly the stories are trivial and at times sentimental but Macgreegor is a realistic personality in a way in which Campbell's scaled down adult clown, Snooker Tam, is not. This results from the fact that Macgreegor has human failings. He can be bad tempered, selfish and rude. He is bored on dignified occasions. He plays truant from Sunday school and spends his collection money on sweets, and he puts in a rare appearance only to be allowed to the annual soiree. On the other hand Jimmy McCallum takes religion and duty too seriously even to consider such conduct. Macgreegor however is the son of an upper working class family, the child of a skilled worker, and enjoys a comfortable and secure home life. Consequently his existence is not as free as some. Bell's portrait is inhibited. Macgreegor is never for long out of the supervision of parents and relatives, and most of his story takes place firmly within the family circle. The communal life of the pavements and back courts so often chronicled in factual memoirs of a

⁶Campbell, Robert W. Snooker Tam Of The Cathcart Railway 1919 p.200.

Glasgow childhood does not intrude.^a The very restriction of his freedom is a comment on his background, for the idea of the home as a haven from the unpleasant aspects of the world is peculiarly urban. There is nothing wrong with the respectable village boy rambling around the countryside, but his city counterpart is naturally more limited because of the closer proximity, and greater concentration, of the unsavoury elements of life. J.J. Bell's outlook and experience is middle class; later generations of Glasgow writers were less retiring however, and the rough and tumble of the average city childhood could be presented.

With his activities circumscribed by the ever present parental eye Macgregor's case is only one example of the tendency at this time with certain types of writers to insist on regimenting children. This was a trait of the right wing - kailyard school, and is not so much a projection of the Victorian adage about children being seen and

^aThese vary in quality and approach. In literary terms Mary Rose Liverani's The Winter Sparrows (1975) is probably the best, followed by Evelyn Cowan's Spring Remembered (1974). Better known however are Cliff Hanley's Dancing In The Streets (1958) and Molly Weir's Shoes Were For Sunday (1970). The latter in particular enjoyed considerable popular success despite the banal style and the inanity of the material. The first two are essentially family stories, the others are more concerned with the general environment and with autobiography. Yet there are great similarities, and overall we find an element of repetitiveness. Everybody seems to think that street games, children's rhymes and the goodness of their respective grandmothers are irresistably interesting. Much of it is little more than a pandering to nostalgia, an ultra parochialism designed to capture the local reader with its familiarity. One salient feature of the books however is that they are invariably cheerful. Childhood is a world away in spirit from the boys scraping about the middens in Prisoners Of Circumstance.

not heard as a mild form of what a century earlier would have been a fear of the mob. It is as if the authors saw something of a potential threat in the spectacle of undisciplined children (particularly when they are working class). Thus once again, in John Buchan's Huntingtower (1922) childhood is wrapped up in an organisational framework, in this case an irregular Boy Scout group. Buchan takes a crowd of boys running wild in the Glasgow slums, gives them the title of The Gorbals Diehards, marches them up and down army fashion, instilling in them a King and Country philosophy, and sets them on the trail of an international network of villains. The result is an incredible hash of romantic nonsense.^b The Diehards are an obnoxious collection of prancing puppets. Can we believe in any child who, in all seriousness, comes out with:

"I must be off to the camp to give out
the orders for the morn. I'm going back
to that Hoose, for its a fight atween the

^bCritical studies of Buchan's works are rare. David Daniell's The Interpreter's House: A critical assessment of John Buchan (1975) does little to aid our understanding. It is a dishonest and insensitive book concerned not with an objective appreciation of the man and his work but with answering those "modern sneers" that Buchan was a racist and a snob. This involves finding profundity and significance in the most banal nonsense. Yet his comments on Huntingtower are worth noting for they express what Buchan himself probably hoped he was doing in the novel. "The genius of Huntingtower is that it defuses all pretension by making the Gorbals lads the winners on their own doorstep. The Diehards lift the book to its true level; it is their individuality, passion, energy and forthright sense, their hymns from the socialist Sunday school and admirable adult skills, all heightened but seen without sentimentality which must finally rescue Buchan from the foolish charge of snobbery." (p.152) It is an exercise of standing truth on its head.

Gorbals Diehards and the scoondrels
that are frightenin' thae women."? ⁷

The whole conception of the boys shows Buchan at his patronising worst. Something similar is present in The Great Trek (1941) by Dominie (Jacob Morrison). This is a school evacuation story, a slight work whose tone is exactly that of Buchan and Campbell. All the characters are wooden, including Andy Merton the boy hero and enthusiastic patriot. It is riddled with episodes of the most revolting sentimentality, as when Andy's beloved ex-teacher returns from the R.A.F. a crippled hero.

Before we move on from those novels that are downright bad mention must be made of A.J. Cronin's A Song Of Sixpence (1964). This book, set in the Edwardian era, recounts the childhood of Laurie Carroll, including his move from a small country village to the city of Winton (Glasgow). It is very much in the usual Cronin formula. Laurie for example is a lad o' pairts who at the end of the book wins against the odds a scholarship to the University. There is also the usual medical accuracy - in this case apparent in the description of the death of the boy's father. And we also find the statutory nervous breakdown.^c The approach is as insipid as ever, descriptions are full of padding and there is a persistent strain of sentimentality. It must be allowed

⁷Buchan, John. Huntingtower 1922 p70

^cCronin persistently puts his heroes through periods of hectic activity which are climaxed by a nervous breakdown. Then comes a long, pleasant convalescence that leads to a happy ending e.g. see Shannon's Way and The Citadel.

that this last feature springs from the personality of the boy. "Marked by my singular childhood, by an upbringing in which too many women had participated, I was, and always would be the victim of every sentient mood, the unwilling slave of my own emotions."⁸ But it is not well handled. We are never shown satisfactorily how the company of women actually affects his development, nor does the author attempt to distance the sentimentality so that we can see how relatively unnatural the hero's cast of mind is. As an evocation of childhood the book is lacking because there is no sense of the boy growing up. Laurie tells his own story from about the age of five to age of sixteen, but Cronin fails to establish any real differences over the years in outlook, understanding, or experience.

The above novels are bad not only as pictures of childhood but as novels. A common factor in all however is that children are used as chessmen in a plotted story, manufactured to the requirements of the narrative. The autobiographical element is of minor or negligible importance, and authenticity consequently diminishes. Conversely many of the best books have recognised affinities with the real lives of their authors. In Justice Of The Peace for example, the experiences of Martin Moir are in many ways identical to Niven's own as a boy and a youth in a Glasgow warehouse. Watson's Me And Peter

⁸Cronin, A.J. A Song Of Sixpence 1964 p.272.

is little more than reminiscence. Other books are not all that different from what we find in the factual accounts of a Glasgow upbringing. The best treatments of childhood are to be found in Me And Peter, Justice Of The Peace, John Lavin's The Compass Of Youth, Hanley's A Taste Of Too Much and in the novels of George Friel. Nevertheless there are several books of lesser distinction which are tolerably well written. We have seen in an earlier chapter how Robin Jenkins fails to convince with his boys in The Changeling and Guests Of War. Both Tom Curdie and Gordon Aldersyde are too scheming for their years. Yet the books succeed in other ways. Guests of War gives us some fine character portraits among the women evacuees, and as long as we suspend our disbelief at some of Tom's behaviour The Changeling stands as an intriguing study of the corruption of relationships. A very different type of book from either of these however is J.F. Hendry's Fernie Brae (1947), which represents one of the few attempts in the Glasgow genre to move away from the traditional form of the novel into something more modern. Hendry adopts a Joycean approach - albeit a shoddy and unsuccessful one - trying to present the world in the child's terms in the manner of Portrait Of The Artist. We do get a picture of the hero growing up through the changes in the way he reacts to life. At first it is the physical to which he responds, to the shape of objects, to colours and sounds. Later on the intellect comes into play and he starts to question things, and we see him for example muse on the meaning of Hell. But Hendry's skill

is just not good enough to work this artistically. He is heavy handed and fails to select properly which details are most significant, and the wonder of childhood which he tries to capture remains elusive. This is a serious flaw, for the whole basis of the book is its impressionistic style. There is no plot, nor can the structure even be said to be episodic, for we move not from one distinct event to another but through a series of apparently random observations. It is an approach which becomes pretentious and lends itself to pseudo-lyricism. Take for example the boy's thoughts when he sees the maps in his grandfather's library.

"Continents and years unfolded like a map below. Somehow the garden was one of these continents. His grandfather was Nansen in the Arctic, with frozen eyes and beard, the year's hero. And he David was the fire and sun through the trees in the orchard, the butterfly winging towards he knew not what. Seas of Silence? Chill ice-caps? He was unafraid, for Nansen had gone there before him and now his grandfather too⁹ was there. What did it all mean?"

We may well ask. It is difficult to relate this passage, especially parts like "David was the fire and sun through the trees", with the consciousness of a young boy. The book improves as it progresses however; Hendry is competent when he reaches the hero's adolescence. While it is the personality of this particular boy which matters, rather than the environment or childhood in general (the technique determines this), for all that the

⁹Hendry, J.F. Fernie Brae 1947 p.12.

hero never becomes in any way distinct. Hendry's imprecise language keeps him hazy.

W.C. Tait's The Wise Thrush (1937) is less consciously serious than Fernie Brae. The style is direct, simple, and capable, and the story convincingly told, at least till the boy has grown up when it starts to degenerate into melodrama. Like Hendry, Tait establishes changes in his hero with the passage of time, although much more precisely. What we see is a character's environment hardening and dulling him as he reacts to the influences of commercialism and religious extremism. Pastor Bruton for example - a money grabbing hypocrite - assumes a gradually more dominating role in the boy's life. The author pins the boy down at different stages in his development showing definite changes between them. We see slices of his life when he is six, fourteen and seventeen years of age. At six he relishes the world around him.

"Peter listened, his small body thrilling to a strange feeling of isolation. He seemed to stand shut off from all the world, alone in the centre of a tingling peace The tingling of the hot water on his cool hand was delicious." 10

However, "at fourteen he knew that life consisted of earning a living. That it might consist of anything else, he had yet to find out."¹¹ By now he is more repressed, no longer rejoicing in the sunlight and refusing to find pleasure in the theatre. By the time he is seventeen

¹⁰Tait, W.C. The Wise Thrush 1937 pp.1-4.

¹¹Ibid. p.11.

this trend has intensified. He is working as an iron-monger and money lender and is only interested in his work. "Book keeping (was) a joy to him The dreaming boy was smothered by his inherited delight in an arid accuracy."¹² Even girls, which at fourteen did hold some attraction, are now of no interest. The giggling ones in his night class pass unnoticed; his studies only concern him. All in all Tait gives us a successful, sharply drawn account of the growth of an individual.

The same is true of Thomas Muir's The Sea Road (1959), which revolves around the hero's obsession with engineering, and his struggle to satisfy his ambitions in this field against the opposition of his guardian.* The tensions between Gavin and his relations, the freshness of the writing, and the uncomplicated nature of the problem, make The Sea Road not only one of the most readable novels in the genre but a memorable picture of childhood. The protagonists are purely external; the traumas of growing up and the strain of personal development are not issues, and the book gives us a plot that works itself out in a satisfactory resolution. Gavin becomes an engineer.

If Muir is concerned with the movement of events around a personality which remains static, the same is not true of two other relatively recent novels, Cliff Hanley's The Taste Of Too Much (1960) and Chaim Bermant's Jericho Sleep Alone (1964). The central situation is the

¹²Ibid. p.57.

*Above Chapters One and Six.

same in both. They focus on adolescents in their last years at school - prior to going to University - and their worries, self doubts, and troubled relationships. Nothing very dramatic happens to either of the heroes, but each in his own way has to contend with problems faced by nearly everyone at this period of their life. Girls are a constant source of puzzlement and embarrassment, a challenge to their courage and self confidence. Exams pose the usual threat. Both writers understand well the moods of adolescence, the tendency to take things too seriously, to get troubles out of proportion, and both handle their material with honesty and sensitivity. Yet their subjects are not identical. Hanley's Peter Haddow is an ordinary Glasgow teenager, while for Bemant's Jerry Broch life is complicated by consciousness of his being a Jew. The worlds they move in are different. Peter's is working class, Jerry's middle class and very Jewish. Much of the latter's uncertainty stems from this environment. In her autobiography Evelyn Cowan notes the changing circumstances of Glasgow's Jewish population:

"In the 1929-30s Era the Jewish people who lived in the Gorbals of Glasgow were a tight little community. Very few of us lived outside that district. We had our synagogues, our own meeting places, dance halls, and especially our own type of food-shops. Congregating exclusively with our own kind we hardly knew any Christian people. But in the early 1930s the drift began. And thirty years before its physical destruction, the soul of the old Gorbals was flitting southwards towards suburbia. Small splinter communities sprang up everywhere. After losing its branches the old parochial tree gradually shrivelled up." 13

¹³Cowan, Evelyn. Spring Remembered 1974 p.99.

It is this new middle class world that Jerry inhabits. In its own way it is as insular as the old one in the Gorbals, and Jerry, while aware of this, can see no satisfactory alternative. His dilemma is the eternal Jewish uncertainty about where they consider their home. Here it is brought into focus by one of his friends:

" "There is only one place on earth in which a Jew can be safe and that is the Jewish homeland. We, us, our generation must build up the state"

Some years later, when he finished his studies, he went out to Israel, but he found the weather hot, and after a few months he returned and set up business as a salesman in mattress stuffing." 14

What then is Jerry's answer? Several present themselves - England, Israel, University - but ultimately his questions of identity, of his place in the world, resolve themselves in an embrace of Glasgow, in a recognition that the physical environment of that city is essential to him. In the process of self discovery, however, he makes a point of singular interest for he realises a commitment to the urban world that is far greater than that of the ordinary city dweller. It is a characteristic of his race. He is strengthened in this view while working on a training Kibbutz in England.

"I was coming to doubt whether the kibbutz itself was such a good thing They had lost all their ability to straighten their

¹⁴Bermant, Chaim. Jericho Sleep Alone 1964 p.45.

backs and look about them and suffered all the hardships of farming life without tasting any of its pleasures They were Jews, and Jews are urban whether they live in the town or the country."¹⁵

Jerry then may be more comfortable in a Scottish city than any Scot.

The best feature of The Taste Of Too Much is Hanley's presentation of the father-son relationship. Despite a genuine affection for one another their friendship founders on the rocks of mutual irritation and misunderstanding, at the core of which lies not only differences in age but more importantly in education. It is a gulf always apparent in their day to day life, but we see it dramatised with admirable authenticity in a scene after Peter's French exam.

"His father was on an early shift, and before he went up the street for a pint at five o'clock he expected Peter to be home with a full report, although Peter knew it would mean practically nothing. It was a matter of filial duty stretched to twanging.

'Did you know all the words?' he would ask for example, and a shrug or a simple yes was not enough of an answer. He insisted on knowing the details with a pathetic determination to share the whole experience.

'There was one word 'ETANG'' Peter offered. 'I put it down as river and it means a pond.'

'For heaven's sake!' Samuel was disgusted. 'Anybody knows the difference between a river and a pond. You should have KNOWN that. You haven't been sticking in at your

¹⁵Ibid. pp.101-2.

homework, that's your trouble.'

'Nobody else knew it either' Peter explained 'Except one girl. There's some things you have to guess. Davie had it as a mine shaft.'

Samuel hooted with unnecessary loudness in relief that somebody had guessed 16 worse than Peter."

The tone here is typical of the book as a whole, low key, yet honest and perceptive.

By this stage we are dealing with above average novels but as we move into those of the first rank in the genre we find that only Watson's Me And Peter has the same appeal to the commonplace as The Taste Of Too Much. Moreover, while childhood in the others is again central, its depiction is less an end in itself than the focal point for some other concern of the writer, although this is not to say that they become puppets as in the moral tracts. Justice Of The Peace examines family relationships, the impulse of the artist, and the peculiarities of human nature. John Lavin's The Compass Of Youth builds a whole fascinating world around its young hero, while Friel uses his children as actors in moral and political allegories. The latter's novels have been dealt with extensively elsewhere,* and it is sufficient to note as a measure of his achievement that despite the wider significance which hangs on them his heroes in The Bank Of Time and The Boy Who Wanted Peace remain completely credible and convincing.

¹⁶Hanley, Clifford. The Taste Of Too Much 1960 p.119.

*See above Chapter Six.

He never falls on his face in the way Jenkins does in The Changeling, because his boys always act not only completely in character, but in a recognisably realistic manner. This includes the peculiar Percy in The Boy Who Wanted Peace whose behaviour is made more acceptable by the humour with which Friel approaches him. The gang battles in the back courts in the earlier novel, whatever their deeper meaning, are faithful in every way to the ordinary observable behaviour of the children of this environment. Friel interprets what actually IS, rather than mould life to express his theories.

There is a suggestion in The Compass Of Youth that the author intended like Friel to draw from his local situation something of universal significance. In this case however it is not the world of the boy, but a whole community, adults and all, that provides his subject matter. At the age of five, with his mother dead and his father disappeared, Peter goes to live in his aunt's house in the East End of Glasgow. Here he will spend the rest of his childhood. His new home is in a closed world centred on an old square.

"The Square as it was officially called, but known for miles around as Hell Square comprised three uneven buildings linked by decrepit thatched cottages and a stray washhouse, grouped round the disused fountain which taxed the memory of the oldest citizens to recall when water was drawn from it." 17

¹⁷Lavin, John. The Compass Of Youth 1953 p.14.

It is an insular environment, like a village complete in itself, and is conceived as something ^of a microcosm. Most of the buildings have some kind of symbolic function; one for example is known as "The House Of Lords." Yet any attempt at a deeper interpretation of the novel based on these hints can at best be only very tenuous, for Lavin never satisfactorily develops this aspect. Indeed The Compass Of Youth is essentially insubstantial although paradoxically it remains a memorable book. This is not because of the plot, which is slight, consisting of snatches of incident, rather than a continuous thread, but because of the characterisation, and the sheer colour, variety, and vitality of life in The Square. The hero is of little consequence in himself, his role being to mirror his environment, but he presents us with a number of fine character studies. Foremost among these is The Professor, a down-at-heel and eccentric failed writer, who occupies a special place in the little community as a thinker, mystic, and prophet of doom. His "apocalyptic thunderings" amuse adults and frighten children, but he becomes a firm friend of Peter's, lending him books, encouraging him to read and helping him find an unexpected richness in life. Peter's other idol is his Uncle Terry, a friendly Irishman, who in a gripping fight scene gives the local drunken bully a much deserved come-uppance. Beside them stand a mixed collection of other figures — gossips, whores, a blind footballer — who together make up a cross section of humanity at large. There is a feeling in the book that this selection is meant to tie

up with Lavin's concern with creating a microcosm, but this is again vague and inexplicit. It should also be noted however that the novel is tinged by that recurring compulsion among Glasgow writers to pander to nostalgia whenever they deal with childhood, and there is a strain of Molly Weir-Cliff Hanley type reminiscence evident. It is set in the Edwardian era and the hero recalls some of the pastimes of himself and his friends. At the fair:

"A halfpenny was the standard price of most attractions and at certain sideshows the proprietors actually accepted jam jars, beer bottles, in fact all kinds of bottles except sauce bottles in lieu of cash. We engaged in bottle hunts ¹⁸ during the day

Nevertheless The Compass Of Youth asserts itself as a novel of lasting interest.

In the Preface to Me And Peter the author confesses that he penned the book while living in the Gulf of Mexico, and it has the feel of a man looking back on his boyhood over time and distance. But it is nostalgia of a different kind from that already mentioned. The patronising note is absent. Moreover it is so much better expressed. Instead of presenting undigested reminiscence Watson interests the reader by firing it with incident. Thus his pastimes are shown not just as items in a catalogue of what he used to do as a boy, but

¹⁸Ibid. p.76.

as the causes of particular episodes. Everything has a story to it. This has consequences for the structure of the novel. It is anecdotal in form, a collection of self contained and separate incidents. While we do get the sense of the hero growing up - as he moves from the bumbings of a small child through the pranks of a boy, to his first attempt at getting paid employment - it is these tales that really matter. To illustrate this feature it is worth quoting one of the shorter examples.

"In the hope of arousing spiritually the lethargy of the community, the elder of our little church engaged the services of a revivalist for a three weeks campaign. This evangelist was an earnest, God-fearing young man, with a large hook nose, a wild shock of hair and a voice like a thousand trumpets. His name was Harrison. He had a way of shooting truths at you that made you feel in two minutes that you were the vilest sinner on earth and that hell was too good a place for you.

Meetings were held every evening and packed to the door. Peter and I, although we were no more than twelve years old at that time, were given peremptory parental orders that we were to attend every service. On the first night, in the first few minutes of the meeting, I felt instinctively drawn to this raw-boned revivalist, and before he was halfway through with his address, I was crying like to break my heart. I felt guilty of every crime on and off the calendar, and became more than anxious to escape with all possible speed from "the wrath to come", which I knew was in my wake. So, when the call was made for volunteers to the penitent form, I struggled out to it along with old men and young women, and a goodly number of kids like myself, who were almost frightened to death. We weren't worrying ourselves about the delights of heaven; it was hell that was bothering us.

That Peter was perturbed at the turn of

events is to put it mildly. He was waiting for me at the outer door, but I passed on with my eyes on the ground, for I was still wondering at the strange fizzing sensation that was going on in my internals. I had not yet decided whether it would be right or wrong for me to have anything more to do with so wicked and hardened a sinner as Peter, knowing him as I did.

He came after me and caught hold of my jacket.

"Are ye no' goin' to speak to me ony mair?" he asked, with concern.

"I'm no' right sure yet," I answered, like the silly little idiot I was.

"If that's the way o' it," he cried, "then by jings! I'll get converted mysel' the morn's nicht."

And sure enough he did. But, what was more to the point, he was truly penitent for his fearful past and became so enthused in his new role that he outstripped me completely and made me appear a greater 19 sinner in comparison, than ever."

The author cannot be faulted for his style which is simple and straightforward, and mixed with his sharp insight it produces writing which is fresh and charming. While the novel is overwhelmingly cheerful, and much of it very funny, Watson does not wear rose coloured spectacles. The bad appears as well as the good. Sickness, death, and poverty are shown, although he does not allow the gloomier side to darken the overall joy of the book. He can also be angry, as when he remembers how a farmer persuaded him to work a whole day for a penny - then refused to pay. Watson's eye takes in the rural as well

as the urban world for his setting is on the fringe of the city, in Pollokshaws at the turn of the century.^d The honesty of his attitude is in direct contrast to the kailyard:

"I do not believe much in the stories I hear of harvesters singing in the fields, of the merry laughter and the joyous shouts. I never heard any of them. What I heard was a few swear words and a grunt here and growl there, but for the most part it was all drab silence."²⁰

Me And Peter is comparable to Tom Sawyer in its timeless appeal. There is the same zest, the same high spirits and natural irreverence, manifesting themselves in a dislike of churchgoing and moral tales . . . It has a wealth of entertainment for children and adults alike, and it is surprising that many of the pieces have not found their way into school anthologies and the like.

Most of our children so far have been working class figures whose existence has often been dominated by some kind of communal life. In Justice Of The Peace however we find in Martin Moir a different type of phenomenon, the son of a wealthy late Victorian family. Adolescence for Martin involves rebellion against the belief of his conventional parents that trade must take precedence over art, and that his future lies in going into his father's business. The opposition of his father dissolves when Martin shows not only a courageous

^dPollokshaws was an independent burgh till 1911, although it has long since been absorbed into the boundaries of a spreading Glasgow.

²⁰Me And Peter op. cit. p.127.

determination to be an artist but a genuine talent. His mother however refuses to forgive him, and her meanness of spirit, which develops into an irrational hatred for Martin's way of life, causes lasting scars on the boy's personality. Niven's working out of the complex emotional background of Martin's adolescence, his bewilderment at maternal rejection jostling with his obsession with the vision of himself as an artist, his discontent with his work in his father's warehouse, yet his guilt at the thought of letting him down, is one of the best things in the Glasgow genre. His handling of emotion and personality is excellent. Martin is living and memorable.*

When we look then at the treatment of childhood in the Glasgow novel we are confronted by a patchy scene that ranges from turgid moralising to the authentic and sensitive portraits of the better writers in the tradition. What also emerges is that childhood is a particularly rewarding subject for the novelist, and we find several examples. Of that small group of really good novels thrown up by the city only St. Mungo's City has no substantial debt to childhood or adolescence. Moreover the reader is aware of qualitative differences within individual novels. The first part of The Wise Thrush for example, about the hero's childhood is a fine piece of writing, but the later stages dealing with his wife's treachery and subsequent death are mere melodrama. Even Justice Of The Peace is flawed. The

*See below Chapter Twelve.

adult life of Martin Moir is sketchier than his adolescence, and as the book progresses it becomes somewhat repetitive as Niven marks time till he reaches the tragic climax by overdoing his denunciations of the group of bigoted ladies patronised by Mrs. Moir. J.J. Bell's adult Macgregor whom we meet in Wee Macgregor Enlists (1914) bears no relation to the child of the earlier stories. The spark has gone leaving the hero a lifeless failure.

There is an important way in which childhood can be of special use to the writer who wants to present a critique of society. For the fresh vision of the child, like that of the foreigner, can be used to highlight aspects of the environment which the adult, through familiarity, takes for granted. For example the youngster's initiation into the realities of an urban world can allow the author to question, and deal at length with topics, under the pretence of satisfying the child's natural curiosity, that in different circumstances would read as mere indulgence. The advantages for the protest writer, who is also conscious of his art, are obvious. Unfortunately however the Glasgow writer has failed to take any significant advantage of this, and there exists no city version of the type of analysis of the small urban community found in Gordon Williams' From Scenes Like These.

CHAPTER TEN

THE HISTORICAL NOVEL IN GLASGOW

CHAPTER TENTHE HISTORICAL NOVEL IN GLASGOW

As historical fiction has long been a staple of Scottish literature it is not surprising to find a number of Glasgow examples. In approaching them we face the kind of questions which the form usually poses. How far back from the date of writing for example, must a work be set to place it in the historical class? Any dividing line is necessarily arbitrary but I have taken a period of roughly two generations since this will generally involve the writer in an attitude to the past which differs from his apprehension of the present; he will be dealing with an age that is not (in most cases) his own. Equally important is that the author should consciously see himself as writing about a different era, however superficial his differentiation may be. Thus a novel like The Sea Road (1959), although it starts in late Victorian times cannot be seen as historical, since its dating is essentially arbitrary and it has no sense of period. I have not been governed however by considerations such as Avrom Fleishman expresses in The English Historical Novel (1971), where he demands the presence of real historical figures:

"It is necessary to include at least one such figure in a novel if it is to qualify as historical The historical novel is distinguished among novels by a specific link to history: not merely a real building or a real event but a real person¹ among the fictitious ones."

This is an unjustifiable condition.

What I will indicate is a distinction between a historical novel and a historical romance. It is a meaningful one, for it helps us understand how the Glasgow novel has dealt with the city's past. The latter is essentially contemporary drama played out in period costume. Real personages and events may well appear but there is no sense of historical forces which bear the character of their age, acting on, and expressed in, individuals. This is a quality of the historical novel proper. As Scott said about the action of Waverley it depended on actions which "necessarily arose from the feelings and prejudices, and parties of the time."² In Glasgow terms John Quigley's King's Royal and M.T. Davis's The Prince And The Tobacco Lords illustrate the difference. Both feature prominent boy meets girl elements which do not end happily, but the respective circumstances are crucially different. When Davis' Annabella Ramsey runs off with a French officer she is showing how wayward girls of any era behave. The affair ends when her lover dies in battle. It is a tale which could be told in any

¹Fleishman, Avrom. The English Historical Novel 1971 pp.3-4.

²Scott, Walter. Waverley 1815 - Preface.

setting. In King's Royal however the romance of Robert King and Mary Devine is destroyed by pressures peculiar to the age in which it is set. Their dilemma springs both from the anti-Catholic bigotry of Victorian Glasgow, and from the spirit of materialism which characterised the age. This finds form in King's ruthless ambition, a ruthlessness which acknowledges the incompatibility of his hopes in business with his love for Mary. His ambition inevitably wins and the couple are wrenched apart. As the action of Quigley's book is specifically linked with the character of the Victorian era it can be seen as a historical novel when The Prince And The Tobacco Lords cannot. This is not to suggest however that King's Royal is in any way exceptional as a book. It is capably written but no more, and though admittedly considerably superior to anything Davis has produced, it is Quigley's attitude to the past rather than his technical accomplishments which furnish the essential difference. Again, the impression should not be given that it is a case of calling good fiction historical novels and bad fiction historical romance. It may well appear like this because as far as the Glasgow novel is concerned the worst stuff tends to fall into the latter category. This however is only partly due to the intrinsic nature of the romance as a form and perhaps more important is the fact that so many romances are the product of the female pen. History is essentially a record of public life and of social and economic forces on a grand scale. But, as argued in a previous chapter,

women seem often to be constitutionally disinclined to confront life outwith a narrow range of personal and domestic matters. When they do they are not usually successful. It is not unreasonable to suggest that no woman could have written the Waverley Novels. What we find then is that the Glasgow tradition has thrown up a very few works which, within our terms, can be seen as historical novels proper. There is a larger number of what are simply historical romances, and there also exists a body of writing which lies somewhere in between. While these kinds of distinction are in a sense artificial, since there is often little to choose between examples of the three groups, they are justified by essential differences in their inspiration.

The theme of Kings Royal (1975) is materialism and the drive for success. It is played out against a background of the Victorian whisky trade. The theme and the period are crucial, for what we find is that all the novels about Glasgow's history which have a genuine spark in them, and a sense of understanding their world at a level more than the superficial, are similarly set in the late nineteenth century and focus on ambition of some kind. Besides Kings Royal there are Guy McCrone's Wax Fruit, George Woden's Mungo, and Mary Cleland's The Sure Traveller. There are good reasons for this. In Chapter One above, we saw how ambition and success have been a prime concern for the Glasgow writer throughout the genre. It is something deeply rooted in the Glasgow experience. When writers of this century wrote then,

about the past, they wrote about a world which moulded their own, and which harboured social forces whose influence had not yet passed. They felt themselves directly connected with the past, and could dramatise it effectively because enough of it still existed in the present. Conversely, this is why C.S. Black's Peter Meiklejohn (1925) for example is a wooden failure. There is no meaningful link between its setting of sixteenth century Glasgow and Black's contemporary world. At this point it is worth referring to Georg Lukacs' The Historical Novel for it argues a theory of historical fiction that exactly fits the facts as we find them in the Glasgow tradition:

"Without a felt relationship to the present a portrayal of history is impossible this does not consist in alluding to contemporary events but in bringing the past to life as the prehistory of the present, in giving poetic life to those historical, social and human forces which in the course of a long evolution have made our present day life what it is and as we experience it." 3

This is what the books I have named do; they bring to life the materialism and ambition of the age that gave birth to our own.

Perhaps the most interesting of these novels is King's Royal. It is Quigley's third Glasgow work, and is considerably more mature than The Bitter Lollipop (1964) or The Golden Stream (1970). Its dynamism stems from

³Lukacs, Georg. The Historical Novel 1962 p.53.

two things: the portrayal of the tensions between self-made businessman Fergus King and his son Robert, and the skilful handling of the story of the old time whisky industry. King is an archetypal figure of the Victorian era, a man who has made a fortune entirely by his own efforts and who now craves respectability and honour. Robert's only concern is business success on any terms, and a clash is inevitable. This is fought out in their business and personal lives. Quigley's precise feeling for the ethos of the time and how it affects individuals ensures that his principal characters are consistently credible and convincing. Much of the novel's appeal is undoubtedly the background of the whisky trade which Quigley, himself a director of a whisky firm, knows in detail. In The Golden Stream he gave us an account of the post-war boom in the industry; in this novel he goes back to the infancy of the modern industry, and the main strand of the plot is about the struggle to raise whisky from the level of a minority product, and, with the aid of innovations in blending, to place it before a mass market. This is done in the face of vicious opposition from traditional distillers. It is substantially the true story of the industry in the late Victorian era, when the great issue was whether a blend had the right to use the name of whisky at all. The expansion of the Kings' business echoes the upward movement which we noted was a feature of novels like The Beggar's Benison:

"In the first year the turnover had been less than £30,000. This year it should be nearly £200,000. Next year it might touch the half million. The drinking of blended Scotch whisky seemed to be the world's fastest growing habit. For it was no longer just Kings Royal. Others had been quick to see the potential. The door Robert had opened had revealed a treasure so rich that no man or company could hope to monopolize it. Previously in excise warehouses all over Scotland great quantities of whisky hopefully distilled, had collected, no one knowing how to sell it. Blending had been the key and now with the distillers' boycott ending a torrent was ready to pour forth from the glens."⁴

The technical background is no less fascinating, like the tricks blenders used for flavouring or colouring their product.

Yet there are flaws in the book, most noticeably the portrait of Tom Hoey, King's son-in-law. He is a cliché, a dissolute weakling shown with no subtlety. At the end of the novel, having won some medals in the Zulu wars, he gets a measure of redemption that is completely out of character, and which is difficult for the reader to accept.

In Guy McCrone's work ambition is of a less material nature than Robert King's - it is rather the social climbing of his father. Some remarks have already been made about ambition in McCrone's work.* He began his saga of Victorian Glasgow in 1940 with Antimacassar City,

⁴Quigly, John. Kings Royal 1975 p.322.

*See above Chapter One.

which seven years later became the first book of Wax Fruit. (Book 2 was entitled The Philistines and book 3 The Puritans.) Starting in 1870 it chronicles the social and financial fortunes, the births, deaths, and marriages of the Ayrshire Moorhouse family after their removal to Glasgow. Aunt Bel (1949) picks the story up in 1892 and The Hayburn Family (1952) continues it for a year from 1900. There is a perceptible decrease in quality as the series progresses which is not entirely inexplicable. The first two books of Wax Fruit are noticeably the best and the purest examples of what McCrone seems to have conceived his saga to be - novels of manners. Much of it is undeniably trivial, like Bel's annoyance at her mother's table manners, "pouring her tea into her saucer and sitting complacently with both elbows on the parlour table, holding up the tea and blowing upon it."⁵ Yet we do get a vivid picture of the self conscious, over-zealous pursuit of the mixture of fashion and respectability, that characterised the nouveau riche as they tried to break into established society. "Bel at this stage was very much of the social caste that allows itself to be ruled by the nameless critic lurking behind the neighbouring lace window curtains."⁶ At times it is genuinely funny, at others merely irritating in its pettiness. Yet the energy, the drive to get on, is always there. There are also certain memorable scenes that exhibit a more basic

⁵ McCrone, Guy. Wax Fruit 1947 p.51.

⁶ Ibid. p.57.

descriptive power. When Phoebe for example goes into the terrible Glasgow slums alone, to bring back her lost nephew, or the clear winter's night on which her parents die in an accident:

"Why were the dogs whining?

It was Doon and Nith that were making the noise. Clyde who was the oldest and most attached to her father, must have trotted off after the trap when her mother and he had driven off this evening.

The strong moon, coming through the skylight, made a dazzling oblong on the wall opposite the little girl's bed. Although she herself lay snug the attic room was so cold that she could see her breath when she puffed in the direction of the beam of light. "Haud yer tongue, Doon! Keep quate Nith!" That was her brother's voice. She could hear his heavy boots cracking the frozen puddles of the farm close"⁷

Description of this kind is more apparent in the earlier stages of the series, and as we move on, where it exists at all, it becomes slipshod, cliched, and mediocre, symptomatic of a general decay in McCrone's control over his material. Indeed Book 3 of Wax Fruit marks something of a change of course in the novel. Up to this point his writing has on the whole been successful, fuelled by a real spark in the delineation of manners and aspirations that comes from McCrone's awareness of the forces working in this society, but now the focus changes to personal relationships, narrowing

⁷Ibid. p.3.

to a look at the marital problems of Phoebe and Henry Hayburn. While these are relatively well handled it indicates that his original inspiration has dried up and that this idea has gone as far as he can take it. The problem is that the family have now reached a stage at which they are established in the higher ranks of Glasgow society, and the impetus that came from their upward progress, and provided the whole basis of the novel's theme, is now removed. It is to be regretted that McCrone decided to extend their story further, for while he functioned as something of a poor man's Jane Austen as long as he had something strongly felt to write about, when he came to deal with what was essentially a more static social world he became mechanical and mediocre. He can tackle the bolder face of change but is not sharp or sensitive enough to portray its subtleties or nuances. The world of the following generations of Moorhouses and Hayburns then, is little removed from the typical sort of superficial costumery that passes for the period in women's magazines. For example the marriage of Lucy Rennie and Stephen Hayburn under the blue skies of the Riviera in The Hayburn Family is sentimental romance, whereas David Moorhouse's relationship with the same woman many years earlier in Wax Fruit exposed the hypocrisy and materialism inherent in polite society. Again Polly and Will's wedding in Aunt Bel becomes an occasion to pander to the lowest depths of feminine taste, describing clothes, domestic arrangements, and all the stupid little crises with which hack writers surround such occasions.

None of the second generation have any life, as children or as adults, and are interesting neither in themselves nor in the situation where we discover them. The saga has now become little more than soap opera. As McCrone is at heart a woman's writer we are not surprised to find his women very much more solid than his men. Phoebe, Bel, Old Mrs. Barrowfield, Lucy Rennie, are more memorable than any of the male characters, and it is around Bel and Phoebe that the stories revolve. Rarely do we step into the man's world of work or business, but move in a round of the home, parties, and afternoon tea. Although McCrone is sympathetic towards his characters he always keeps them somewhat at a distance, which allows him to expose their faults, and the baser motives that lie behind much of their conduct. There is an ironic, semi critical tone throughout (although it does become less apparent later on) which is his saving grace, preventing the trivia from becoming suffocating and overwhelming. Thus while Bel is warm and likeable we also see her as conceited and climbing, and, where the benefit of her family is concerned, calculating. Her reaction to the news of her niece's engagement is not unmixed congratulation:

"The child was only eighteen. But the sooner these two girls found husbands the better. Their mother's income was fixed and none too large. Bel was not ungenerous. But Arthur had been more than good. And there had been times when Bel had felt Mary took Arthur's generosity with too much patient resignation. Now there would be young Will Butter to help."⁸

⁸ McCrone, Guy. Aunt Bel 1949 p.41.

In George Woden's Mungo (1932) we return to the self made man. John Mungo starts with nothing, sets out to become a rich man, and succeeds. A collier, he leaves this trade, goes to Glasgow and rises in haberdashery. The Glasgow background is less important than the personality of the hero, which provides the story's momentum. The first half of the novel, concerned as it is with Mungo's struggle in the late nineteenth century city, is far better than the later stages which deal with a more contemporary world and the affairs of his family and acquaintances. The vigour has gone; nothing vital now fuels the novel. Mungo's greed and ruthlessness have already been explored* but it should be added that it is not unreasonable to suggest that the novel's title and the hero's name is a deliberate attempt by Woden to identify the spirit of Glasgow with the qualities we see in Mungo - the commercial greed, ability, and the determination to succeed.

Mary Cleland's two historical works, The Two Windows (1922) and The Sure Traveller (1923), stand as something of a link between our two forms of historical novel and historical romance. Both are set in the Glasgow of the 1880s and share a number of characters, although their relative importance is different in each book. Despite an incidental social awareness, The Two Windows is simply bad romance. The plot is sentimental and unreal; the

*See above Chapter One.

characters are unconvincing; for example the central ones are a crippled pauper child who is adopted by a wealthy couple and nurtured to beauty and health, and a pair of tinkers, father and son, whom it transpires are respectively a fallen gentleman and a genius. However this novel did introduce the figure of Thomas Macbeth, self made man. In terms of the plot he is of secondary importance, but he has a vitality and a genuine spark of life in him which seems to have struck a chord in the author, for in her next novel she expanded not only his personal role but the ethos which he represents. This is why The Sure Traveller is much more successful: it expresses a theme which the author recognised as vital not only to Victorian society but to her own - materialism. It is a case of giving us "prehistory of our own age." Macbeth is echoed in another of the same type, Mr. McCosh, and their nature and influence are expressed in conflict within their own families. Young Tom Macbeth is at odds with his father's grossly materialistic view of life, Catherine McCosh with her grandfather's . These tensions assume something of an element of what we find in The House With The Green Shutters, where the consciousness of late Victorian Scotland is dramatised in a theme of separation between the heart and the head. However it should be understood that The Sure Traveller is only a moderately successful novel. Its theme is somewhat crudely executed and Cleland fails to resist the pull towards facile romance. We find a version of what Raymond Williams calls "retrospective radicalism." There is a feeling that commercialism, far from being

rooted in the very structure of society, is merely an undesirable aspect of modernism. The old values, whatever they were, are better. Catherine is associated with the past; she loves the soil and enjoys gardening, although she is forbidden this occupation by her parents, who are specifically identified with the modern world. Again, she is disgusted with the fashionable room her mother decorates for her, preferring "the rooms of her sometime schoolfriends, mellow with an old world charm."⁹ It is a romantic notion echoed in the progress of the plot. Tom and Catherine escape together from the sordid materialism of Glasgow to a farm on a Scottish island, a sort of mystical place uncorrupted by the new order. It provides a conveniently happy ending for the book. This sort of escape from industrialism into a world of rural bliss is typical of the whole course of Scottish literature in the late nineteenth century. In Cleland it is only one symptom of a basically Victorian outlook, for while The Sure Traveller appeared in 1923 it could well have been written several decades earlier; the prose style and general literary method are very traditional. And it is similar in tone and approach to St. Mungo's City (1885).

At this point we turn from works which I have suggested can be regarded as historical novels proper, to those that fall between them and the category of historical romance. Two types exist. Firstly there are books which

⁹Cleland, Mary. The Sure Traveller 1923 p.9.

make some kind of serious attempt at relating Glasgow's past to its present. They differ in an important way from those we have considered above, since their relationship with the past is not something FELT but something consciously conceived. They make deliberate historical comparisons rather than expressing an awareness of vital and persisting social forces. Two books are involved; Elizabeth Kyle's The Tontine Belle (1951) and Dot Allan's Deepening River (1932). Both of them interpret the city's history in the light of unchanging human nature, finding qualities in the people of old Glasgow that survive in the contemporary world. Kyle makes this the more explicit. The Tontine Belle alternates between past and present, between contemporary Glasgow and the late eighteenth century when the American wars were bringing the prosperity of the Tobacco Lords to an end. Two stories are told; Tom Ecclestoun's, a major eighteenth century trader, and that of his descendant Jinny Ecclestoun, a young newspaper woman, and what emerges is that the spirit of old Glasgow which made the former great is still alive and kicking today. Tom is arrogant, selfish, and ruthless, but there is something great in him; courage, vitality, and brutal strength. He is a man, we are told, who could "defy fate".¹⁰ Facing ruin he gambles everything he has on a last chance trading venture, and when his ship 'The Tontine Belle' is lost off Baltimore he hangs himself rather than face

¹⁰Kyle, Elizabeth. The Tontine Belle 1951 p.28.

the scorn of those he once scorned. It is a courageous act; a last exercise in defiance.

Jinny however had always been bored by her father's continual stories about his impoverished family's illustrious past, but when he dies she falls heir to the last tangible relic of the family heritage - a crumbling property in Glasgow. She returns to the city after a life in exile determined to sell the building, and in her efforts to get public money made available to take it off her hands she encounters descendants of those other Tobacco Lords who had been Tom Ercclestoun's rivals. Two things arise from this. We see Jinny as every bit as ruthless, scheming and self-assured in the pursuit of her own interests as old Tom had been. The only reason, for example, that she cultivates Simon Logie's acquaintance is the expectation that he will be elected to public office and may use its funds to buy her property. We are also aware, notwithstanding the romantic framework, of the theme of the novel as the way the past intrudes on the present. A long buried swindle for example threatens to come to light with serious repercussions for the public life of today's Glasgow. Simon Logie is the descendant of one of Tom's rivals and it transpires that his eighteenth century forbear had laid the foundations of his family's continuing good fortune by cheating Ercclestoun out of 'The Tontine Belle', which had not in fact sunk but returned disguised as one of Logie's ships. If this were to be revealed it would thwart Simon's hopes of election. To the benefit

of all concerned however the matter is hushed up, though not without considerable difficulty. Note how it reveals Jinny as capable even of murder when her plans are spiked, as she contemplates the killing of an old man who knows the secret. Something of a bond between Tom and Jinny stretches over the centuries, clarified in a scene in the old house:

"Death. At the word which echoed between them Tom Ecclestoun turned around slowly and faced her. He was smiling the triumphant smile that he always wore when preparing to down an enemy. The same smile began to dawn slowly upon her own lips. They looked through each other not seeing one another but feeling the same ruthless determination pulse through the blood they shared." ¹¹

The Tontine Belle, although a lightweight novel, is very readable and the intricate plot is well handled. Deepening River however is less successful. Allan's structure is different, focusing not on two widely separate periods, but, as the title implies, dealing with an on-going historical process. The story begins in 1745 and the Jacobite occupation of Glasgow, and traces the fortunes of both one family and the city in general, up to the depression years after World War I. Much of it is just novelettish romance - most notably the tragic love affair between Agnes the burgher's daughter, and the dashing Highland captain - and much trivial and boring domestic matter. Yet there is a more thoughtful side. It is not so much that Allan provides

¹¹Ibid. p.237.

any solid expression of the city's development over the years, for the physical face is never very clear, but that she applauds the spirit of commerce which made Glasgow great and testifies to its continuing presence. Artistically there is something contrived in the way the author draws a parallel between the eighteenth century Agnes and the twentieth century Phillipa, yet her point is clear. Their stories are too consistently similar, their reactions too much the same. Both lose a lover in war; both then channel their energies into industry and the future of the Clyde. Agnes's ability and vitality transformed her father's business, and helped lay the foundations for the river's expansion, just as it is implied that the same qualities in her modern descendant will help shipbuilding out of the doldrums. The consciousness of an identity between past and present is always there, not only in the human stories but in the hard facts she draws to our attention. "The revenue of the port was £1,044 in 1771. In 1912 £582,554."¹²

The second kind of work in this broad grouping are the books which tell the story of real historical characters and situations in novel form. To deal with them as a separate class distinct from the historical novel or the historical romance is not as artificial as it may seem, for while all three types use real material to a greater or lesser extent the attitude is

¹² Allan, Dot. Deepening River 1932 p.224.

crucially different in each case. Unlike the historical novel these books are not concerned with any relationship the past may have to the present, but are interested in the subject matter for itself. Again, unlike the romances however, this interest is at a serious level. The characters and the period provide more than a background and framework for some picturesque or swashbuckling tale. Very often the romances are typified by a superficial knowledge of the relevant history as the writers read up enough to paint in an outline and no more. But in the books we are about to consider there is a high degree of fidelity to known facts - a serious attempt to record history accurately in fictional form. We find a useful coincidence in the publication in 1908 of two books dealing with the Glasgow area in the late eighteenth century, A Prophet's Reward by Mrs. Euphans Strain and Richard Kennoway And His Friends by Katherine Steuart. Indeed their subject is precisely the same: the trial for sedition of lawyer Thomas Muir of Huntershill and the political background of the time. This was the most celebrated case arising from the Establishment's reaction to calls for reform when the shadow of the French Revolution covered the country. The trial was a travesty of justice, the presiding judge, the notorious Lord Braxfield, heavily loading the proceedings against the defendant, and the inherent drama in his courtroom clash with Muir is the obvious attraction for Strain and Steuart. Both look at the affair with the eyes of a more democratic age and their sympathy goes towards the

reformers. A character in A Prophet's Reward outlines the need for reform:

"To put it in a nutshell the expiring magistracy nominates and elects - you may rather say appoints - its successors themselves if they please, certainly members of the clique - a small clique at that - who regard themselves as the absolute owners and dispensers of all the municipal offices and patronage. The public has no say whatever in the matter; the public interest is never so much as alleged. There is no check in their authority; there's no check on their expenditure; the town's property ¹³ is at their absolute disposal."

The two books however are very different in method. A Prophet's Reward is a straightforward portrayal of the events leading up to Muir's sentence of fourteen years transportation, mixed with a strand of political intrigue and a romantic love interest. It is an entertaining novel if not of great literary quality. The atmosphere of electoral corruption is well established and the facts of Muir's case are accurate and detailed. Much of these for instance are taken almost verbatim - including the speeches for and against Muir - from factual accounts of his trial.^a His final speech to the jury for example corresponds word for word with records of the trial:

"Were I to be led this moment from the bar to the scaffold, I should feel the same calmness and serenity which I now do. My mind tells me that I have engaged in a good, a just, a glorious cause - a cause which sooner or later must and will prevail; and by a timely reform save this ¹⁴ country from destruction."

¹³ Strain, Euphans. A Prophet's Reward 1908 p.21.

^a Both A Prophet's Reward and Richard Kennoway And His Friends draw on Peter Mackenzie's The Life Of Thomas Muir (1831).

¹⁴ See A Prophet's Reward p.336 and Life Of Muir p.111.

On the other hand Richard Kennoway And His Friends cannot really be regarded as a novel, despite the declared intentions of the author. "In these pages" she says in the Preface, "an attempt has been made to trace the thoughts and actions of actual men and women (in such a way) that a biography may, if the reader pleases, be looked upon as a work of fiction." But in a novel there is an imaginative element that is absent in this work. The novelist creates action and characters as well as using real ones. When there are gaps in his^e knowledge of the latter, he invents. His^e job is to pass fiction off as fact. This blend is what we find in A Prophet's Reward but not in Richard Kennoway And His Friends, where the author admits that "no unreal or imaginary person is to be found commemorated." Everything is not merely based on fact, but is fact - taken from a number of sources, particularly letters belonging to the author's own family, which deal with her ancestors.^b Together with a variety of other works like Cockburn's Memorials Of His Time she creates a pastiche with no plot, but which gathers together the thoughts and experiences of a group of Glasgow acquaintances. The result is a good detailed history of the Muir case and its social and political background, which evokes the atmosphere of the time and shows the reactions of ordinary people

^bIn Aspects Of The Novel (1927 ed) E.M. Forster makes the point that "if a character in a novel is exactly like Queen Victoria - not rather like but exactly like - then it actually is Queen Victoria and the novel, or all of it that the character touches, becomes a memoir. A memoir is history, it is based on evidence. A novel is based on evidence + or - x, the unknown quantity being the temperament of the novelist and the unknown quality always modifies the effect of the evidence, and sometimes transforms it entirely." (p.65)

to his predicament. But it is not a novel. Here we have one view of Muir's condemnation:

"All the Tories in Glasgow were, of course, in the highest spirits for Reform was being put down with a vengeance. Margarot and Gerald, Skirving and Palmer - Botany Bay for them all! The French had guillotined their queen! The whole world might now see the real meaning of this cry for Reform! Down with all reformers! To Botany Bay with all Friends of the People, Jacobins and black-nebs." 15

There is an important quality in Steuart's book which may have persuaded her she was writing fiction. It is a quality she shares with her sisters the novelists: an impulse towards domesticity and trivia. Her account of the main public events of the time is buried in a mass of the kind of social detail dear to the hearts of women. For example:

"May Steuart went resolutely forth to buy from some merchant or other, in the Saltmarket, a quantity of sulphur and treacle, which after skilful compounding and melting she administered - forcibly if necessary - to the unfortunate boys and girls of the widower. For our ancestors all, without exception, believed in a malign and mysterious influence exercised by the pleasant season of spring on the blood of the human race - an influence only to be warded off by persistent dosing."¹⁶

This kind of thing, as we shall see, pervades the historical romances. Indeed it is to be found in A Prophet's Reward. In writing like this then Steuart

¹⁵Richard Kennoway And His Friends op. cit. pp.125-6.

¹⁶Ibid. p.125.

was in a sense approaching the stance taken in the majority of fiction produced by her sex.

A somewhat different dramatisation of real life is found in Flesh And The Devil (1950) by Elbur Ford (Eleanor A.B. Hibbert). This novel is more of a curiosity than serious literature, for it is a novelist's account of one of Glasgow's most famous murder cases - the poisoning of his wife and mother-in-law by Dr. Edward Pritchard. Using the facts of his life and crime as they emerged during and after his trial in 1865^c, the author traces his story from his first meeting with his wife, to his execution, and tries to build up a picture of what the man was like, and of the motive for his crimes.^d She also accuses him of the murder of one of his servants some years earlier, although there is no conclusive proof of his guilt. The book is not particularly successful, either as a study of a criminal personality or as a depiction of his age. Pritchard emerges as little more than a typical melodrama villain, a man with a facility for justifying to himself any evil deed:

At the end:

^cSubstantially derived from Wm. Roughead's account in the Notable Scottish Trials series.

^dJames Bridie also used the case as the basis for his play Dr. Angelus. The case of Madeleine Smith - the most celebrated of the Glasgow murder cases - has not produced a modern retrospective study in novel form, although a few years after the event Emma Robertson (a prolific woman writer) wrote a novel based on it called Madeleine Graham (1864). There have however been a number of plays on the subject.

"the priest began to understand a little of Edward's complex nature; he grasped something of the extreme vanity of the man, his peculiarly distorted vision which could, through long habit turn wrong into right, right into wrong whenever he wished."¹⁷

Early on in the novel it seemed as if Ford might have been about to see something schizoid in Pritchard's nature, but this never becomes developed. Instead he is just an ordinary libertine who teeters on the edge of exposure for years, and finally has to kill to keep his affair with a servant girl secret. Nothing emerges about the Glasgow of his time, and despite a determined attempt to keep the reader aware of the historical setting, nothing really about the Victorian period either. (We are told for example that the feminine submissiveness of Pritchard's wife is a general contemporary trend, and of Victoria herself that "though she was a Queen she was but a submissive wife of Albert the Prince Consort."¹⁸ Again the Crimean War figures as a distant backdrop to some of the novel's earlier action, but it remains an incidental decoration to the main facts of the tale.) The one thing that does stand out, albeit on a superficial level, is the hypocrisy of the age, the social climate which fostered a gap between public respectability and private vice. Pritchard, outwardly a man of impeccable standing, underneath, a libertine, was something of a victim of his age.

¹⁷Ford, Elbur. Flesh And The Devil 1950 p.267.

¹⁸Ibid. p.19.

The limitations of Flesh And The Devil stem from the nature of the subject. The book is a genre piece, an example of popularised criminology - although considerably higher than the Sunday paper level - aimed at the apparently insatiable public appetite for seeing both murder and justice done. There is little room for imagination, (although in this case the author uses a certain amount of novelistic license) as deviation from strict accuracy offends the legalistic ethos of this kind of work. Both the Glasgow background and the human issues involved are unimportant. The case is an item of sensation cut off from reality and stuck in a jar to be gaped at. The essential attitude of this kind of book is illustrated by The Dear Old Gentleman (1936) by G. Goodchild and B. Roberts. It is based on another notorious Glasgow criminal case, the murder in 1862 of Jess McPherson, and the subsequent trial of Jessie McLachlan. The authors transpose the story however into a modern setting, and it is only late on in the novel that this change becomes clear, so unimportant is the background. In the real case the defendant was found guilty and then reprieved after a public outcry, in this book the verdict is "not proven", allowing the authors to spin a mystery story out of the facts that emerged at the trial.

Related to these works is Pamela Hill's The Incumbent (1974). Like Flesh And The Devil it is a study of the coexistence in a Victorian gentleman of public respectability and private sin. The Rev. William Heatherton has a long and venerable career as minister to a fashionable

city congregation. Yet buried in his personal life is a dark secret - the fact that he has killed his wife's lover. The story is ostensibly based on fact, the author, like Katherine Steuart, drawing on family papers, rumours and reminiscences concerning her ancestor Heatherton. It is much more than a simple murder story however since it encompasses a complicated web of family relationships and romances. Heatherton's wife dies of natural causes soon after her lover, and the minister remarries. After a few years, however, Margaret, his second wife, stumbles on his secret and from then on the marriage remains real in name only. Again, despite opposition from his mother, Margaret's son by her first marriage marries Heatherton's daughter by his previous one, leaving a residue of bitterness and family hostility. While the bare bones of the story are intriguing Hill fails to realise their full potential. She opts to stress character rather than plot to examine the hero's personality - his lust, pride and insensitivity - but her perception is dull and she never really penetrates the man's make up. Similarly, her prosaic style forfeits much of the reader's interest in the family as a whole, although it does give the novel a claustrophobic quality appropriate to the subject.

It is relevant at this stage to mention William Henderson's King Of The Gorbals (1973). It is debatable whether or not it can be called a historical work - if so, only just - but like Flesh And The Devil its roots are in fact. It is a boxing story, set in the Thirties,

and based on the life of world flyweight champion Benny Lynch. Benny Morrison, as Henderson names his hero, is Lynch thinly disguised, and the outlines of their careers are substantially the same. Both rise spectacularly from the slums of Glasgow's Southside to win a world title, both begin to slide as soon as they reach the peak of their careers and proceed to drink themselves into the gutter.^e Their decline is fast and sordid. Lynch was dead at 33, Morrison at 29. Henderson's story however is not just a carbon copy of the real one, and while most of the main details, as well as many of the minor ones, are the same, he contrives to sensationalise what is already a sensational story. For example he has Morrison marry a beautiful but faithless London whore. Like the gang novels it is aimed at the lower end of the reading market and in tone it is reminiscent of these. Yet having said this it must be added that the book is not without appeal. Henderson's descriptions of fights are a cross between newspaper accounts, and the sport as portrayed in boy's comics but they do have a crude vitality. Again there is a wealth of interesting background detail about boxing:

"He would use a minimum of three boxers against the boy he was bringing to fitness. Each round would last the normal three minutes and the first of the sparring partners would step inside the square ring with, say, Benny. And the two of them wearing head guards and with their hands taped with the regulation surgical bandage, not exceeding 8 ft. 4 in.

^eLynch's story will be found in Peter McInnes's somewhat superficial biography Ten And Out (1961). Like Dr. Pritchard his life also inspired a play - Benny Lynch (1975) by Bill Bryden.

in length or $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. in width, and
with 'pillows' on their hands 19
weighing 16 ounces"

What never comes over is the personality of the man. The book never succeeds in bringing the boxer to life as a real human being; he remains a spectacle as much in his decline, as he does in his rise to fame. Perhaps this is because legends do not have personalities, and a legend is what Lynch/Morrison undeniably became.

Turning away from novels with a factual basis we enter our third main grouping, and the realms of pure historical romance. Here we find little of any worth. The scene is dominated by women writers whose perception of life, past or present, is poor. N.B. Morrison, M.T. Davis and Audrey De Haven (Dreda Boyde) are the worst. They have produced nothing which is not miserable hack-work. Dot Allan and Elizabeth Kyle are a little better. For all of them however, the past is merely a different frame for their usual pictures of romance and personal relationships. It is nothing more than decoration. Davis' The Prince And The Tobacco Lords (1975) can be summed up by this extract:

"Already Annabella was busy making plans and preparations for the next evening's ball and as soon as she arrived home she started putting them into practice. With Nancy's help she concocted a hair wash of honey water, tincture of ambergris, tincture of musk, with some spirits of wine and all shaken well together. Then, with much giggling and squealing Nancy helped her wash her long hair."²⁰

¹⁹Henderson, William. King Of The Gorbals 1973 p.75.

²⁰Davis, Margaret Thomson. The Prince And The Tobacco Lords 1975 p.134.

The focus is trivial and superficial. Davis has picked up a few details about cosmetics in the past, regurgitates them, and thinks she is giving us history. The whole novel is a collection of the same kind of facile rubbish. She in no way evokes Glasgow as it was during the "Forty Five." Economic and social forces do not concern her and the book is a string of mechanical love scenes involving the daughter of a tobacco lord, and wooden adventures happening to two waifs. She tries to give an authentic background to the situation of the Jacobites in Glasgow by describing in detail some of the battles of the rebellion, but they are as much a failure as anything else in the novel. She has not got the talent to dramatise them, but sweeps them in dead and undigested from the pages of some history book. The Prince And The Tobacco Lords is an unsuccessful novel which shows no advance in ability from the author's contemporary works.

Her treatment of Prince Charles is illuminating for it crystallises the mood of irresponsible romance that is typical of these books as a group, and stems directly from the female eye. What matters is not his significance as a political symbol, nor even his presence as a handsome young man, but how cute he was as a child.

"Sheridan couldn't help smiling to himself as he remembered a note an eight year old Charles had penned to his father: 'I will be very dutiful to Mama' it promised 'and not jump too near....' " 21

It is the same attitude that infects Morrison's

When The Wind Blows (1937). This deals with the family of a Glasgow merchant during the 1820s and is substantially a long winded account of the ages, personalities, and physical appearances of the brood of children, and of clothes, fashion, and domestic trivia in general. The plot, which is mediocre anyway, becomes bogged down by it all. There is the usual dull recitation of love affairs, marriages, and strained emotion.

"She was not to be lightly won.
Her face floated before him in all
its delicacy and beauty; a pretty
face thought the man quickening his
step as though to elude something,
some might even call it a lovely face. 22
Her high cheek bones"

Morrison's sense of the past stops at calling the parents "Mama" and "Papa". This, it must be supposed, is authenticity! The Scarlet Cloak by De Haven is back to the tobacco lords again, and is, if anything, even more negligible than the above two. It is a completely wooden and uninteresting intrigue of beautiful ladies and villainous gentlemen.

Elizabeth Kyle (Agnes M.R. Dunlop) has a more respectable output to her name. Apart from The Tontine Belle she published Douce (1950), Free As Air (1974), and Down The Water (1975). Douce is an ingenious and interesting, though it must be admitted pointless, exercise in rewriting the Mary Queen of Scots story in a Victorian setting. Kyle gives us no new insights

²²Morrison, Nancy Brysson. When The Wind Blows 1937
p.153.

into Mary's life or personality. Nor does she say anything about Glasgow life past or present, other than an incidental swipe at anti-Catholic bigotry. Indeed such an undertaking leaves little scope for the artist, confined as she is in the straight-jacket of the known facts of Mary's life, and the reader follows it for one reason only - his curiosity about how Kyle will translate all the characters and incidents in the drama into nineteenth century Glasgow. This she does down to the last detail. The beautiful Douce Albany returns from a French upbringing to head a Scottish wine importing business. Soon rivalry develops with the English branch of the firm which is presided over by her plain but ruthless cousin Ann, and a mutual fear of take over festers between them. Ann is Elizabeth I, and Aylmer Lennox, Douce's worthless husband to whom she is introduced by the English side of the family, and who retains suspicious links with them, is Darnley. Rene, a French clerk is Rizzio, Captain Hepburn, Bothwell, and Dr. Dalbeattie, the Catholic-hating Glasgow minister, Knox. The intrigues and state of affairs of Mary's life are played out in the commercial business of the wine world, and the personal lives of the protagonists. Even the murder of Rizzio for example has its counterpart in the killing of Rene by two louts employed by Lennox. Kyle's treatment of the story is completely sympathetic to Mary, who is seen as a victim of circumstances and the scheming of others. Yet it has nothing really to do with Glasgow and is of little note other than as a curiosity.

Kyle's two recent works feature Edwardian Glasgow and resemble one another in conception. She chooses a period background partly for its picturesque associations, and partly because she wants a setting in the art world, and the turn of the century was the era of the Glasgow school of painters. Several of her characters are recognisably based on real personalities (her Richard Knox is Glasgow art dealer Alexander Reid and Handasyde Gemmell, painter E.A. Hornel.). The two books have some figures in common although the plots are entirely separate. They are however, drawn along the same lines. A young woman, alone in life, enters Glasgow society and is faced with a mystery. In the first book the heroine's lost husband seems to be still alive, but it transpires that he is dead. In the second the heroine's father has been presumed dead; it turns out that he is alive. Free As Air has a superficial resemblance to Jane Eyre with a governess heroine falling in love with a married man whose wife is an imbecile who finally kills herself. While both books have little depth they are however readable. Dot Allan's Charity Begins At Home (1958) is again set in this period but is little more than a costume piece. A young girl enters smart society and marries. She commits a crime but is forgiven. It could be set anywhere for all the city matters.

It should not be assumed that because the historical romance as we have found it has proved disappointing, the form need inevitably mean literary debasement. Glasgow writers who have come to it have been poor, but in the hands of talent it can become refreshing escapism. The

male writers have had only slightly more to offer than the women. George Eyre Todd's Anne Of Argyle (1895) and C.S. Black's Peter Meiklejohn (1925) are as bad as anything we have encountered. The first is a tale of the Covenanting times, a turgid mess only partly set in the city. We get a romantic account of Montrose, meet Charles II, and see Zachary Boyd preach at Glasgow Cathedral, but not one of them has any life. Todd however takes the novel seriously and packs it with footnotes in the manner of Scott. Peter Meiklejohn is set a century earlier and deals with monastic life in the city. It is a mixture of swashbuckling adventure and gothic romance, revolving around a student after he is expelled from the university and has enrolled in the archbishop's bodyguard. It in no way evokes the spirit of another age. However, even to talk about these books in serious terms is to give them undeserved attention.

George Mills' Craiglutha (1849) is better, and a useful illustration of how historical romance is largely a modern tale in period setting. The author does not bother to root it in a definite era, and all we know is that it is set "in the history of our fathers when the inhabitants of Scotland had no other public mode of conveyance from one part of the country to another excepting those limited, slow, and irregular cart-waggons"²³ The past is irrelevant and the story is primarily about the legal problems surrounding the ownership of an estate.

²³Mills, George. Craiglutha 1849 p.5.

To an extent it resembles The Entail, but it becomes heavy and tedious as it progresses. Mills does however show in snatches the perception of the baser human motives that dominates The Beggar's Benison. Mr. Blawinlug for example gives his son advice:

" "That's the way o' the world Benjie" replied Mr. Blawinlug, "poor Wintle is no' o' the standing and importance that one should rowte and laugh at his jokes, unless when they are really good and irresistable, whilk they are sometimes. There's auld Sir Bruce Blawflum, up the hill, on the contrary he's rich, and can put a good job in a chiel's way occasionally; and therefore it behoves us to laugh richt heartily when he inflicts us either on the bench, or at his ain board, wi' his horrid bad anes." " 24

Finally, Allan Govan's High Adventure In Darien (1936) comes as welcome relief after all the rubbish we have met in the field of historical romance. Despite some novelettish elements and over-writing at times it is an entertaining, capably written, book. The period is the early eighteenth century and despite the title most of the action takes place in Glasgow. The sections abroad which deal with the Darien expedition, and the disastrous attempts at setting up a Scottish colony in South America are short and superficial. Govan's success comes not from the plot - typical of the kind - but from his characters, particularly the merchant Ezekiel Galbraith, his wife, and his villainous father. This

²⁴Ibid. p.16.

trio are very much alive and Govan handles well their conversation with its Scots content. The father has involved them in a smuggling mishap:

" "If it had been onybody else, yon wouñd hae been the death o' him; but I think that, seein' it's Habbie, he may possibly come through." Ezekiel looked at Daniel and shook his head depressingly. "The Lord be guid to us a'. What did I tell ye!"

"Whether he comes through or no' it's a disgracefu' business. This is what comes o' gallivantin' aboot the country an' consortin' wi' sailors an' smugglers. I kent ye would get yoursel's into trouble - I kent it when ye set oot" and Mistress Jeanie looked her most virtuous."²⁵

0

It should be understood that the groupings and distinctions we have made in this chapter are primarily a way of organising what is a rag bag of poor material, rather than having any intrinsic importance in themselves. If the historical fiction thrown up by Glasgow has any lesson to give it is that only when a vital theme - such as materialism - is present in the work will it have any life. It should also be noted that these books focus mainly on middle class life. This is understandable for it is this group which in the main controls and initiates social forces.

²⁵Govan, Allan. High Adventure In Darien 1936 pp.50-51.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SARAH TYTLER AND "ST. MUNGO'S CITY"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SARAH TYTLER AND "ST. MUNGO'S CITY"

Henrietta Keddie was born in Cupar in 1827 and spent most of her childhood in Fife. She came from a solid middle class family, and while never rich, enjoyed a comfortable upbringing. Her father had farming interests and ran a small scale mining enterprise. At the age of thirteen she went to school in Edinburgh for a time, then returned to her native town where later on she was to become a schoolteacher. She published her first novel in 1852 and went on to become one of the most prolific female writers of the Victorian era, with almost a hundred books to her credit as well as a copious journalistic output. She died in 1914.^a Her range was wide; as well as contemporary fiction, some of it with Scottish settings, she wrote history, historical romance, biography, literary art, and music criticism, religious and moral tracts and stories for girls. Such a large output however obviously meant that most of her work was of no great quality and indeed we find little to interest today's reader. She is however a better writer and more important literary figure than her younger counterpart Annie S. Swan, not only because of a generally superior level of competence but because she produced in St. Mungo's

^aHer autobiography, Three Generations (1907), is a charming book. Yet the author herself remains elusive, it is as much a family history as a personal memoir, and after her childhood we learn little about the woman. However it is worth looking at as an intensely readable portrait of a Victorian middle class family.

City a novel of genuine importance in our national literature. This novel stands far above the mediocre hackwork which was her norm and shows that the time spent on her other writings was a waste of talent. Like A.S. Swan her appeal was primarily to the women's market and most of her books have feminine leanings. Much of her work was escapist, pandering to the interests in fashion and high society.^b Her Glasgow novel however addressed a far wider audience and showed the author capable of fine writing when dealing with something strongly felt.

Structurally and philosophically St. Mungo's City (1884) is very much a typical product of its time, a traditional Victorian novel arranged on a wide canvas with several strands of plot and a variety of characters. The main storyline concerns the affairs of businessman Tam Drysdale and his family. The start of the novel finds him successful and apparently secure in the fortune he has built. His contentment however is shattered when the terms of an old marriage settlement come to light, revealing that the property which gave him his initial start, and laid the basis of his future prosperity, is not in fact legally his, and whatever his moral rights all his subsequent wealth does not in law really belong to him. As these circumstances remain a secret that he need not break Drysdale is confronted with the problem of conscience, of whether to sit tight and say nothing,

^b She had a particular penchant for royal and aristocratic ladies and much of her work is in this vein: The Countess of Huntingdon And Her Circle (1907), Queen Charlotte's Maidens (1901), Duchess Frances (1889), Life Of Her Most Gracious Majesty The Queen (1883), Tudor Queens and Princesses (1895), The Two Lady Lascelles (1908).

or make the facts known and take the consequences. After much delay he opts for the latter, and the prospect of exchanging his fortune for his peace of mind. There is a twist to the story however, for at the last moment it transpires that the date of the document on which the legal argument turns has been misread and that a few crucial hours have been incorrectly calculated. When this is set right the status quo is restored. This strand of the plot, complicated by the romantic entanglements of the hero's daughter and the discontent of his son, is interlinked with a secondary one which deals with the fortunes of an impoverished army officer and his down-on-their-luck aunts. These are only the bare bones of the plot and the novel is a much richer vision of life than they themselves suggest. As a portrait of Glasgow it is mixed. The physical aspect of the city has no great prominence. Much of the book is in fact set not in the centre, where Drysdale's office is, but on the outskirts where his home and his works lie, and while Tytler expresses her pride in the many civic improvements instigated in Glasgow she does not actually describe them. Her concern rather, is to capture the spirit of the place and this she does admirably. Yet it should be noticed that it is the spirit of only one section of Glasgow society, of the middle class, and that working class life and the social problems of the poor are almost entirely absent. She wants to work her version of the Glasgow (as well as characteristically Victorian) obsession with ambition and success. The theme of money dominates the novel,

finding expression both in action and characterisation. It lies at the heart of Tam Drysdale's dilemma, and also causes the rift with his son, who cannot reconcile his father's riches with what he knows to be the position of some of the poor. Similarly it affects the lives of the Misses McKinnon and their nephew Eneas. The latter's army pay is barely adequate to support his frugal bachelor existence, and as he has no other income it is only with great difficulty that he is able to participate in the social life his station requires. The lives of the former however are far worse, and we see them sink through genteel poverty to near starvation, trying all the time to keep up the appearances they knew when their Dear Papa was alive. When Eneas comes to visit a show is put on.

"The blanks and deficiencies were hidden by a series of elaborate manoeuvres which sometimes took an hour or two to carry out. The Miss Mackinnons wore their company gowns and caps on the days when they expected their grand nephew. It was a temporary turn however halting, to the glories of the past " ¹

Then we have the Vaughan Sisters, ladies of birth and breeding but little means. Despite her attraction to titles, Tytler, true to her middle class roots, is hard headed enough to see them realistically, and understands that while the nouveau riche look on their background with envy, the Vaughans themselves would gladly exchange for the opportunities money can buy. Finally, Dr. Peter Murray provides another perspective. To him

¹Tytler, Sarah. St. Mungo's City 1885 p.69.

money is of little consequence. He lives simply and lets the general clamour for prosperity pass him by, refusing to increase his fees, as he may well have done, when his wealthy patients become even wealthier. Murray is the moral centre of the book and through comment and example expresses the values by which both the other characters and the Glasgow experience *are* measured. He is above all a symbol of moderation. This is important, for Tytler's attitude to commercial expansion and the spirit of trade is ambivalent. She is neither wholeheartedly for, nor decisively against. Her portrait is not of a city in the grip of Mammon, as we find in The Beggar's Benison, but of Clydeside as a dynamo of commendable enterprise. It is with some pride that she views the pace and energy of the Glasgow businessman, apparent even in the streets.

"When the swarm of dark coloured ants hurry along the pavement it is clear they mean business, hearty though the greetings are which burst from the deep throated, deep chested pedestrians, worthy of the warm hearts and frank tongues - careless of sing song patios - of the mighty men of Clydesdale. They will not tarry on their errands, they have to put their shoulders to the wheel with a will to bear the load imposed upon them."²

There is heroism here. Tam Drysdale gets a pat on the head for his career. He has made a fortune through hard work and ability - and he has done it himself. Tytler can only praise him.

²Ibid. p.14.

Alongside this vein of approval however we are aware of the author having severe reservations about the city's commercial ethos. Expansion has an unpleasant side. This is not a social concern but a moral concern. It is not the herding of more and more people into slums which worries her, but the unsavoury changes in manners and outlook, which accompany the cult of success. Moderation is thrown to the winds, conspicuous consumption and dissatisfaction are the order of the day. The rich flaunt their wealth and everybody else envies them. "The great point at dinners was the costliness of the table equipage and the expense and unseasonableness rather than the seasonableness of the viands."³ The money ethic is so all-pervasive in Glasgow that when Drysdale is faced with his moral dilemma he is uncertain as to what course of action to take. He is a good man with a strong sense of what is right but is unable while under the influence of the city to follow his conscience. Only when the author has removed him from Glasgow altogether - in a chapter entitled A Charmed Sail - and sent him on a tour of the Highlands and Islands does he come to terms with what he knows to be right, and face the prospect of losing his wealth. Now he is moved to observe: "Aye the hills are grand Grand like truth itsel'."⁴

Against the behaviour of general society however stands the life of Dr. Peter Murray - eating simple wholesome food, passing his time in study and the quiet

³Ibid. p.94.

⁴Ibid. p.285.

contemplation of nature; moderate in everything, totally content: An important thing about him is that he is not wholly of the industrial world, but has strong rural connections, for there is a recognition of social change in the novel that involves a sense of a new world and an old world. Dr. Peter has reconciled both, but not so society at large. Industrialism is destroying the environment, the 'chemical abominations' in the river are killing the fish.⁵ On a different plane modernism smothers natural feelings. Mrs. Drysdale's true spirit is subdued by the fashions of the new commercial classes to which she belongs, and in society her existence is wooden. However,

"when she was alone with her daughter Eppie she would tell charming tales, idylls of old country and town life embellished by queer figures and quaint customs - Egg Jean, Bell Geordie and Creepie Kate, Milky May Day and Hallowe'en 6 wi' its nuts and apples."

This in no way means however that Tytler is a romantic looking back to some non-existent rural golden age, but she realises that the very pace of modern economic development has had unpredictable results, and among other things it has meant a separation of the classes to a new extreme. For example they no longer share their leisure together as once they did during the Glasgow Fair.* The wealthy seem to have lost any sense of responsibility towards the poor. It is on this

⁵Ibid. p.26.

⁶Ibid. p.96.

*See above Chapter One.

question that Drysdale's son comes into conflict with his father. He speaks of his concern for "the working class with their desperate strikes, their fits of starvation and their fits of excess, their gross materialism their worn out bodies and trampled down souls...."⁷ And he sees them as a problem. The answer however lies not in his radicalism which is exposed as immature, and in reply Dr. Peter firmly upholds the principle of capitalism with the usual cliches about individualism.

"No man be he rich or poor is bound to be a slave either to his gains or his deprivation Every sturdy dyer and patient bleacher every hammerer and weaver and mill girl among them has his or her destiny in his or her hands."⁸

It is Dr. Peter who states the philosophy of the book, which is essentially a vague notion of togetherness, of class reconciliation.

"Surely the philosophy of all the centuries has found out something better than to keep on pitting classes against each other, and setting them by the ears when their strength is in the union - not of men alone, but of the men and the masters, in making the best and not the worst of each other."⁹

The author's political attitude then is very similar to what Mrs. Gaskell applied to her industrial characters of a generation earlier. At this later date Tytler is no more advanced.

Much of the strength of these themes in St. Mungo's

⁷Ibid. p.59.

⁸Ibid. p.59.

⁹Ibid. p.64.

City is due to the firm grasp the author has not only of the trends in society, but of the economic forces which lie behind them. We see here for example the inordinate economic activity which moved Dr. Peter to comment that "it is a fever fit, when the patient looks full in the face and rosy."¹⁰ It is the unhealthy boom which precedes disaster:

"Men were so eager to avail themselves of the chances opening out before them, that whenever they had irons at all, they put every one into the fire. Speculators caught at the materials out of which millions might be made, and launched them on the rising waters, with a faith that scarcely knew a doubt. A large amount of capital was lifted out of the old channels, which by comparison paid miserably, and laid out in the new cent. per cent. ventures of a brilliant era in commerce. Credit followed capital and he was counted happiest who could command most, who had a bank of which he was one of the principal directors at his back, into whose cash-box - speaking figuratively - he could dip his hand at will, or who belonged to an old established firm in high repute for sagacity and wealth; or a new firm whose good fortune kept step with its daring, so that it dazzled the eyes of its contemporaries forgetting to apply the word 'plunging'¹¹ to its great triumphant undertakings."

Ultimately however the novel comes to no constructive conclusions. There is the statutory happy ending with all the principal protagonists getting their own personal salvation, but society in general is left untouched. The vague notions of moderation provide no real answer to the faults she has exposed. At the end of the novel Tam Drysdale expresses his intention to build a home for the working classes, as his contribution to the

¹⁰Ibid. p.134.

¹¹Ibid. p.134.

mutual goodwill, but apart from this nothing positive emerges. However, no degree of perceptive social criticism necessarily makes a good novel, and St. Mungo's City stands so well because it has other qualities. Its outlook is diverse, so much more so than an outline of the main thesis suggests. We get a picture of Glasgow that includes other things like the Irish influence, the Highland influence, and the decline of certain districts and the rise of others. Moreover despite her serious views Tytler is freer than most from the crippling didacticism that was such a feature of Victorian writing. Most of her opinions are contained in character and action and are therefore not so intrusive as to do any major harm to the artistic fabric of the novel. The twists and turns of the plot are well handled. The machinations of Rory Of The Shelties, for example, are mysterious without being sensational. Her characterisation is admirable. She is a master of the ordinary, and while none of her people are gross like Dickens's, or picturesque like Scott's they are completely alive. Her skill is particularly evident in her handling of the changes in Drysdale's personality after he discovers that his wealth is threatened. Under the strain of his secret the solid, even dour, businessman becomes a careless pleasure seeker infected with an unnatural gaiety and a desire to spend money. Psychologically it is extremely credible. Similarly the sight of Sandy Macnab who knows his position, is a constant threat to him:

"After Tam had landed himself in this moral quagmire a new torment beset him. He was haunted by the presence of Sandy Macnab, the dog man at Semple Barns. Go where Tam liked, in the streets of Glasgow, on the country roads near Drysdale Hall and Semple Barns, Sandy Macnab was constantly turning up promiscuously, very much in the fashion of fatality. Of course Tam, in his distempered frame of mind, was liable to exaggerate the accident; nevertheless it existed. Naturally the sight of Sandy with the recollections it conjured up, was not from the first agreeable to Tam. As time progressed, and the workings of his mind had reached a certain stage, they began, in spite of him, to present the strapping, easy-minded, thick skinned Highlander in the light of an accomplice forced upon Tam's notice. Before long the merest glimpse of the muscular figure, with the erect, almost martial gait and elastic step, the swarthy complexion, the roving eye, the flattering tartans, became perfectly detestable to the person who had once been full of a fine serenity, but was fast growing fidgety, testy and disposed to consider himself impertinently intruded upon." 12

Nothing dazzling perhaps, but soundly authentic.

On a lighter note we see her play on the humours of the Scottish character. Here it is the chatter of the McKinnons:

" 'MISS Macmasters! quo she' echoed Miss Janet in the highest key. 'Lass Macmasters would be the likes thing. Why her faither was the lamp lichter in the Square and his faither a ferryman up the water.' " 13

Indeed the Scottish flavour is one of the most satisfying features of the novel. In her use of language there are few to beat Tytler and her Scots is among the

¹²Ibid. p.238.

¹³Ibid. p.72.

richest and most evocative found in nineteenth century fiction.[‡] That is not to say however that she is faultless in this field for like so many of her colleagues, then and now, she is uncertain about the validity of her native tongue and feels called on at times to translate it into English: "I have heard tell that if she had so much given a pech or eech (groan or sigh) after his breath was out the property would have been hers."¹⁴ Nevertheless, on the whole, she has few equals.

As a final comment it should be stressed that St. Mungo's City is well worth resurrecting from its undeserved obscurity. It is not only an interesting social document but a work of art; the best novel about Glasgow in the nineteenth century. Moreover, while it is admittedly minor when compared with the greats, it is nevertheless a significant contribution to the Scottish heritage as a whole.

[‡]See above Chapter *Seven*

¹⁴St. Mungo's City op. cit. p.8.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FREDERICK NIVEN 1878 - 1944

CHAPTER TWELVE

FREDERICK NIVEN 1878 - 1944

If Sarah Tytler is the best Glasgow novelist of the nineteenth century Frederick Niven is her counterpart in the twentieth. But his position is much more controversial. Some critics - most notably Hugh McDiarmid - have seriously doubted the merits of his work. In an influential article written in 1925 McDiarmid compares him unfavourably with J.J. Bell, whose Wee Macgreegor he believes is "worth all the rest of Bell's output - and the whole of Niven's put together."¹ Niven he says, has an inferiority complex and "a puerile attitude to art." His work is "slabs of sentiment masquerading as slices of life" and Justice Of The Peace is "impurposive and impotent."² The author of this abuse however bases his arguments not on analysis or discussion of Niven's actual writings but on his failure to meet certain demands which McDiarmid makes for the development of Scottish fiction. He has "not devised a form of novel which is specifically Scottish"³ but worked along traditional lines. This is certainly true but is it a fair way of evaluating the quality of a writer's work? McDiarmid's attack in fact cannot be taken as a serious assessment of Niven, but is really an arrogant misreading designed more as a manifesto for the poet's own views about

¹McDiarmid, Hugh. Contemporary Scottish Studies 1926 (1976 reprint p.22).

²Ibid. p.22.

³Ibid. p.21.

regenerating literature in Scotland. The coupling with J.J. Bell is inappropriate and it is far more accurate to raise the name of John Galt.

It is fitting that Niven should have dedicated Mrs. Barry to his memory for there are striking similarities between the two men, as writers and as individuals. While Niven was born and spent his early childhood in Valparaiso, like Galt he had strong family ties with Greenock and with Ayrshire. Both men were to become extensive travellers and spend much of their lives overseas, and both had particular connections with Canada. As a young man Niven made several trips there, working in lumber camps and on the railways, and following old Indian trails, and in his last years, in the hope of regaining his failing health, he settled permanently in British Columbia where he was to die. His literary output totals just under forty books and covers a variety of interests - biography, verse, travel writing, and fiction. Yet like Galt he produced his best works not when dealing with the exotic lands to which his journeys took him, but when painting the ordinary world of urban Scotland. The link however is closer than this for they have much in common in technique, attitude, and in the quality of their writing.

Despite his South American upbringing it was Glasgow that captured the major part of Niven's affections and allegiance. It was the city he "learnt to love",⁴ and

⁴Niven, Frederick. Coloured Spectacles 1938 p.79.

he spent his adolescent years at Hutchesons Grammar School, and as an apprentice in a warehouse owned by his father, a Glasgow manufacturer of muslins, before moving to a job in a library and on to journalism and writing. His great love at this time was art and he had serious thoughts of pursuing it as a career. He attended Glasgow School of Art in the evenings and acquired a wide knowledge of contemporary trends. It was an era when art was in the air in the city, lectures and courses in all aspects of painting and drawing were immensely popular and some famous men were at work in Glasgow. In later life Niven was to look back on the period as something of a golden age not only in his own life but in the city's history. Indeed, his wife watched him as he worked and saw his feeling for the place:

"When he was writing The Staff At Simson's his hands frequently would be wet as if they had been in water. On one occasion looking very dazed, he said "I have seen the pigeons in Ingram Street...." and he really had. He dictated a lot and at such times one could see him practically reporting what he saw before his eyes - very like an artist at a drawing. Possibly that is one reason why the specialist told him his work took more out of him than it would if he were a navy." 5

It is easy to understand why it was primarily Glasgow of the 1890s and the Edwardian age that furnished the setting for his books.

⁵Niven, Mrs. Pauline - Letter to Mr. John Dunlop, Librarian of Bailie's Library - June 2 1956 (unpublished).

Just as Galt has been slow to be given his proper place as a minor, yet important figure, in the mainstream of English fiction, so Niven's stature as a major Scottish novelist has never been fully appreciated.^a Though not a great writer he is a very good one, and Justice Of The Peace (1914) is a fine book by any standards. In his Annals Of Scotland George Blake writes of it thus:

"Neither a forceful nor brilliant work, it was a careful and observant job. For the very first time a writer of talent had taken the commercial world of a Scottish city for granted and made a good story out of the career of a man of business and the vicissitudes of his affairs. It was the first projection, the first admission of a mercantile middle class with its own prides and problems. It blandly and usefully ignored the assumption that the Scot was either a peasant or a chieftan; it recognised the fact that the most of Scottish life was now urban, geared to an industrial economy." 6

This is accurate only up to a point. Certainly Glasgow is particularly well conveyed as Niven avoids the pitfall of being over-conscious of background. But Justice Of The Peace is by no means the first working of the commercial city. More serious however is the implication that the novel is basically about the business world. This is not so. Rather the author's concern is to study the personalities of the Moir family and especially the complex mother-son relationship. It is

^aSince his death several attempts have been made by his friends to get his books re-issued but with no success. Justice Of The Peace was rejected twice by Penguin.

⁶Blake, George. Annals Of Scotland 1956 pp.18-19.

crucial to understand that Niven's interest in all his Glasgow novels is less in society - although as a sideline this does come over well - but with character and the quirks of human nature.* He has insight and can convey people superbly. This is what McDiarmid fails to recognise.

In the Preface to Justice Of The Peace he recognised a lack of construction as a constitutional weakness in his work, and it is clear that this is because his plots are always of secondary importance, vehicles on which to mount his character studies. In the above novel itself this is not so much of a problem. A good solid storyline exists ready made in the facts of the author's own life, and this carries things along for much of the book. In the later stages however he has to invent, and it must be admitted that Niven is now less certain, and that he tends to get a bit repetitive at times. Yet never do his characters fail to live and convince absolutely. This is his great strength. He shows them fully, and subtly, and while he never lays bare their innermost souls he maintains a suggestion of deep psychological possibilities in his central characters that give them an extra dimension. His handling of Martin's discontent with his life in the warehouse is particularly good. It is a time of uncertainty and conflicting impulses. Duty and aspiration wrestle together without a conclusive victory for either side, and Niven unfolds at length the various influences on

*See Appendix. D.

the boy before he finally strikes out on his own - the routine of the warehouse broken by the surreptitious indulgence of his artistic talents, the bustle and colour of the city-centre streets, restaurants and smoking rooms, the hostility of his mother and the concern of his father. In the Preface the author confesses that the idea for the novel had a peculiar grip on him. He was "haunted by it so greatly that I had to allow it to turn into a book I do not know but what, if I had not to exist as well as live, I would unravel all this book yet once again, and again begin upon it."⁷ Twenty three years later he was to do something similar in The Staff At Simson's (1937). The setting is the same, as Niven again turns to the scenes of his youth, although this time the focus is not on one individual but on the range of characters who pass through a soft goods warehouse during a twenty year period. Again it is Glasgow of the Nineties and the first decade of this century. Bob Simson, one of the owners, keeps an office book, the description of which outlines the scope of the novel:

"The book in his hand he considered, was almost in a way like the fabled Book of the Day of Judgement. The Warehouse in Cochrane Street was the world in little. People came and passed. Of some the book observed that they had been married on a certain day; of some it made a comment on character. It remarked "retired" or "drowned" or dead and gave the date. "Went to Arizona" "went to South Africa" or "went to New Zealand". They came - and they went."⁸

⁷Niven, Frederick. Justice Of The Peace 1914 p.6.

⁸Niven, Frederick. The Staff At Simson's 1937 p.316.

Yet The Staff At Simson's is never as significant as this suggests. The passage seems to be tagged on at the end of the novel in an attempt to give it a depth it otherwise lacks. We do get a sense of ongoing life over a generation, as well as a vividly sketched background and a host of firmly realised characters. But the world of the warehouse becomes no more than that. It is never a microcosm and Niven is interested in his characters just for their own sake. Even these however are somewhat restricted, for while they are real and convincing Niven forfeits the possibilities for complexity and development by trying to cover too much within the pages of a medium sized novel. There are too many people and it is too wide a time scale for him to dwell on any figure for long. Hence the book's lack of substance. As the characters are fixed types who do not undergo any changes in the course of the novel they are akin to those we find in Galt. But this is unusual in Niven for on the whole he is able to do with his characters what Galt apparently cannot do, that is invest them with full and complex personalities capable of change, and of acting out with a range of stock pre-ordained responses. He understands that the individual is many things and that there are qualities of thought and feeling often hidden from the obvious outward appearance of a person. Of the two writers' respective characters the most immediately comparable are Mrs. Moir and 'Liddy Grippy. If Niven had created the latter she would have been more subtly rounded, less grotesque, and she may well have developed

or matured as she aged. At the same time as Mrs. Moir is not such a forceful character, she is less crudely conceived. Within Justice Of The Peace there are psychological justifications for her strange behaviour, whereas Leddy Grippy is peculiar just because she is peculiar.

Yet this must not distract us from the affinities between Galt and Niven. Now here more than in the episodic structure of The Staff At Simson's is evident the inability to sustain a continuous plot which is common to both. Yet more important are the attitude and approach they take to their work. They look at the Scottish scene through the same restrained commonsense eyes. We find careful and accurate observation, not flights of fancy. Their work has a documentary element, it is orderly, and rooted in the ordinary world. To claim any more similarities is not justified, but this itself is no insignificant link. What is more tenuous however is the comparison that has been made between Niven and Chekhov.⁹ The exact grounds are vague, though what the commentator probably had in mind is the way in which Niven can creep up on the reader with a deep insight in what is an apparently simple and leisurely piece of writing. When it comes to themes there is little connection. It is no coincidence that the reference should have been made in connection with A Tale

⁹Reid, Alexander.S. "A Scottish Chekhov?" Scotland's Magazine Vol. 58 No. 3 March 1962.

That Is Told (1920), for it is in this book that Niven is at his most quietly realistic. In the Prologue the narrator sets out his literary philosophy in these terms:

"I have a plain story to tell - my own; not a story to a pattern.... I shall tell it as simply as possible. Arabesques and whirls, lightening and convolutions are all very well to make a thin theme and paltry days seem a TOUR DE FORCE in the telling." 10

In his article McDiarmid specifically takes exception to this passage and makes out that it shows Niven's inferiority complex, without explaining that it is written not as an expression of Niven's own literary convictions but in character. A Tale That Is Told is a first person narrative and it is the hero's philosophy. While Justice Of The Peace is his best novel, fired as it is with an enthusiasm for his subject derived from his own experience, this is Niven's most technically accomplished book. His adopted persona of a diffident bachelor who observes rather than participates in life, is carried perfectly. He makes a virtue of his plotting difficulties by allowing the events of the narrator's life, which like real life are haphazard and lacking in conscious design, to provide the only element of organisation in the book. Moreover the conscious effort to keep his language in character - and at times prim - cuts down on much of the awkward phrasing noticeable in some

¹⁰Niven, Frederick. A Tale That Is Told 1920 pp.2-4.

of his other books. Niven's grip on his material is excellent. McDiarmid would frown at his quiet, authentic approach, but it is moving in an unobtrusive way, and is perfect for the type of personality he wishes to convey. Not only is the narrator admirably revealed through his reactions to life and to other people, but the other characters are differentiated with subtlety and discrimination. His father for example, the Rev. Thomas Grey, is a mixture of humbug, sincerity and genuine goodness:

"My father never talked much about having preached to Queen Victoria at Balmoral, but it did have an effect upon his bearing - I think as much because of the way people looked on him due to the distinction, as because of the way he looked upon it. If a man is constantly being kow-towed to it is only human nature that he will adopt easily one of two attitudes - either that of administering a kick, or one like a figure of Buddha. Now I come to think of it, my father did look something like a Buddha, but his eyes were often abrim with geniality. Anyone could hazard the guess seeing him walk down a station platform, that he had preached to somebody in his day He had an oddly deferential air to everybody, as well as that air to which I refer of sanctified and comfortable importance. Halt him in his stride down the station platform and the hint of bombast fell from him, gave place to a large courtesy. He treated every man he met as though he too had preached to Queen Victoria and was not unduly puffed up about it. I think it is better to be a false god in a big easy fashion than to be those who kow-tow to the false gods. My father had chosen (as I see it, looking back on him) the better part; and he was genial. Of course there was doubtless a third choice - there often is when we think there are only two; he might have chosen not to be a parson. I know that

this air of geniality is discoverable in many selfish men.

Of this humbug I would say it was not of the devastating order I think the main fault was that he was a parson. Had he been a farmer tilling the acres of Lanark-Mains, and attending the local agricultural fairs in tweeds, with a cigar atilt under a reddening nose no one would have chuckled profanely over him at all." ¹¹

It is an assessment that is fair to the man, that recognises the good and bad in his personality. It is developed and refined over many pages in descriptions of conversations and family life, and we get a considerable insight into him.

Niven's interest in visual art is evident not merely in the allusions to painters and engravers , of which there is so much in Justice Of The Peace, but in the way he brings to his work the painter's eye for detail and colour. He talks for example of "the sky overhead all a wonderful blue hue like the inside of mussel-shells."¹² There are many memorable scenes in his work which draw on this kind of observation, like young Martin Moir's first visits to the restaurants and coffee houses in the city centre in Justice Of The Peace, or the episode in A Tale That Is Told when the narrator goes to Irvine in midwinter to visit the girl he loves. It is a long sequence but a short extract shows how Niven's descriptions are never mere padding, but blend with his

¹¹Ibid. pp.13-4.

¹²Justice Of The Peace op. cit. p.82.

characters' feelings. The warmth of anticipation at seeing Marjory is reflected in the town.

"I went on across the bridge that gives the street an effect as of leaping across the river. It was a 'gurly' river that day, occasional snowflakes came down, fluttered to its surface, and melted on the instant. The church spire seemed stiff with cold. The houses had more than their wonted appearance of huddling close like a flock of sheep when the wind is keen. The smoke from the chimneys told of broad hearths and snug interiors. There came upon me a comfortable thought that I had all eternity to live in and potter through the town." 13

While Justice Of The Peace is intriguing in its account of Martin's ambition and his relationship with his mother, and A Tale That Is Told inspires an admiration at Niven's skill, Mrs. Barry (1933) does something different again. It is a very moving novel. The undramatic story of a gentlewoman who has come down in the world and who has to provide for herself and her young son through her own efforts. She copes adequately for a time by taking in lodgers, but it turns out that she has a tumor of some sort and has only months to live. There is no self pity, she takes the discovery quietly and with composure, and her thoughts are only for her son's future. Niven handles the situation with impressive restraint avoiding the obvious temptation to play heavily on the reader's feelings. Indeed the story is all the more touching for the very simplicity with which it is told.

¹³ A Tale That Is Told op. cit. pp.156-7.

What matters above all is the character of Mrs. Barry, her courage, her natural dignity, and her concern for others. She goes about the business of providing for her son without any fuss, but with a steady resolve to see him fixed up before she dies. The scheming element in her nature which in another character may well have been unattractive - she sends her son to visit some wealthy friends, ostensibly as a social call but in the hope they will give him money - is just an indication that she accepts her position, and the necessity of taking what courses are open to her.

" "You did not see Lady Shaw, I suppose," she remarked.

"Oh yes. She gave me lunch. We had a very sustaining lunch indeed!"

Mrs. Barry's eyes were on him with a wistful expression.

"And - oh mummy - when I was coming away she gave me" - he drew a deep breath - "five shillings!"

That was what she had sent him to Miss Bryden hoping - not for five shillings necessarily, but for something, recalling how Lady Shaw on a former occasion had given him some money." 14

It is interesting to note that there is an element of sexual shyness in Mrs. Barry's relationship with her son that echoes, though in a milder form, what we find in Justice Of The Peace. She is determined to shield him from this aspect of life. Niven it would seem has

¹⁴Niven, Frederick. Mrs. Barry 1933 p.181

a particular fascination with this sort of family situation.

Despite the general restraint there are touches in Mrs. Barry and in his other novels where the kailyard creeps in, although the charge of producing "slabs of sentiment" is unjust exaggeration. (Again the connection with Galt, though of course it is by no means an exclusive legacy.) In Mrs. Barry there is the presentation of Christmas, complete with snow and blind carol singers, and in The Staff At Simson's for example the episode where the genial, kind hearted boss allows his employees out to play billiards when business is quiet.

Frederick Niven's rediscovery is long overdue. He is an important Scottish novelist and the best of the Glasgow writers. We find neither excitement nor dialectics in his work, nor does he have any theory of Scotland such as we find in George Blake. What we can expect instead are portraits well painted; people of interest for themselves. His grasp of the subtleties and complexities of human nature is excellent and he conveys them superbly.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The idea of a "Glasgow School" of novelists was given currency during the 1920s, but the expression is misleading since it suggests a coherence of purpose and direction that never in fact existed. It fails to discriminate firstly between natives of Glasgow who wrote novels about external subjects, and writers whose works were specifically set in the city, and secondly among the radically different kinds of books produced by the latter. Yet it is valid to talk more loosely about a Glasgow "genre" or "tradition" since, whatever their differences, the novels are all commonly defined by a geographical limitation. Apart however from the split response between a vision of Glasgow as an industrial centre and as a civilized city, important in very general terms, there is no all-embracing theory that covers them precisely because the setting is the one point of common contact. Throughout its 150 year history a variety of types of work have come under the umbrella of the Glasgow novel. What we do find are certain themes that appear often enough to be significant, and a number of groupings with their own characteristics. We noted for example the importance of ambition in the genre and saw the theme change over the years from grandiose Victorian dreams to more moderate twentieth century aspirations. Similarly we were aware of a particular response to urban society by women novelists and characters alike, which frequently led them to adopt a restrictive role.

The city's kailyard novels furnish another body of writing with its own identifiable qualities, in this case closely resembling their rural counterparts. Again the historical works obviously stand as a distinct group. In the final analysis however what emerges is a picture of diversity; examinations of political trends in the city's fiction, the development of realism, and the movement from religion to a concern with the personality emphasise the absence of a simple homogeneous picture. Each topic involves only certain novels and in most cases there is no natural link between topics.

The Glasgow novel over the years has developed but it has not progressed. Changes in subject matter and emphasis have followed trends in the wider world of English fiction, but there has been no continuing improvement in quality. Good novels have appeared not as part of a process but as isolated flowerings. The best have come from Sarah Tytler, Frederick Niven, Edward Gaitens and George Friel.

THE CONTEXT

The Glasgow novel remains minor literature. Yet it is significant on two counts; firstly as one piece in a jig-saw that makes up a picture of British fiction area by area; secondly it has, in Scottish terms, a national dimension as the main part of that literature's awareness of urban society and industrialism. We have

seen the genre's link with the mainstream of English literature in such things as the influence of Dickens in Victorian novels, of Scott in the historical examples, of Lawrence in Catherine Carswell Despite the latter however Glasgow fiction has been conservative in style and technique, has been neither innovatory in its own right nor shown itself susceptible to the wilder excesses of change. There has been no genuine stream of consciousness and no Glasgow anti-novel. The genre has followed traditional lines.

The relationship with other regional fiction is less obvious. In The English Regional Novel (1942) Phyllis Bently demonstrates that "almost every yard of English soil has been celebrated in English regional fiction"¹ and outlines characteristics which force us to admit that the Glasgow novel is neither unique in portraying provincial life itself, nor in large areas of its approach. She points to a frequently heavy use of dialect, to an interest in ordinary life and to a consciousness of place that at times becomes too local. We have ourselves noted the similarities between Love On The Dole (Lancashire) with its perception of humanity in the mass and the protest novels of Clydeside, and it is possible to draw comparisons between many Glasgow novels and examples of English industrial fiction. Indeed the case of George Woden, a native of Birmingham, illuminates this

¹Bently, Phyllis. The English Regional Novel 1942 p. 43.

since he wrote not only about Glasgow but set a number of novels in the English Black Country.

What is more important to our study however is the genre's immediate relations - the fiction of urban and industrial Scotland. The field is a wide one composed of several broad groups but some very brief comment is worthwhile. Firstly we have the fiction of the large city. There are a number of Edinburgh examples although nowhere near as many as are set in Glasgow. Scott of course dominates. His contribution is well known yet his largely historical focus needs note since this represents the major impulse of writers who have turned to the capital. The colour and romance of the past have attracted more interest than contemporary life. Some notable exceptions have been Christine Isabel Johnston who set her Elizabeth de Bruce (1827) in the Edinburgh of her own times, and more recently Campbell Nairne and Christine Orr in respectively One Stair Up (1932) and Hogmanay (1928). Nairne's novel in particular is reminiscent of much of the Glasgow genre during the Thirties. Again, in Ellen Adair (1913) and Old Soldier (1936) Frederick Niven produced novels similar to his Glasgow work but with an Edinburgh setting, and in Ombra The Mystery (1904) by Frederick Graves we get something much narrower - a novel that focused mainly on hospitals and medical students. Speaking very generally it is true to say that the impression we get from Edinburgh is less gloomy than that of Glasgow, that there is a more genuine interest in people and human idiosyncrasies.

For example in The Ferret Was Abraham's Daughter (1949) by Fred Urquart, the dynamism of the novel arises not from the tenement background which is similar to what we find in many Glasgow novels, but from the way Urquart blends the fantasy world of Bessie, his heroine, with a strongly established community feeling. It is a work of great liveliness. Similarly, Edward Albert's Herrin Jennie (1931) is full of colour. We find a theme of ambition by now familiar to us, but the Victorian world that it inhabits is more picturesque and cheerful than any corresponding Glasgow example. The other Scottish cities, Aberdeen and Dundee, did not produce fiction in the same kind of numbers. One novel that requires mention however is Charles Gibbon's A Princess Of Jutedom (1886), a rare example of industrial fiction set on the East coast. The scene is Dundee at the time of its great jute based expansion. The novel works on the same themes as The Beggar's Benison and paints a grim picture of materialism and the ruthless pursuit of riches among the chiefs of the industry. It is melodramatic, however, possibly because the author needed to spin out his tale over three volumes.

A second kind of work is the novel of the industrial town. There are many, among them Lennox Kerr's Glenshiel (1932) and Woman Of Glenshiel (1935) where the setting is Paisley; J.S. Martin's The Balance (1928) has a Lanarkshire background, as has Daniel MacDougall's Savage Conflict (1936). More modern are Robin Jenkins' Happy For The Child (1953) and The Thistle And The Grail

(1954). These novels all exhibit an awareness of a specifically industrial background which links them in varying degrees to the Glasgow genre. Somewhat different however are the urban novels that follow the trend set by George Douglas Brown's The House With The Green Shutters (1902) - presenting a jaundiced picture of the small community. The closest is A.J. Cronin's Hatter's Castle (1931), a shameless plagiarism which takes Brown's theme and characters and cheapens and debases them. Hugh Munro's Tribal Town (1964) is directly in this group. A more favourable treatment of small town life - in Kilmarnock - will be found in the work of William McIlvanney. Somewhat different are the studies of life in the mining industry of which an increasing number have appeared over the years. The novels of Tom Hanlin are set in Lanarkshire, as is James Welsh's The Underworld (1920). The latter's The Morlocks (1924) focuses on the Fife coalfields, while Jessica Stirling's The Spoiled Earth (1974) and The Hiring Fair (1976) feature Lanarkshire and the Lothians. Welsh however is the most interesting since his writing foreshadows certain examples of the Glasgow genre. The Underworld is a protest with an emphasis on working class organisation reminiscent of David Lambert in the 1950s, while The Morlocks demonstrates that Blake's The Wild Men (1925) was not the first Scottish novel to crystallise fears of a left wing revolutionary conspiracy, topical in the early Twenties, into a work of fiction. It deals with subversive cells within the mining unions which organise

and incite treason and violence on a national scale. Like The Wild Men, it is melodramatic fantasy set against a realistic background, but in this case the picture of the misguided revolutionaries is modified by a strong element of sympathy in the author's attitude.

The above remarks are in no way intended as even a brief survey of Scottish urban fiction but are meant merely to suggest in outline some facets of the broader tradition of which the Glasgow novel is a part. One important link however remains - the novels which deal with the PROCESS of urbanisation, the transition from the country to the city. Dot Allan's Deepening River gives us the development of Glasgow itself but only a few Scottish novels have dealt with the more general historical process. It is of course the pattern of A Scots Quair, each novel dealing with different stages of the theme: Sunset Song (1932) the land; Cloud Howe (1933) the town; Grey Granite (1934) the city. Chris Guthrie the heroine becomes a personification of Scotland and her career echoes the national experience, but her return to the land at the end (quite apart from the unreality of its portrayal in personal terms) does much to invalidate the trilogy's historical point. Scotland has become irreversibly urban and industrialised and Gibbon merely gives way to sentiment in his conception of Chris' destiny. The Land Of The Leal (1939) is James Barke's version of the same theme. Philosophically he is more consistent. The novel is a family story that follows several generations of Ramsays from rural

Galloway to Fife and finally Glasgow. Barke does not sacrifice the historical truth of their experience to sentiment. At the end of the novel Jean Ramsay, now old, remembers with nostalgia the Galloway of her youth but this is as near as she will ever get to it again. "It had been a long hard pilgrimage from the farm cot-house to this small window in the city wall. But here she was to know all the peace and rest she was to be granted this side of the grave."² Imaginatively and stylistically Barke is a far less accomplished writer than Gibbon. The Land Of The Leal is unrestrained and novelettish at times and the Glasgow section at the end, while it does present a good picture of working class life and socialist politics in the city during the inter-war years, is similar to Major Operation in its use of undigested propaganda.

These novels have treated the subject of transition on the grand scale but From Scenes Like These (1968), Gordon Williams' fine novel, confronts us with the actual physical face of change, of the urban world creeping up on the country. This quotation sums up the vision of the book:

"Willie had seen them preparing a factory site before. First they carted away the topsoil. For a year or so they'd drive in lorryloads of rubbish from the corporation destructor, tipping it on to the fields, bulldozing it flat, the dirty rubbish from the town, ash and cans and muck. They'd

²Barke, James. The Land Of The Leal 1939 p. 637

bulldoze the hedges. While the coup was being laid the sky would be dark with crows and seagulls. Packs of rats would swarm over the rubbish. The fields round about would be covered in dust and the roads littered with papers and cans and cardboard boxes off the lorries. Combustible waste would smoulder under the surface, its dirty, stinking smoke reeking the whole countryside. The whole place would become an eyesore. Then one day they'd have levelled it up to their requirements and they'd begin to lay³ the foundations for the factories."

What we are aware of then is the Glasgow genre as part of a many-sided tradition of fiction about urban and industrial Scotland.

THE GLASGOW NOVEL IN THE FUTURE

The story of the Glasgow novel is of course an ongoing one. There is every reason to believe that works set in the city will continue to be produced at a steady rate. The last few years have seen the publication of as many examples as any similar period. However there is no evidence to suggest that the genre may be on the brink of throwing up an outstanding novel that can rank with the best in English fiction. One cannot of course account for genius but in so far as one can predict future possibilities from past trends we can find little hope of excellence. A number of less than ideal features are apparent. The inwardness and tendency

³Williams, Gordon. From Scenes Like These 1968 p.166.

to be ultra local, although seen less since the war, has continued. There has been a persistent refusal to think in world terms. I suggested in Chapter Six that the best evocations of Glasgow came when writers, instead of pursuing it directly, showed it as a by-product of some other interest, so the great Glasgow novel if it comes may be a working of genuinely universal themes and topics which JUST HAPPEN to be set in Glasgow and are not consciously located there. The picture since 1970 however is essentially uninspiring and current trends in terms of both quality and subject matter are largely a repetition of well-trodden paths. The novel seems unable to free itself from an obsession with the past and with stereotyped conceptions of Glasgow life. In 1970 J.M. Reid's Judy From Crown Street was posthumously published. The focus was tenement life in the 1930s. It is a competent novel, handling personal relationships well and expressing the familiar theme of ambition, but it is no more. Reid gives us no new insights. 1971 followed with The Dark Horizon by Alexander Highlands, another excursion into pre-war Glasgow. In some ways it is reminiscent of The Shipbuilders. The background of the yards is similar and in the Blairs and the Sinclairs Highlands creates an employer-worker axis that parallels the Pagans and the Shields in Blake's novel. The Dark Horizon however has novelettish features - like the romance between the shipyard owner's son and the driller's daughter - that are a symptom of the author's lack of real inspiration. His work is derivative; it is not a response to

contemporary life but essentially an extended cliché. The backward looking stance of The Dark Horizon and Judy From Crown Street is typical of the genre in the Seventies. There has been a conspicuous reluctance to deal with modern Glasgow. As we have seen M.T. Davis, the most prolific of recent writers, with five Glasgow novels within four years has only one - The Prisoner - (1974) which deals with the city today. Her others are a trilogy about the late Thirties and the war years and a historical romance set in the eighteenth century. The historical impulse was also continued by John Quigley who turned from the contemporary world of his two previous novels to write about the Victorian city in Kings Royal (1975) and Pamela Hill whose The Incumbent (1974) is a romance set in the nineteenth century city. Similarly Elizabeth Kyle, after two decades of silence produced Free As Air (1974) and Down The Water (1975), romantic novels set in Edwardian Glasgow. Kyle admittedly cannot be seen as indicating future trends since these works represent the tail end of a career. It is more surprising however to find the first and only novel of folksinger and songwriter Matt McGinn set in wartime Glasgow, as his songs are generally contemporary and topical. Fry The Little Fishes (1975) is about life in a Catholic approved school based on McGinn's own adolescent experiences. It is a mediocre book lacking in insight or vitality. The characters - like the sadistic Brother Gabriel - are crudely portrayed and never come to life. The episode

on the Glasgow streets is superficial and unreal.

James Anderson Russel and William Henderson cast back a decade earlier for their material. The latter's King Of The Gorbals (1973) was, we noted, based extensively on the life of boxer Benny Lynch. Russel's novel - The Scorner's Chair (1973) took by contrast an intellectual background. It deals with politics in the Glasgow of the Thirties and German fascism. The hero is a divinity student at Glasgow University who goes to Germany to study and gets involved in a series of adventures including a flight from the Nazis. He returns to Glasgow to take up a chair of theology, only to be forced out of it because of his unorthodox views. It is a flimsy and incredible novel, in no way helped by the sterile philosophical musing that crops up towards the end.

The only Glasgow novelists to have turned their eyes on their own times to any purpose in the Seventies are George Friel, Evelyn Cowan and Chaim Berman. Friel's Mr. Alfred M.A. is a fine novel in which many of the concerns of his earlier works come to full maturity. However An Empty House, with which he followed in 1974, was less accomplished and somewhat repetitive in concept. Friel's work promised the most for the future of the genre but this came to nothing with his death in 1975. Chaim Berman added to his Glasgow writing in 1976 with The Second Mrs. Whitberg but it is not as good as Jericho Sleep Alone. It is the somewhat superficial story of a Glasgow Jewish middle aged widower and the new women

in his life. A second Jewish writer to have come to prominence in the city is Evelyn Cowan. In Spring Remembered (1974) she produced a charming picture of her childhood in the Gorbals, but her first novel Portrait Of Alice (1976) inhabits a very different world. It is the same middle class Jewish circle of Bermant's Jericho Sleep Alone but the focus has switched from youth to middle age. The heroine, Alice Gazoont, is married to a wealthy businessman, has a grown up family and a lovely home. Although her lot on the surface seems perfect, Alice is unhappy and unfulfilled. When we meet her she has just emerged from hospital after a nervous breakdown. The novel is a continuation, at a more serious level than we find in Bermant, of the post-war Glasgow writer's interest in personality. We get a sympathetic picture of Alice's dilemma and the pressures that act on her. We see her marital disharmony and her unease at her husband's materialism, her alienation from the Jewish community and its religious tenets, her disappointment at her children's life styles and her failure at times to fully grasp reality. Cowan has ability and Portrait Of Alice is a competent first novel, yet there are faults. At times it is cliched, particularly when the author employs the technique of drawing parallels with the cinema, and there are melodramatic elements that sit ill with the overall thoughtfulness.

Cowan may well go on to do better things, and with Bermant increase the Jewish element in the Glasgow genre, but it would be wrong to overemphasise this as a possible

trend. With a population of only about fourteen thousand to draw on it is unlikely that their ranks will be significantly added to. What is very likely however is that other immigrant writers will produce novels set in their own communities, just as in the past the Glasgow-Irish have contributed works like The Dance Of The Apprentices. The Glasgow-Pakistani novel for example is a possibility. This need not necessarily be written in English, and already some short stories set in Glasgow have appeared in Asian language magazines.

APPENDIX A

CRIME AND DETECTIVE NOVELS

There are a number of these, mostly wooden potboilers where the Glasgow setting is of little consequence. Only a few are interesting. The earliest is David Sliman's Man Hunting or, The Hounds Of The Law, (1888) which purports to be a retired detective's actual cases presented in fictional form. In 1903 William Robertson produced Morris Hume Detective, a Glasgow version of the Sherlock Holmes formula - the investigator with remarkable powers, master of disguise. Afterwards, with the exception of some turgid offerings by George Woden, few of these novels appeared until after the last war. Bill Knox has been the most prolific with a series featuring Chief Inspector Thane and Inspector Moss of the Glasgow police, and other works. The quality however is always low. Somewhat better are Hugh C. Rae's Skinner (1965) which was based on the Peter Manuel case, Boyd and Parker's The Dark Number (1973), where a man returns to Glasgow to investigate his wife's disappearance, Hugh Miller's violent The Open City (1973) a story of underworld revenge and, published in the same year, James Wood's North Beat, a police procedure story about the crimes encountered in twenty-four hours of a detective's life. The only book which in any way evokes the atmosphere of Glasgow is The View From Daniel Pyke (1974) produced by Bill Knox and Eddie Boyd from television scripts by the latter.

LIST BY AUTHOR

- Boyd, E. and Knox, B. The View From Daniel Pyke. 1974.
- Boyd, E. and Parker, R. The Dark Number, 1973.
- Calvin, H. (pseud. Cliff Hanley). The D.N.A. Business
Affair. 1967.
- Cassells, John. Death Comes To Rothesay. 1949.
- Crawford, Ian. Scare The Gentle Citizen. 1966.
- Duncan, William. Mystery On The Clyde. 1945.
- Knox, Bill. Deadline For A Dream. 1959.
- Knox, Bill. Death Department. 1959.
- Knox, Bill. Leave It To The Hangman. 1960.
- Knox, Bill. Die For Big Betsy. 1961.
- Knox, Bill. Death Calls The Spot. 1961.
- Knox, Bill. Little Drops Of Blood. 1962.
- Knox, Bill. The Taste Of Proof. 1966.
- Knox, Bill. Justice On The Rocks. 1967.
- Knox, Bill. To Kill A Witch. 1972.
- Knox, Bill. Draw Batons. 1973.
- Mackinnon, Alan. Dead On Departure. 1964.
- Macvicar, Angus. The Golden Venus Affair.
- Malloch, Peter. Eleven Twenty Glasgow Central. 1955.
- Malloch, Peter. Kickback. 1973.
- Miller, Hugh. The Open City. 1973.
- Rae, Hugh C. Skinner. 1965.
- Rae, Hugh C. The Marksman. 1971.
- Robertson, William. Morris Hume Detective. 1905.
- Slaney, G.W. The Cathkin Mystery. 1937.
- Sliman, David. Man Hunting, or The Hounds Of The Law. 1888.
- Trocchi, Alexander. Young Adam. 1961.

Woden, George (pseud. of G.W. Slaney). The Threefold
Mystery. 1923.

Woden, George. The Mystery Of The Amorous Music Master.
1951.

Wood, James. North Beat. 1973.

APPENDIX B

Glasgow as a city with distinctive qualities and a splendour of its own, as seen by native observers.

From: History Of Glasgow (1804) by J. Denholm pp.159-91

"The Coffee Room of the Tontine is 72 feet in length, and of a proportional breadth, and is universally allowed to be the most elegant in Britain, and possibly in Europe. Its main entry is from the Town House or Exchange.

Subscribers are entitled to the use of the room, newspapers and magazines, of which no Coffee Room in Britain can boast a greater variety. For here are not only the whole Scotch papers, but also the greater part of those published in London, as well as some from Ireland, France, etc. besides reviews magazines and other periodical publications. At the daily arrival of the mail, a more stirring, lively and anxious scene can hardly be imagined. Here you are not offended as in London and several other towns, upon entering places of this description, with clouds of smoke and fumes of tobacco, or with that brutal noise, proceeding from the too free use of liquor; neither of which is allowed to be used in the room."

The History Of Glasgow (1881) by George MacGregor p.515.

"Perhaps no city in the kingdom is better or more regularly laid out. The long lines of regular streets, the freestone buildings in all styles of architecture - some of these buildings grand and imposing - have a most favourable impression upon the stranger."

And: p.516

"Glasgow has now reached the proud position of being the second city in the empire. To that dignity it has advanced with remarkable rapidity, and there appears to be no relaxation of the energy which has accomplished that result."

Architecture Of Glasgow (1968) by A. Gomme and D. Walker p.12.

"Not only is Glasgow one of the few cities in Britain which can claim a very strong local tradition in architecture, developing almost independently of the rest of the country: it has also a recognisable local style. And this style is important in ways different from any of the several styles which occupied the Victorian architectural stage in England."

Glasgow - The First 800 Years (1975) by Hugh Cochrane published by City Of Glasgow District Council p.48.

"As Glasgow's industrial strength became more widely known abroad, the rich and famous came to visit it. Indian rajahs, members of the Japanese Royal Family, Chinese statesmen, and the Shah of Persia brought their shopping lists. They wanted ships, locomotives and machinery. The Grand Duke Alexis of Russia gabbled excitedly, that Glasgow was 'the centre of intelligence of England' when he came to the launching of the 'Livadia', the royal yacht of the Czar."

APPENDIX C - 1

Specimen of the phonetic approach
to modern Glasgow speech: from
Honest by Tom Leonard p.46 of
Three Glasgow Writers (1976) -
The Molendinar Press.

It will be obvious why nobody has yet attempted to write a whole novel in this manner, as it becomes tedious even in small doses.

HONEST

A canny even remembir thi furst thing a remembir. Whit a mean iz, a remembir aboot four hunner thingz, awit wance. Trouble iz tae, a remembir thim aw thi time.

A thinka must be gon aff ma nut. Av ey thoat that though - leasta always seemti be thinkin, either am jist aboot ti go aff ma nut, or else am already affit. But yi ey think, ach well, wance yir aff yir nut, yill no no yiraffit. But am no so sure. A wish a wuz.

Even jist sitn doonin writn. A ey useti think, whenever a felt like writn sumhm, that that wiz awright, aw yi hud to say wuz, ach well, a think ahl sit doonin write sumhm, nyi jiss sat doonin wrote it. But no noo, naw. A canny even day that for five minutes, but ahl sitnlookit thi thing, nthink, here, sumdayz wrote that afore. Then ahl go, hawlun aw thi books ootma cupboard, trynti find out hooit wuz. Nwither a find out or no, it takes me that long luknfurit, a canny be bothird writn any mair, wance av stoapt. An anyway. a tend ti think, if it's wan a they thingz that might uv been writn before, there's no much point in writin it again, even if naibdy actually huz, is there?

It's annoyin - a feel av got this big story buldn up inside me, n ivri day ahl sit down, good, here it comes, only it dizny come at all. Nthi thing iz, it's Noah's if a even no what thi story's goany be about, coz a doant. So a thinkty ma cell, jist invent sumdy, write a story about a fisherman or sumhm. But thi longer a think, thi mair a realise a canny be bothird writn aboot a fisherman. Whut wid a wahnti write about a fisherman fur? N am

no gonny go downti thi library, nsay, huvyi enny
booksn fisherman, jiss so's a can go nread up
about thim, then go n write another wan. Hoo
wahntsti read a story about fisherman anyway,
apart fray people that wid read it, so's they could
go n write another wan, or fisherman that read?
A suppose right enough, thi trick might be, that
yi cin write a story about a fisherman, so
long as thi main thing iz, that thi bloke izny
a fisherman, but a man that fishes. Or maybe that
izny right at all, a widny no.

APPENDIX C - 2

Glasgow speech circa 1900. From Erchie My Droll Friend (1904) p.43 by Hugh Foulis (Neil Munro) - Blackwood.

Carnegie's Wee Lassie

" 'Well,' says she at that, 'I think I'll hae a hairy-heided lion.'

" 'Hairy-heided lion. Right!' says Mr. Carnegie. 'Ye'll get that, my wee lassie,' and cries doon the turret stair to the kitchen for his No. 9 secretary.

"The No. 9 secretary comes up in his shirt sleeves, chewin' blot-sheet and dighting the ink aff his elbows.

" 'Whit are ye thrang at the noo?' asks Mr. Carnegie as nice as onything to him, though he's only a kind o' a workin' man.

" 'Sendin' aff the week's orders for new kirk organs,' says the No. 9 secretary, 'and it'll tak' us till Wednesday.'

" 'Where's a' the rest o' my secretaries?' asks Mr. Carnegie.

" 'Half o' them's makin' oot cheques for new leebraries up and doon the country, and the ither half's oot in the back-coort burning letters frae weedows wi' nineteen weans, nane o' them daein' for themsel's, and frae men that were dacent and steady a' their days, but had awfu' bad luck.'

" 'If it gangs on like this we'll hae to put ye on the night-shift,' says Mr. Carnegie. 'It's comin' to't when I hae to write my ain letters. I'll be expected to write my ain books next. But I'll no' dae onything o' the kind. Jist you telegraph to India, or Africa, or Japan, or wherever the hairy-heided lions comes frae, and tell them to send wee Maggie ane o' the very best at 50 per cent aff for cash.'

APPENDIX D

This letter to Niven from R.B. Cunninghame Grahame sums up the fact that character is the essential quality of Niven's work. All his comments revolve on it.

It is in an unpublished collection in the Bailie Library, Glasgow.

79A Elizabeth Street,
London S.W.1.

April 21/ 33.

My Dear Niven,

"Mrs. Barry" is really splendid. How well you have drawn, the brave and sympathetic woman.

Even to read of such a woman makes one think better of humanity. Mr. Amara is excellent also. You have not fallen into the mistake of making him talk in modern English a very wearisome thing to read. You have indicated that he did speak modern English and that is enough. That was Conrad's way. The man "deaved" his readers with long ill spelled sentences.

To say you know "Glesca" well is almost an impertinence. You might have created it. The two doctors are very good. They soon become personal friends. Dr. Craig's "You owe me a shilling but you can leave it" I quote from memory, is a coup de genie, and shows the man better than most people's tedious pages of description. May I put in a very gentle criticism. I do not like in the last sentence "She had found rest." It is not like the book and it was obvious that she had found it. May I suggest without offence that "Mrs. Barry did not answer. She had not heard (or did not hear) the bell" would read, I will not say better but more like yourself?

All my congratulations on your fine piece of work.

Yours Etc.,
R.B. Cunninghame Grahame.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. THE GLASGOW NOVEL

- Anon. How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish: a tale of 1890.
Glasgow, 1884.
- Alexander, Thomas. Charles Gordon, or The Mask Of Friendship.
Glasgow, 1865.
- Allan, Dot. The Syrens. London, 1921.
- Allan, Dot. Makeshift. London, 1928.
- Allan, Dot. Deepening River. London, 1932.
- Allan, Dot. Hunger March. London, 1934.
- Allan, Dot. Charity Begins At Home. London, 1958.
- Arnold, Frederick. Alfred Leslie. Glasgow, 1856.
- Bell, John Joy. Wee Macgreegor. Glasgow, 1902.
- Bell, John Joy. Ethel. Edinburgh, 1903.
- Bell, John Joy. Wee Macgreegor Again: a sequel. Glasgow,
1904.
- Bell, John Joy. Thou Fool. London, 1907.
- Bell, John Joy. Courtin Christina. London, 1913.
- Bell, John Joy. Wee Macgreegor Enlists. London, 1915.
- Bell, John Joy. The Nickums. Glasgow, 1923.
- Bell, John Joy. The Braw Bailie. London, 1925.
- Bermant, Chaim. Jericho Sleep Alone. London, 1964.
- Bermant, Chaim. The Second Mrs. Whitberg. London, 1976.
- Black, Charles Stewart. Peter Meiklejohn: a tale of Old
Glasgow. London, 1925.
- Blair, John. Jean. London, 1906.
- Blake, George. Mince Collop Close. London, 1923.

- Blake, George. The Wild Men. London, 1925.
- Blake, George. Young Malcolm. London, 1926.
- Blake, George. The Shipbuilders. London, 1935.
- Blake, George. David And Joanna. London, 1936.
- Buchan, John. Huntingtower. London, 1922.
- Burgess, Moira. The Day Before Tomorrow. London, 1971.
- Campbell, Robert W. Private Spud Tamson. Edinburgh, 1916.
- Campbell, Robert W. Sergt. Spud Tamson. V.C. London, 1918.
- Campbell, Robert W. Snooker Tam Of The Cathcart Railway.
Edinburgh, 1919.
- Campbell, Robert W. Winnie McLeod. London, 1920.
- Campbell, Robert W. Jimmy McCallum. Edinburgh, 1921.
- Carlton, Alexander. University Sunrise. Glasgow, 1969.
- Carswell, Catherine. Open The Door. London, 1920.
- Carswell, Catherine. The Camomile. London, 1922.
- Cleland, Mary. The Two Windows. London, 1922.
- Cleland, Mary. The Sure Traveller. London, 1923.
- Cockburn, John. Tenement. Edinburgh, 1925.
- Cowan, Evelyn. Portrait Of Alice. Edinburgh, 1976.
- Craig, Robert. Lucy Flockhart. London, 1931.
- Crawford, Archibald. Tartan Shirts. London, 1936.
- Cronin, Archibald Joseph. Shannon's Way. London, 1948.
- Cronin, Archibald Joseph. A Song Of Sixpence. London, 1964.
- Davis, Margaret Thomson. The Breadmakers. London, 1972.
- Davis, Margaret Thomson. A Baby Might Be Crying. London, 1973.
- Davis, Margaret Thomson. A Sort Of Peace. London, 1973.
- Davis, Margaret Thomson. The Prisoner. London, 1974.
- Davis, Margaret Thomson. The Prince And The Tobacco Lords.
London, 1976.

- De Haven, Audrey (pseud. of Dreda Boyd). The Scarlet Cloak.
Edinburgh, London, 1907.
- Dominie (pseud. of Jacob Morrison). The Great Trek. Glasgow,
1941.
- Douglas, O. (pseud. of Anna Buchan). The Setons. London, 1917.
- Douglas, O. Ann And Her Mother. London, 1922.
- Douglas, O. Eliza For Common. London, 1928.
- Duncan, Henry. The Young South Country Weaver or A Journey
To Glasgow. Edinburgh, 1821.
- Eccott, W.J. The Second City. Edinburgh, 1912.
- Eyre-Todd, George. Anne Of Argyle. London, 1895.
- Falconer, Eric. Droll Glasgow. Glasgow, 1905.
- Fergus, Blythswood (pseud. of Rev. W. Fergus). Satan On
Holiday. Glasgow, 1903.
- Fergus, J.W. Bill Broon Territorial. Kirkintilloch, c. 1911.
- Fleming, Zachary (pseud. of Henry Johnston). Martha Spreull:
being chapters in the life of a single wumman.
Glasgow, 1884.
- Ford, Elbur (pseud. of E.A.B. Hibbert). Flesh And The Devil.
London, 1950.
- Foulis, Hugh (pseud. of Neil Munro). Erichie My Droll Friend.
Edinburgh, 1904.
- Friel, George. The Bank Of Time. London, 1959.
- Friel, George. The Boy Who Wanted Peace. London, 1964.
- Friel, George. Grace And Miss Partridge. London, 1969.
- Friel, George. Mr. Alfred M.A. London, 1972.
- Friel, George. An Empty House. London, 1974.
- Gaitens, Edward. Growing Up. London, 1942.
- Gaitens, Edward. Dance Of The Apprentices. Glasgow, 1948.
- Gavin, Catherine. Clyde Valley. London, 1938.
- Goodchild, George and Roberts, Bechhofer. The Dear Old
Gentleman. London, 1936.

- Gordon, C.M. Jet Ford. Glasgow, 1880.
- Govan, Allan. High Adventure In Darien. London, 1936.
- Gunn, Neil Miller. Wild Geese Overhead. London, 1939.
- Gunn, Neil Miller. The Lost Chart. London, 1949.
- Hanley, Clifford. The Taste Of Too Much. London, 1960.
- Hanley, Clifford. The Red Haired Bitch. London, 1969.
- Haynes, Dorothy K. The Gibsons of Glasgow. Published
as part of Triad Two ed. by Jack Aistrop.
London, 1947.
- Henderson, William. King Of The Gorbals. London, 1973.
- Hendry, James F. Fernie Brae. Glasgow, 1947.
- Highlands, Alexander. The Dark Horizon. London, 1971.
- Hill, Pamela. The Incumbent. London, 1974.
- Hind, Archie. The Dear Green Place. London, 1968.
- Hunter, Stewart. This Good Company. London, 1946.
- Hunter, Stewart. The Happiest Hour. London, 1953.
- Jenkins, Robin. Guests Of War. London, 1956.
- Jenkins, Robin. The Changeling. London, 1958.
- Jenkins, Robin. A Very Scotch Affair. London, 1968.
- Kennaway, James. The Cost Of Living Like This. London, 1969.
- Kyle, Elizabeth. Douce. London, 1950.
- Kyle, Elizabeth. The Tontine Belle. London, 1951.
- Kyle, Elizabeth. Free As Air. London, 1974.
- Kyle, Elizabeth. Down The Water. London, 1975.
- Lambert, David. He Must So Live. London, 1956.
- Lambert, David. No Time For Sleeping. London, 1958.
- Lavin, John J. Compass Of Youth. London, 1953.
- Levenax, David (pseud. of C.E. Beckett). Plain Tales Of
The City And Suburbs. Glasgow N.D. C.1900.
- Lewis, Morag. Shushie: A Glesga Love Affair. Glasgow, 1904.

- McArthur, Alexander and Long, H. Kingsley. No Mean City. London, 1935 (1957 paperback edition).
- McArthur, Alexander and Watts, Peter. No Bad Money. London, 1969 (1971 paperback edition).
- McCrone, Guy. The Striped Umbrella. London, 1937.
- McCrone, Guy. Antimacassar City. London, 1940.
- McCrone, Guy. Wax Fruit. London, 1947.
- McCrone, Guy. Aunt Bel. London, 1949.
- McCrone, Guy. The Hayburn Family. London, 1952.
- McCrone, Guy. James And Charlotte. London, 1955.
- McCrone, Guy. An Independent Young Man. London, 1961.
- McCulloch, David. The Swinging Tub. London, 1917.
- McGhee, Bill. Cut And Run. London, 1962.
- MacGill, Patrick. Children Of The Dead End. London, 1914.
- MacGill, Patrick. The Ratpit. London, 1915 (1971 paperback).
- McGinn, Matt. Fry The Little Fishes. London, 1975.
- McKechnie, Samuel. Prisoners Of Circumstance. London, 1934.
- McMillan, Archibald. Jeems Kaye. Glasgow, 188-.
- McNeillie, John. Glasgow Keelie. London, 1940.
- Mair, Alistair. The Douglas Affair. London, 1960.
- Mair, Alistair. The Ripening Time. London, 1970.
- Mills, George. Craiglutha. Glasgow and Edinburgh N.D. c. 1849.
- Mills, George. The Beggar's Benison. London, 1866.
- Mirvish, Robert. Woman In A Room. London, 1959.
- Morrison, Nancy Brysson. When The Wind Blows. London, 1937.
- Morrison, Nancy Brysson. The Following Wind. London, 1954.
- Morrison, Nancy Brysson. Thea. London, 1963.
- Muir, Edwin. Poor Tom. London, 1932.
- Muir, Marie. Leezie Lindsay. London, 1955.
- Muir, Thomas. The Sea Road. London, 1959.
- Munro, Hugh. The Clydesiders. London, 1961. (1968 paperback edition).

- Nicolson, Robert. Mrs. Ross. London, 1961. (Penguin paperback as The Whisperers 1966).
- Nicolson, Robert. A Flight Of Steps. London, 1966.
- Niven, Frederick, Justice Of The Peace. London, 1914.
- Niven, Frederick. A Tale That Is Told. London, 1920.
- Niven, Frederick. Mrs. Barry. London, 1933.
- Niven, Frederick. The Staff At Simson's. London, 1937.
- Pae, David. The Factory Girl. Aberdeen, 1885.
- Pryde, Helen.W. The First Book Of The McFlannels.
London, 1947.
- Pryde, Helen W. The McFlannels See It Through. London,
1948.
- Pryde, Helen W. McFlannels United. London, 1949.
- Pryde, Helen W. McFlannel Family Affairs. London, 1950.
- Pryde, Helen W. Maisie McFlannel's Romance. London, 1951.
- Quigley, John. The Bitter Lollipop. London, 1964.
- Quigley, John. The Golden Stream. London, 1970.
- Quigley, John. Kings' Royal. London, 1975.
- Rae, Hugh C. Night Pillow. London, 1967.
- Reid, John M. Homeward Journey. Edinburgh, 1934.
- Reid, John M. Judy From Crown Street, Ilfracombe, 1970.
- Roy, George. Generalship. London and Glasgow, 1858.
- Russel, James A. The Scorner's Chair. Midlothian, 1973.
- Shiels, Edward. Gael Over Glasgow. London, 1937.
- Simpson, Joseph W. Mair Macjigger. Glasgow, 1903.
- Steuart, Katherine. Richard Kennoway And His Friends.
London, 1908.
- Strain, Euphans. A Prophet's Reward. Edinburgh and London,
1908.
- Swan, Annie S. The Guinea Stamp. Edinburgh, 1892.
- Tait, W. Cumming. The Wise Thrush. London, 1937.
- Teaddy (pseud.) Sir Colin Cut Up And Co. London, 1857.

- Tytler, Sarah. St. Mungo's City. London, 1885.
- Watson, Robert. Me And Peter. London, 1926.
- Weyman, Alfred J. The Dangerous Man. London, 1888.
- Woden, George (pseud. of G.W. Slaney). Mungo. London, 1932.
- Woden, George. Tannenbrae. London, 1935.
- Woden, George. The Bailie's Tale. London, 1937.
- Woden, George. Happiness Has No Story. London, 1938.
- Woden, George. Dusk For Dreams. London, 1941.
- Woden, George. Messenger At Arms. London, 1947.
- Woden, George. Simonetta. London, 1952.

B. OTHER FICTION

- Albert, Edward. Herrin' Jennie. London, 1931.
- Barke, James. The Land Of The Leal. London, 1939.
- Blake, George. The Constant Star. London, 1945.
- Blake, George. The Westering Sun. London, 1946.
- Brown, George Douglas. The House With The Green Shutters.
London, 1902.
- Campbell, Robert. W. Spud Tamson's Pit. London, 1926.
- Cockburn, John. The Hungry Heart. London, 1956.
- Cronin, A.J. Hatter's Castle. London, 1931.
- Dawson, G.H. Ivan Ludovic And The Race For Wealth. Edinburgh 18
- Dickens, Charles. The Old Curiosity Shop. London, 1841.
- Dickens, Charles. Bleak House. London, 1852.
- Dickens, Charles. Hard Times. London, 1854.
- Flaubert, Gustav. Madam Bovary. Paris, 1856.
- Galt, John. Annals Of The Parish. Edinburgh, 1821.
- Galt, John. Sir Andrew Wylie. Edinburgh, 1822.
- Galt, John. The Provost. Edinburgh, 1822.
- Galt, John. The Entail. Edinburgh, 1823.
- Galt, John. The Gathering Of The West. Edinburgh, 1823.
- Gibbon, Lewis Grassic (pseud. of J.L. Mitchell). Sunset
Song. London, 1932 (1973 paperback).
- Gibbon, Lewis Grassic. Cloud Howe. London, 1933.
- Gibbon, Lewis Grassic. Grey Granite. London, 1934.
- Gissing, George. The Nether World. London, 1889.
- Golding, William. Lord Of The Flies. London, 1954.
- Graves, Frederick. Ombra The Mystery. Edinburgh, 1904.
- Greenwood, Walter. Love On The Dole. London, 1933.
(1972 paperback edition)

Hamilton, Thomas. The Youth And Manhood Of Cyril Thornton.
Edinburgh, 1821.

Hay, Ian. The First Hundred Thousand. Edinburgh, 1915.

Jenkins, Robin. Happy For The Child. London, 1953.

Jenkins, Robin. The Thistle And The Grail. London, 1954.

Johnstone, C.I. Elizabeth De Bruce. Edinburgh, 1827.

Kerr, Lennox. Glenshiels. London, 1932.

Kerr, Lennox. Woman Of Glenshiels. London, 1935.

Lockhart, John Gibson. Peter's Letters To His Kinsfolk.
Edinburgh, 1819.

Marshall, Bruce. All Glorious Within. London, 1944.

Martin, John Smellie. The Balance. London, 1928.

MacDougall, Daniel. Savage Conflict. London, 1936.

McIlvanney, William. Remedy Is None. London, 1966.

McIlvanney, William. A Gift From Nessus. London, 1968.

Munro, Hugh. Tribal Town. London, 1964.

Nairne, Campbell. One Stair Up. Edinburgh, 1932.

Niven, Frederick. Ellen Adair. London, 1913.

Niven, Frederick. Old Soldier. London, 1936.

Orr, Christine. Hogmanay. London, 1928.

Rae, Hugh C. The Saturday Epic. London, 1970.

Robertson, Emma. Madeleine Graham. London, 1864.

Scott, Walter. Waverley. Edinburgh, 1815.

Scott, Walter. Rob Roy. Edinburgh, 1817.

Smollet, Tobias. The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker.
1771.

Stirling, Jessica. The Spoiled Earth. London, 1974.

Stirling, Jessica. The Hiring Fair. London, 1976.

Tressell, Robert. The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists.
London, 1955.

Twain, Mark. Tom Sawyer. U.S.A. 1876.

Urquart, Fred. The Ferret Was Abraham's Daughter.
1947.

Welsh, James C. The Underworld. London, 1920.

Welsh, James C. The Morlocks. London, 1924.

Williams, Gordon. From Scenes Like These. London, 1968
(1970 paperback edition)

C. BACKGROUND, HISTORY AND CRITICISM

- Aird, Andrew. Glimpses Of Old Glasgow. Glasgow, 1894.
- Allan, Walter. The English Novel. London, 1954.
- Auden, W.H. Collected Shorter Poems. London, 1966.
- Bentley, Phyllis. The English Regional Novel. London, 1942.
- Blake, George. Barrie And The Kailyard School. London, 1951.
- Blake, George. The Trials Of Patrick Carragher. London, 1951.
- Blake, George. Annals Of Scotland. B.B.C. publications 1956.
- Bolitho, William. Cancer Of Empire. London, 1924.
- Bonnar, Robert. James Barke: A True Son Of The Soil in Essays In Honour Of William Gallacher - Humbolt University, Berlin, 1966.
- Brown, Walker D. Clydeside Litterateurs. Glasgow, 1897.
- Bryden, Bill. Benny Lynch. Edinburgh, 1975.
- Bridie, James. Dr. Angelus. London, 1950.
- Buckley, J.H. The Victorian Temper. London, 1952.
- Butter, P.H. Edwin Muir. Edinburgh, 1962.
- Butter, P.H. Edwin Muir: Man And Poet. Edinburgh, 1966.
- Carswell, Catherine. Savage Pilgrimage. London, 1932.
- Carswell, Catherine. Lying Awake. London, 1950.
- Cecil, David. Early Victorian Novelists. London, 1934.
- Cochrane, Hugh. Glasgow - The First 800 Years. Glasgow, 1975.
- Cockburn, Henry. Memorials Of His Time. Edinburgh, 1856.
- Cowan, Evelyn. Spring Remembered. Edinburgh, 1974.
- Craig, David. Scottish Literature And The Scottish People 1680-1830. London, 1961.
- Dale, John. Progress Of The Novel. New York, 1962.
- Daniell, David. The Interpreter's House: A Critical Assessment Of John Buchan. London, 1975.

- Darlow, Thomas Herbert. William Robertson Nicoll: Life And Letters. London, 1925.
- Davie, George Elder. The Democratic Intellect. Edinburgh, 196
- Davies, Ross. Women And Work. London, 1975.
- Denholm, J. History Of Glasgow. Glasgow, 1804.
- Douglas, Sir George. The Blackwood Group. Edinburgh, 1897.
- Drummond, A.L. and Bulloch, James. The Church In Victorian Scotland. Edinburgh, 1975.
- Dunbar, Janet. J.M. Barrie. London, 1970.
- Ensor, R.C.K. England 1870-1914. London, 1936.
- Fergusson, Robert. Poetical Works. (Paisley 1905 edition).
- Fleishman, Avrom. The English Historical Novel. Baltimore and London, 1971.
- Forster, E.M. Aspects Of The Novel. London, 1927.
- Freeman, John. Literature And Location. London, 1963.
- Frykman, Erik. John Galt's Scottish Stories 1820-23. Upsala, 1959.
- Furst, L.R. and Skrine, P.N. Naturalism. London, 1971.
- Gibbon, Lewis Grassie (pseud. of J.L. Mitchell). A Scots Hairst ed. Ian Munro London, 1967.
- Glen, Duncan. Hugh MacDiarmid And The Scottish Renaissance. Edinburgh, 1964.
- Gomme, A. and Walker, D. Architecture Of Glasgow. London, 196
- Haldane, Elizabeth S. The Scotland Of Our Fathers. London, 19
- Hamerton, J.A. Sketches From Glasgow. Glasgow, 1893.
- Hamilton, Henry. The Industrial Revolution In Scotland. Oxford, 1932.
- Hanley, Clifford. Dancing In The Streets. London, 1958.
- Harriston, William. The City Mirror or, A Glasgow Minature. Glasgow, 1824.
- Hogg, James. The Confessions Of A Justified Sinner. Edinburgh, 1824.

- James, Henry. Hawthorn. London, 1879.
- Joyce, James. A Portrait Of The Artist As A Young Man.
New York, 1916.
- Keddie, Henrietta. Three Generations. London, 1911.
- Kellet, John R. Glasgow: A Concise History. London, 1967.
- Leclaire, Lucien. Le Roman Regionaliste Dans Les Isles
Britanniques 1800-1950. Paris, 1954.
- Leonard, Tom in Three Glasgow Writers. Glasgow, 1976.
- Lindsay, Maurice. Portrait Of Glasgow. London, 1972.
- Liverani, Mary Rose. The Winter Sparrows. Melbourne, 1975.
- Lloyde, A.L. Folk Song In England. London, 1967.
- Lockhart, John Gibson. Life Of Scott. Edinburgh, 1837.
- Lukacs, Georg. The Historical Novel. London, 1962.
- MacKenzie, Peter. The Life Of Thomas Muir. Edinburgh,
1831.
- McDiarmid, Hugh (C.M. Grieve). Contemporary Scottish
Studies 1926 (1976 Edition, Edinburgh).
- McInnes, Peter. Ten And Out. Bournemouth, 1961.
- McGregor, George. The History Of Glasgow. Glasgow, 1881.
- McUre, John. History Of Glasgow. Glasgow, 1736.
- Martin, David. The Glasgow School Of Painters. London,
1897.
- Marwick, W.H. Economic Developments In Victorian Scotland.
London, 1936.
- Mill, John Stewart. The Subjection Of Women. London,
1869.
- Morrison, David ed. Essays On Neil M. Gunn Thurso, 1971.
- Muir, Edwin. Scott And Scotland. London, 1936.
- Muir, Edwin. An Autobiography. London, 1954.
- Muir, James Hamilton (pseud. of James Bone, A.M. Charteris
and M. Bone). Glasgow in 1901. Glasgow, 1901.
- Mumford, Lewis. The Culture Of Cities. London, 1936.
(1948 edition).
- Munro, Neil. The Looker-On. Edinburgh, 1933.

- Nicoll, Mildred Robertson. The Letters Of Annie S. Swan. London, 1945.
- Niven, Frederick. Coloured Spectacles. London, 1938.
- Oakly, Charles A. The Second City. Glasgow and London, (3rd edition).
- Pinchbeck, Ivy. Women Workers And The Industrial Revolution. London, 1930.
- Pritchett, V.S. The Living Novel. London, 1946. (1960 paperback edition).
- Roebuck, Janet. The Making Of Modern English Society From 1850. London, 1973.
- Roughhead, William. The Trial of Dr. Pritchard. London, 1906.
- S cott, Alexander and Gifford, Douglas (ed.) Neil M. Gunn: The Man And The Writer. Edinburgh, 1973.
- Sillitoe, Percy. Cloak Without Dagger. London, 1955.
- Shadow (Alexander Brown). Midnight Scenes And Social Photographs. Glasgow, 1858.
- Smout, T.C. A History Of The Scottish People 1560-1830. London, 1969.
- Spiers, John. The Scots Literary Tradition. London, 1962.
- Swan, Annie S. The Lam I Love. London, 1936.
- Synge, J.M. The Playboy Of The Western World. Dublin, 1907.
- Symons, Julian. The Detective Story In Britain. London, 1962.
- Third Statistical Account Of Scotland: Glasgow. Glasgow, 1958.
- Thompson, E.P. The Making Of The English Working Class. London, 1963 (paperback 1968).
- Vicinus, Martha. The Industrial Muse. London, 1974.
- Watt, Ian. The Rise Of The Novel. London, 1957 (paperback 197
- Weber, Max. The Protestant Ethic And The Spirit Of Capitalism. London, 1930.
- Weir, Molly. Shoes Were For Sunday. London, 1970.
- Williams, Raymond. The Country And The City. London, 1973.
- Wordsworth, William. The Prelude. 1928 ed. Oxford.

D. PERIODICALS

Advertisement in Glasgow Courier 4 April 1820.

Anon. "The Glasgow Accent" St. Mungo Nov. 2 1905 p.111.

Anon. "Captain Campbell's Latest" The Bailie 31 March 1926.

Anon. Review of "How Glasgow Ceased To Flourish" The Bailie
12 March 1884.

Angus, Robert. "Two Scottish Novels" The Scottish Nation
6 Nov. 1923.

Burgess, Moira. "Robin Jenkins: A Novelist Of Scotland"
Library Review Vol. 22 No. 9 Winter 1970.

Burgess, Moira. "A Glasgow Novel" Library Review Vol. 22
No. 7 Autumn 1970.

Cockburn, John. "The Scottish Novel" Scots Observer 25
Feb. 1933.

Day, A.E. "From Irish Navy To Royal Librarian" Library World
Vol. 71 No. 831 Sept. 1969.

Drawbell, James. "Are There No Annie S. Swan Books Nowadays?"
Scots Magazine, New Series Vol. 89 No. 1 April 1968.

Dunlop, John. "The Spirit Of Niven" Scottish Field, Vol.
102 No. 623 Nov. 1954.

Hanley, Clifford. "The Writer in Scotland" New Saltire,
No. 5, August 1962.

Hanley, Clifford, "Glorious Gallus Glasgow" Evening Times
8 March 1976.

Hodge, David. "Wee Macgregor Twenty Five" Bookman No. 434,
Vol. 73 Nov. 1927.

Hunter, Stewart. "Waters Of Change" Scots Magazine, new
series, Vol. 94 No. 4 Jan. 1971.

Jenkins, Robin. "Novelist In Scotland" Saltire Review,
Vol. 2 No. 5 Autumn 1955.

Jenkins, Robin. "The Novelist's Quest For a Suitable Theme"
Scottish Library Association: Proceedings Of The
Annual Conference 1956.

Keir, Walter. "Scottish History And Scottish Fiction"
Saltire Review Vol. 1 No. 1 April 1954.

- Letters in The Word March 1947, May 1947, Oct. 1947.
- Lochhead, Marion C. "The Glasgow School" Scots Magazine
Vol. 4 No. 4 Jan. 1926.
- Mackay, Hugh. "The Novels of James Kennaway" Library Review
Vol. 23 No. 6 Summer 1972.
- Mitchell, Jack. "The Struggle For The Working Class Novel
In Scotland" The Scottish Marxist No. 6 April 1974.
- Morgan, Edwin. "The Beatnik In The Kailyard" New Saltire
No. 3 Spring 1962.
- Muir, Edwin. "New Paths In Fiction: The Scottish Novel
Since The War" Glasgow Herald: Book Review
Supplement 22 Nov. 1934.
- Murison, David. "As You Were Saying" Evening Times 3 March 197.
- Pye, Michael. "James Kennaway" The Scotsman 23 May 1970.
- Reid, Alexander S. "A Scottish Chekhov?" Scotland's Magazine
Vol. 58 No. 3 March 1962.
- Reid, Alexander S. "The Era Of Annie S. Swan" Scotland's
Magazine Vol. 56 No. 3 March 1960.
- Scouller, Edward D. "My View Of The Scots Novel" Scotland
Vol. 3 No. 4 Winter 1938.
- Stewart, Agnes. "Scottish Novelists" The Northern Review
May 1924.
- Thomson, Alastair R. "Faith And Love: An Examination Of
Some Themes In The Novels Of Robin Jenkins"
New Saltire No. 3 Spring 1962.

E

BIBLIOGRAPHIES

- Aitken, W.R. Scottish Fiction Reserve: A List Of The Authors Included In The Scheme. Coatbridge 1955 (Scottish Library Association).
- Burgess, Moira. The Glasgow Novel 1870-1970. Glasgow 1972.
- Ferguson, C.S. and Emslie, G.C. A Selected List Of Glasgow Novels. Glasgow, 1950.
- Leclaire, Lucien. A General Analytical Bibliography Of The Regional Novelists Of The British Isles, 1850-1950. Paris, 1954.

F

UNPUBLISHED SOURCES

50 letters from George Mills to George and Mrs. Cruickshank between 1848 and 1875 in The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

11 letters of R.B. Cunninghame Grahame to Frederick Niven dated between 1933 and 1935. Also one letter by Mrs. Niven to John Dunlop librarian of Baillie's Library dated 1956. In Baillie's Library, Glasgow.

All references to works are to the first editions unless otherwise indicated.

