POSTCOLONIAL RESISTANCE: CLASS, GENDER AND RACE IN MCILVANNEY'S *THE BIG MAN**

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ABSTRACT

This article is an extension of previous work on the Scottish writer, William McIlvanney, situating McIlvanney's novel, *The Big Man* (1986), within postcolonial theoretical concerns. Drawing on the postcolonial writing of Edward Said, Diane Brydon and Simon During, McLuckie uses the three point definition of Mishra and Hodge —power imbalance, second language, race— to illustrate the viability of postcolonial analyses within former colonial terrain, thus expanding postcolonialism as an *exclusive* term. The class, gender and limited race analysis of *The Big Man* leads to an inclusive, experience-based postcoloniality (in narrative strategy and theme) that promotes articulation and action.

KEY WORDS: Postcolonialism, language, race, class, gender, Scottish literature, McIlvanney, articulation, agency.

RESUMEN

Este artículo es una extensión de trabajos previos realizados sobre el escritor escocés, William McIlvanney, en el cual se sitúa a la novela *The Big Man* (1986) dentro de ámbitos teóricos postcoloniales. Basándonos en los escritos postcoloniales de Edward Said, Diane Brydon y Simon During, utilizamos la definición tripartita de Mishra y Hodge —desequilibrios de poder, segunda lengua, raza— para ilustrar la viabilidad de los análisis postcoloniales dentro de los antiguos dominios coloniales, hasta considerar al postcolonialismo como un término *exclusivo*. El análisis de clase, género y raza limitada, efectuado sobre *The Big Man,* nos conduce a un postcolonialismo inclusivo y basado en la experiencia (en cuanto a estrategia narrativa y temática) que promueve la articulación y la acción.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Postcolonialismo, lengua, raza, clase, género, literatura escocesa, McIlvanney, articulación, agencia.

1. INTRODUCTION

McIlvanney's rebellion (i.e., his postcolonial resistance) in *The Big Man* (1986) shows how he highlights, to paraphrase Brydon, the hidden difference of class in Thatcherite Britain:

I believe that one disaster of our time has not been a physical event. It is something much more widespread, more lasting, more crippling to our subsequent aspirations. It is the perceived shipwreck of social idealism —the loss of belief in our ability significantly to reconstruct society towards a more justly shared community of living. (McIlvanney, *Surviving* 11)

Where this loss was initiated is problematic and produces diverse responses. In part, for McIlvanney, the perpetrators were monetarists of Thatcher's ilk, and, in part, it has been a disillusionment or apathy with socialism, where people have forgotten or have been trained to forget the specific and local, personal nature of that kind of life: "an attempt to share as justly as we can with one another the terms of human existence" (12). McIlvanney admonishes us to rediscover social idealism. He calls for "a way to coexist justly with our dreams, to let them share our reality without trying to coerce them to be it. In the search for what may not be there we will surely discover that we are not as much as we wish we were but just as surely that we are more than we thought we were" (12). Dan Scoular, in *The Big Man*, undertakes the search, arriving at a renewed belief in his fellow (wo)man and himself, through the text's examination of class, gender and, to a lesser extent, race.

Tom Nairn offers a slightly different perspective than McIlvanney, which builds on McIlvanney's work. Nairn's essay is a work of revaluation and "re-commitment" at a literary and political level. Using McIlvanney's short story, and later telescript, "Dreaming" Nairn examines the nation's state:

[McIlvanney's Sammy Nelson, a] protesting revolutionary [,] wanted to finish off certain native customs and attitudes —those things about ourselves which we just can't stand one minute longer, although we may have to stand them for the rest of our lives. This betrays something crucial about Scottish identity. Scotland is not a colonised culture, but a self-colonised one. [The] oppression... has historically been largely self-inflicted and self-sustained. The Scots were not conquered, or forcibly assimilated. They conquered and partly assimilated themselves, over a remarkably long period of time for good reasons and opportunities, chances it appeared unreasonable for a small and marginal nation to refuse. But at the same time they have always resented doing so... In Scotland... such resentment immediately encounters a peculiar obstacle. It is inevitably, and in a historical sense rightly, linked to self-hatred and a degree of self-disparagement. Unlike nearly all other colonised or forcibly assimilated peoples, the Scots really do have mainly themselves to blame, and so mainly themselves —or a part of themselves— to attack and destroy. (6)

Nairn, like Edward Said, focusses on a distraction to the task of uniting to face those forces amassing against us. Where Said writes that "Separatist or nativist enterprises strike me as exhausted" (Said, "Figures" 16), Nairn is placing the burden

* For Michèlle McLuckie and Ross Tyner.

on the Scottish people themselves to sit up and take notice of their condition. But, Nairn needs to realize that lengthy periods of psychological conditioning and force of circumstance have produced the people's condition. It has not been a wholly internal process. How much of the economic, political, and intellectual colonization that the Scots (and Scoular) experience has been created by monetarists (Mason), then slowly internalized, as Milosz provocatively argues in *The Captive Mind* (1995) before it is rejected? Were the people to do so, the easy option of blaming others for conditions could be forgotten and all could unite to what Said calls "the notion of opposing coercive domination, transforming the present by trying rationally and analytically to lift some of the burdens of the past" (Said, "Figures" 17).[1] It is an immense and valuable task, one which McIlvanney creatively participates in to move beyond Kelman's valuable but limited contribution of identity politics, to reach those, anywhere, who will listen. Far from the politics of exclusion of Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin, we see in Said, and in McIlvanney, writers who promote inclusion in social change. McIlvanney's work is set in Scotland and is primarily addressed to the people there because that is the community he sees most affected, daily, and which is the one where change has to begin for him. There is also, between McIlvanney and Nairn, and other Scottish writers a fluctuation between responses to different levels of individual, communal, and imperial responsibility. Thus McIlvanney's resistance is both "'primary resistance', literally fighting against outside intrusion" and "ideological resistance, when efforts are made to reconstitute a 'shattered community, to save or restore the sense and fact of community against all the pressures of the colonial system'..." (Said, "Themes" 209).[2]

2. WORKING CLASS TRADITION AND CHANGE

Dan Scoular, the central character in *The Big Man*, is a dramatic embodiment of this process of self-discovery, through conflict with myths of his past, primarily those constituted *for* him by the community. Scoular is "The Big Man" who can fell others with a single punch, but those punches arise from an underpinning

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[1] Said warns against national identity and a politics of opposition generally that relaxes its vigilance, "since there is the inherent danger to oppositional effort of becoming institutionalized, marginality turning into separatism, and resistance turning into dogma... there is always a need to keep community before coercion, criticism before mere solidarity, and vigilance ahead of assent" (Said, "Connecting Empire" 54). It is an echo of McIlvanney's remarks: "You want a measurement of people? Then, if you wish to remain Scottish, here it is. You will measure them by the extent of their understanding, by the width of their compassion, by the depth of their concern and by the size of their humanity" (McIlvanney, "Stands Scotland" 21). The position is for a local humane socialism.

[2] McIlvanney's strategy in the opening of *Docherty* is instructive here, for he opens with events of world, primarily imperial, history, but ends on the import of an individual within a hitherto (un)acknowledged community.

of decency instilled in him by his father's physically reinforced sense of honour and his mother's ironic wordplay: his father beats Dan to teach him only to use his fists with cause, while his mother reminds him that he might be a big man, but a "wee coat fits" him. The need of a cause and the need to grow, to develop, are central ideas in McIlvanney's deconstruction of artifice and construction of the real because he perceives the necessity of our willingness not to espouse an idealised and fossilised working class tradition, but rather to "re-earn the possession [and renewal] of [it]. Tradition doesn't survive in a vacuum —it survives on living re-commitment" (McIlvanney, "Stands " 21).

McIlvanney's choice of epigraph ("What is a rebel? A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation.") and his explication of that epigraph (McIlvanney, *Surviving* 217-38) stand as the novel's thesis, with the incomplete first paragraph as the direction of Scoular's quest from the instinctive sense of injustice against Vince Mabon to a clear and conscious denial of Matt Mason. Camus concludes his paragraph thus: "He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself. A slave who has taken orders all his life, suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command. What does he mean by saying 'no'?" (Camus 19). Camus continues,

> In other words his 'no' affirms a borderline... He rebels because he categorically refuses to submit to conditions that he considers intolerable... Rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that somewhere, in some way, you are justified... Thus he implicitly brings into play a standard of values so far from being false that he is willing to preserve them at all costs. (19)

Unquestionably, this is the situation we find Dan Scoular in, though his 'no' is enunciated "'Hey'... Some basic feeling had expressed itself beyond his conscious control" (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 57). McIlvanney stays close to the argument Camus outlines in his essay, to the point that following an investigation of the self, Dan Scoular finds meaning and a reason for his 'rebellion' in community. Camus concludes his first chapter with:

> ...we can sum up the initial progress that the spirit of rebellion accomplishes in a process that is already convinced of the absurdity and apparent sterility of the world. But from the moment that a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience —as the experience of everyone. Rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. I *rebel* —therefore we *exist*. (Camus 28)

But, why choose rebellion as a form of resistance rather than revolution? In "A Shield Against the Gorgon," McIlvanney reveals his sceptical side:

> A rebellion denies categories, a revolution invents them. Rebellion is made by individuals, revolution is made by committees. The loneliness of the rebel establishes kinship. The kinship of revolutionaries establishes loneliness. One proclaims individuals, one denies them... Revolution is a bourgeois and essentially reactionary phenomenon because it deifies the establishment, the principle of the establish-

ment. It is petrified rebellion... But rebellion is pragmatic and salvationary. It moves forward constantly in doubt. It tries to confront the simplifications and lies of ideology and dogma with experience, the reality of our living... To be true to our own experience... is to rebel to a more just way of living. (McIlvanney, *Surviving* 237)

Humanist, socialist, intensely passionate and subjective, McIlvanney's position has a strong appeal. It is clear that McIlvanney has related concerns to theoreticians in the field of postcolonial discourse, writing from the perspective of a moral and committed critic like Edward Said. What is it that Dan rebels against? How does he achieve his sense of self as communal being, in relation to class, gender and race? Is there something in the process, other than a real inquiry into self and a scepticism that can contribute to postcolonial theory?

The first question is answered immediately following Dan's verbal, then physical defence of Vince: an inquiry into the nature of his community, why "nobody else voted with him... He felt his isolation, and his head was left to work out how to follow where his heart had led" (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 58). Theory, then, follows praxis for Dan;[3] he reflects on and interrogates his life and actions; we see a symbiotic relationship between the two, the real, felt experience initiates it though —a model not unlike Aristotle's *Poetics* where theory grew out of praxis to produce a benchmark statement about aesthetics.

I will restrict my comments to six parts of the novel: the community's labelling of Dan, Dan's marital relationship, the working class conflict, his relationship to the drug-dealer, Matt Mason, Dan's return to the community, and the issue of language —all are inextricably bound together in the the renewal of *a* working class identity.

3.1. LABELS: THE EXTERNAL SELF

Tom Nairn writes that "The subordinate or marginalised community has both to try to remain itself on the one hand, and to live with the dominant state on the other. In that sense, identity-dilemmas... are a commonplace feature of identity" (Nairn, "Scottish Identity" 7). We see this in McIlvanney and Scoular's interrogation. Even the sound of Scoular's name (scholar, aurally) is prescient to the educational agenda McIlvanney has. Who is Dan Scoular? Scoular stands for Scotland as much as for himself and the community of Thornbank.[4] The closing of the narrative for expository ends provides an answer:

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[3] "Generalisations are abstract and to that extent comfortable. The individual experiences behind them are not" ("Stands" 19).

[4] "It is this sense of self-identity, the fathoming of the complex answers to the simple questions of 'who are you and where are you from?' which is central to [the novel]... It's no wonder that Dan is inarticulate, because McIlvanney gives him the responsibility for speaking for Scotland" (Dunion 27).

> Theorists rode in from time to time from their outposts of specialisation, bearing news that was supposed to make all clear. Television was setting bad examples. Society had become materialistic. Schools had abdicated authority. The hydrogen bomb was everyone's neurosis. What was certain was that Graithnock did not know itself anymore... Thornbank, as the child copes with the parents' problems, was suffering too... This communal sense of identity found its apotheosis in a few local people... There was Dan Scoular... His most frequently commented on talent was a simple one. He could knock people unconscious very quickly... It wasn't easy to see why such a minimal ability of such limited application should have earned him so much status... Thornbank, like a lot of small places... had a legendising affection for anything local that was in any way remarkable. (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 20-2)

This abbreviated summary becomes more specific as people begin to populate it. The reversal of imperialist discourse —specialists are not at the centre— and the refinement through two levels of community to an individual iterates the necessity of the experienced, the individual. Simultaneously, McIlvanney is drawing connections between the levels to allow a form of Lukácsian character type, where individual *is* community.

The relationships pose a problem because Thornbank and Graithnock are no longer defined by physical prowess, by their ability to produce as workers in the economy. For Scoular, the "people were giving him back a sense of him that in no way matched what was going on. His statue didn't fit" (23). Consequently, McIlvanney has Scoular interrogate the community's label for him —"big man" (22)— to offer a redefinition of the community.

Initially the definition rules Scoular —"What they needed him to be they had partly accustomed him to be." (23)— to the extent that his wife Betty concludes: "he was wasting himself. He let days happen to him" (37). His sense of self is lost to others' perceptions. Mason, the antagonistic force, acts as the catalyst to bring Dan out of his malaise and to begin the process of self redefinition. It starts with a realization that he has been set-up, accompanied by Betty's critique of his ways:

> He thought of something Betty had once said of him: "When you walk into a room, the only attitude that seems to occur to you is, 'What game do you play here? I bet I can play that as good as you.' It never seems to occur to you to say, 'I don't believe in that game...' Why do you think you have to accept the rules?" (58)

The passage is central, in its relation to the novel's epigraph from Camus, and to what Scoular will achieve. To know ourselves is to determine our fate. As with the scene at the Red Lion pub, Scoular becomes conscious too late that he's entered another person's game, another set of rules on several occasions. He is the 'dancing bear', as Betty Scoular's comments will show.

Where he does separate from others' rules and games is in relation to his own people, his parents, the villagers, his wife, and Cutty Dawson: the working class, in its disparate energies and foci. With respect to each of these people, Dan

expects understanding because of greater or lesser degrees of *shared experience*. Where his experience differs a space opens for critique and adaptation. With Mason, Dan has little shared experience and so is caught off-guard. His parents, while able to provide endless support after he was born, "couldn't follow him, even in imagination, into the newness of his experience. They had conceived him to be an extension of their own lives, not a contradiction of them" (83). The contradiction is time and circumstance, a fossilizing of their idealised working class perspectives and an accompanying inability to adapt their resources in the face of modernised weaponry and "tactics of social exploitation [that] developed unforeseen subtleties that outmanoeuvred their principles completely" (123). This and Scoular's reaction against the communally-imposed label give him a known foundation to start from; Cutty Dawson arrives as a coalesced form of both sets of working class principles, now prejudices. So, Dan defines himself there through opposition to the community he is an integral part of, but not clearly, positively, non-oppositionally. With Betty, the process begins in a similar fashion, ending not in bludgeoning the past but in tentatively seeing the future.

3.2. MARRIAGE: INTIMATE SELF

> If [Neil Gunn] indulges in a kind of gender kailyard, he has a contemporary successor in William McIlvanney's nostalgic paeans to a heroic masculinity for which post-industrial Scotland no longer (thankfully) has a place. (Whyte XI.)

I begin with this passage to underscore the abject silliness and lack of contextualization of much criticism. Whyte may well have found a Scottish writer at whom he can and does "take potshots" (XI), but that is about as strenuous as the thinking gets. Taking an example from *Docherty*, an industrial novel, to make a point about gender representation in *post*-industrial Scotland, Whyte wilfully perverts his material. Similarly, the claim that "The idealised family worlds of Gunn and McIlvanney are alien to the tradition of Glasgow fiction" (XVI)! Followed by: the claim that Glasgow fiction "has tended [in contrast to Gunn and McIlvanney] to concentrate on gender alienation, on male figures rich in pathos who fail to obtain nurturing from cold and distant wives" (XVI). And, concluding with the claim that "female characters cannot be comprehended or embraced (verbally, structurally) by the male author" (XVI) is superficially shown. Surely, *The Big Man*, published nine years before Whyte's comments and dealing with post-industrial Scotland, would have been a more obvious and generous choice, as we shall see.

The marital self is significant to McIlvanney's concern with communal renewal, for it allows the deconstruction of the "hard man" mythology with which he is said to be complicit (see, for example, Calder, *Revolving Culture* 215, 230) in novels like *Docherty*. If such macho stereotypes are allowed to go unchallenged, then a significant portion of the reconstituted community and its valuable contribution remains silenced. Betty Scoular, Dan's wife, narrates portions of the novel, not to have another voice support some idealistic image of Dan, although it serves that

purpose too, but rather to give voice to different concerns and to aid in the deconstruction of the myth.

Betty is conscious of the need for some structures, seeing them as a way of getting started, not the final word: "They gave you a few lines of ritual dialogue that came from God knows what lexicon of antiquated male prejudice and the rest of your life was endless improvisation..." (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 25). Before Dan awakens to systems that affect his and his family's lives, Betty has begun the critique, in a dense section (23-33) analyzing marriage, ceremony, and social role. Aware of Dan's intuitive decency, she is also aware of the shortcomings attached to it: "Betty saw what he was doing... She felt a familiar feeling in relation to him, emotional agreement locked with rational despair. She had never doubted his intelligence and she had never stopped doubting how he applied it. All he was doing for these people was providing the cabaret, being the party's dancing bear" (103). Dan does not see as quickly as Betty. This is part of the reason for their slow estrangement. Another more significant part is the search Betty is going through to revivify her own sense of self.

Where Dan's search takes him to a fight from which he experiences rejection symptoms, Betty's search takes her to Gordon Struthers. She is not defining herself through yet another man or social institution, time itself is the more important element: "Sitting holding hands with Gordon in their lounge bar, she knew she was waiting for something to happen, for time to infiltrate the sureness of Gordon's theory with event —discovery of their secret, Dan's withdrawal from the fight, something. She was waiting for time, but not much time, to make her clearer to herself" (106). Time, though, dissipates into what looks suspiciously like waiting, a limbo, where definition will come from outwith the self. Hence Betty's interest in Dan's newfound energy (99-100), however misdirected she feels it is. Again, the importance in this relationship is the love built into two people improvising their ways together.

Wullie Mairshall, of the traditional school of the working class, alerts Dan to Betty's affair with Gordon (99; 110-1); Dan's response is to go to "their lounge" and see. He does not feel like a "working-class avenging angel" (153); he wants to know how he will act, not how he is supposed to act (153-4). The process of interrogating defining systems from all/any sides is well underway. The big surprise for readers waiting for a lounge bar battle is the one Dan experiences in his own head. Betty, out of the context of their marriage, is reborn, becomes "incomprehensibly herself" (158). Reversals take place, as Dan begins to define himself through Betty, enlarging the complexity of an initially inner, individual quest. "Experience was an unlearning of certain kinds of knowledge, not a garnering but a stripping off" (159) that leads to new articulations, new assessments of what has become deadened by habit. Far from taking the easy option of fighting his wife's companion, Scoular makes the more difficult choice of seeing reasons for her presence there.

It is these realisations from localised experience that permit Scoular to reshape himself; in the renewal of their marriage, he doesn't *take* it for granted that Betty wants him —he offers (a gift) himself. Betty has the power to "take it or leave it!" (246). Betty's decision is expected as a result of too little exploration of her

involvement with Struthers; schematically, in this thesis novel, she has "given up an idea [Struthers] for a passion [Scoular]" (256); the effort is not over as they struggle to communicate through small acts their commitment to each other. This is one instance where Beth Dickson's trenchant observation about the struggle of McIlvanney's heroes does not hold true: "McIlvanney's heroes [']... methods lead to the disintegration, not the affirmation, of the self" (Dickson, "Class and Being" 59). Rather, Betty Scoular's search complements Dan's renewal of self and self-in-community. Passion, experience, articulation are elevated over intellect and abstraction; the local over the universal. Betty comes to this position, ahead of Dan, through time; Dan comes to it in the midst of a brutal fight. She, then, is the exemplar.

3.3. THE BRAWL: DISCOVERING THE SELF

> It is best when Caliban sees his own history as an aspect of the history of all subjugated men and women, and comprehends the complex truth of his own social and historical situation. (Said, "Themes" 214)

Before the fight, Scoular has a need to discover Cutty Dawson (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 80), thus a concern with people is evident. McIlvanney employs a similar strategy to peel back Dawson's identity: Scoular walks the streets of Glasgow to get a sense of the man from his place (130). Scoular still intends to fight Dawson, but instinct tells him to get a sense of the man.

This sense of the opponent is necessary because he fights himself in the bare-knuckled brawl as much as he fights Cutty Dawson. Scoular cannot "through the ceremony of habit [make] the day real for" himself (163). Contact with Cutty will achieve that, will help him to understand why he participates in a fight that is wrong —because it has been arranged by someone else (177). He is uninvolved because the event does not arise either naturally from his experience, nor has it been prepared for, considered, and executed by himself. Cutty, on the other hand, "seemed sure enough of the rightness of what was happening" (177); he does not reflect. Once underway, the fight pulls together familial and communal history with the present moment. In Cutty's "intractable" smile (178) Dan perceives a weakness: the same working class ideal's adopted and unchanging view of right. This moment is the beginning of Scoular's formulation, for himself, of a renewed tradition, but it requires the defeat of the past.

Positively Dan sees that he and Cutty "were expressing something jointly" (185), where the event's meaning derives from those involved. The experience is not shared though as Cutty sides with the crowd's (outsiders') comments on what he and Dan experience. The crowd's and Cutty's certainties echo the certainties of his parents, of the heritage he was bequeathed. Cutty's blind right eye, thus, is transformed into a symbol for a generational blindness in the working class (and in the colonised generally). Before regeneration can occur Dan has to repeatedly hit Cutty in his blind eye, symbolically defeating the certainties of the past. Any sense Scoular subsequently develops about identity, community and value will be, as a result of

his actions here, no more than *provisional*. Provisionality does have the benefit of elasticity and multiple adaptations.

Far from rejecting Cutty in his defeat, Scoular seeks him out to understand where they have been. Only participants, those who have shared the experience, can achieve this end. At the hospital Scoular lies when he announces Cutty is "ma brother" (209), an utterance repeated by Cutty for Scoular (211). Similarly, Cutty's mother, wife and daughter are identified as Dan's mother's "descendants" and Cutty is seen as Dan's father's "true heir" (214). The claim to familial ties is a bridge constructed from experience; that it is between two fictional Scottish characters does not prejudice its applicability between two or more real people of differing race or ethnicity.

Dan "hadn't won. Cutty had lost. His [i.e., Dan's] father had lost" (214). Intra-communal battles may be over,[5] but external battles remain now that a position, provisional as it is, has been determined: "Both fighters had lost. Only the promoters had won" (216). The fight tied to larger socio-economic forces, Scoular needs to build on the lessons learned.

3.4. MATT MASON: THE COLONIZER OF SELF

Gavin Wallace writes:

> Dan Scoular... articulates through his fists his defence of the morality of his fictional predecessor [Tam Docherty], though against a contemporary political and social context decidedly more sophisticated and cynical in its power to control and distort lives, whether through a monetarist rule which destroys communities or the city heroin barons who perpetuate exploitation and violence. (Wallace, "Stubborn" 2; Wallace & Stevenson 221)

The two are related, as Mason's veneer of respectability illustrates; or, as McIlvanney's depiction of Mrs. Thatcher as a "cultural vandal" amply attest (McIlvanney, "Stands Scotland" 20). The one gives a degree of credibility to the other: "the policies of [Thatcher's] government... are a licence issued to the wealthy to exploit the poor" (19).

And exploitation or colonization of Thornbank's resources, in the shape of Scoular, is precisely what Mason is after. From the opening paragraphs, where the red haired boy (the symbol of rebellion in McIlvanney's work, such as in the poem "Eugenesis"), identifies Mason's Mercedes as "'A shark. A great white'" (McIlvanney,

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[5] Simon DURING argues that "The 'postcolonialist' paradigm... fails to account for the ways in which postcolonial societies are internally divided. This division is perhaps most dramatic in the former settler colonies..." (During 343). The evidence is to the contrary in postcolonial fiction, as the example illustrates. Similarly, the work of Narogin Mudrooroo and other postcolonial writers suggests otherwise.

The Big Man 11) and he and his companions hum the theme tune of *Jaws*, we are aware of Mason's predatory nature; indeed, the boy's (and the book's) opening command "Look" alerts us to the need for examination and attention. From this exterior perspective, as in his other works, McIlvanney closes the narrative in on an 'interior' perspective, that of Mason, Foley, and Fleming in the car. The two views coexist and affect one another, no matter how much of a "passer-by" (12; a tourist, in the vocabulary of Laidlaw) we or the men in the car may think we are. The juxtaposed descriptions and perspectives force us to *see*, less myopically and self-interestedly, the inter-relatedness of apparently disparate elements (we become travellers).

Why are Mason and his crew predatory? Because they enunciate an attitude of the times that needs to be demolished. They have no interest in the countryside they are passing through; they dismiss people, places, things without thought: "'Did Fast Frankie mention this place?' [asked one, while the other replied] 'Has anybody ever?'" (12). The *ethos* of Mason and his crew reveals the changed nature of life; he is impatient, does not want a "history" of the place, nor to "socialize" (14). Business-like, looking at the destination and the balance sheet, his world is sterile. They wonder who thought up the name of the Red Lion pub (17), underscoring their lack of interest in anything but profit,[6] their loss of a sense of national symbols.

Suspense built and taken to an edge with Billy Fleming preparing for a fight, McIlvanney's narrator breaks the story to take us on a visit to an industrial town, decaying, its people stagnating in unemployment. The narrative shift is there to make those who haven't experienced such a life look and attend to what is happening. The synopsis is simplified, yet it produces enough of a picture that we can see the disappearance of a distinct and valid culture:

> When there was nowhere for him to turn up, what could he do? Like so many of the towns of the industrial West of Scotland, Graithnock had offered little but the means to work. It had exemplified the assumption that working men are workers. Let them work. In the meantime, other people could get on with the higher things, what they liked to call 'culture'. At the same time the workers had made a culture of their own. It was raw. It was sentimental songs at spontaneous parties, half-remembered poems that were admitted into no academic canon of excellence, anecdotes of doubtful social taste, wild and surrealistic turns of phrase, bizarre imaginings that made Don Quixote look like a bank clerk... In Graithnock, that secondary culture had been predominant... the pub talk flourished, the stories were oral novels... But it was all dependent on money [i.e., work]. (19)[7]

[6] Eddie Foley is an exception to the other two; he is complicit in their activities *and* has an interest in where they are, though he keeps it hidden after Mason's rebukes about wasting time.

[7] The parallel with postcolonial subjects' oral traditions is most striking in the narrator's depiction of working class culture here.

Thatcher's monetarist policies and their implementation led to the loss of work, opening up new avenues of exploitation for the Masons.

Mason tests Dan in the structured insult of Vince Mabon that leads to Dan's first rebellion. Almost immediately the fight is over, Dan is conscious of a puppet-master pulling strings; he is, however, without work and Mason's offer —to fight against another man in a bare-knuckle contest for entertainment— is seductive. Yet Dan does not stop asking questions, putting his standards on hold for the duration of his 'employment'; when he states that "there's money and there's money" (63), we observe the need for vigilance, especially in circumstances where others are involved: "Dan couldn't think at the moment of one certainty, except the feeling he had to use himself in some way for his family" (68). The obligation ("had to") combined with the negative term ("use") show the conflicting emotions; where the former is usually undertaken willingly, the latter smacks of functionalism.

Mason has a different conception of family, where their "use", that is, each member's status as an investment dominates —"His sons, who were at boarding school, were expected to repay the investment..." (134). Mason's is the monetarist approach to familial affection. It is one that Scoular becomes increasingly aware of and shows signs of rejecting. When Scoular is ambivalent about fighting for money, Mason pays for a performance from Smithy, an addict, to anger Scoular at Cam Colvin's destruction of people's lives. Mason uses Smithy as an end, Scoular is concerned with the means: "'That's a man ye're talkin' about. Not a tailor's dummy. He can hear ye'" (151). Ultimately the two men clash, when Mason refuses to pay Cutty Dawson for participating in the fight. Dan Scoular responds instinctively, hitting Mason (238); the choice is hardly conscious, but upon later reflection, it is not one that he's sorry he made. Monetarism's pariah status moves at this juncture from the status of a possibility for Scoular (working with/for Mason is complicity) to an oppositional force. He has learned that "doors exclude from both sides" (127), Mason and monetarism have cut themselves off from his contribution. To borrow from Simon During, McIlvanney elicits "previously diverted or repressed traditions, desires, life practices and beliefs" (During, "Postcolonialism and Globalisation" 339) from his fiction.

3.5. REGENERATION: INDIVIDUAL SELF AS COMMUNAL OFFERING

So, what Dan Scoular said "No" to was the system's treatment of his community and that community beginning to show signs of decay. Dan's rebellion was not a renunciation, for there are still elements of the communal life that he is unwilling to forgo. Once awakened, all members of the community can participate and draw from one another: Dan's effect on Fast Frankie White is to remind the latter of values he had forgone and feels uneasy about having lost (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 143); the Thornbank spectators recognise the sinister nature of the fight, and feel that they should be lining up *with* Dan (173), something they were unable to do at the Red Lion when confronted by Billy Fleming; Alistair Corstophine's realization of "the possibility of an alternative sense of things" (220). The 'system' remains, but the process for its transformation is underway. The final paragraphs of

the novel are an encapsulated illustration of this regeneration: communal support and consideration for others:

> This wasn't a group of casual drinkers. It was an expression of solidarity... He thought that if somebody were to come to the door of the pub just now and summon him by name, a lot of these men would stand up in answer... Some laughed and he was laughing too. He felt the joy of being here, whatever the terms. Tonight or tomorrow it might come. He wasn't unique in that. It was what his father had faced, and countless others. And when he spoke, his voice was *an* echo of the generations of *people* who had stood where he was standing. 'Ah'll have another pint when ye've time, Alan,' he said. (270-1, emphasis added)

I emphasize two words here to illustrate McIlvanney's concern that the situation not be seen as individual rupturing or dominating community: "an" —the indefinite article— alerts us to the other voices that are also echoes; while, "people" is an authorial substitute for Dan's thought about "the men" who would rise to his aid —it is a gender neutral word, forcing inclusiveness onto a male pub scene.

At the novel's close, Dan Scoular is exposed. He has rebelled against the monetarist politics promoted by the centre. What Dan seeks and has achieved in microcosm is a transformation in society: monetarist hegemony is usurped for the moment. The future remains bleak, with little prospect of work within the community. That Scoular is killed by the negative forces in society in *Strange Loyalties* (1991) is a mark of McIlvanney's growing pessimism in the power to resist and change the centre by engaging it. Nonetheless, others replace Scoular, and resistance continues in the form of intelligence, inquiry, involvement; overall, there is a continued stress in McIlvanney's writing on our need to "inhabit the paradox" (McIlvanney, "Inhabit the Paradox" 25) as a means toward articulation and change.

3.6. THE LINGUISTIC SELF

The novel is not the rarefied heights of ancient mythology, though McIlvanney can do that when he wishes. Rather, allusions are to popular culture: the films *Jaws*, *Raging Bull*, *Rocky*, and briefly to McIlvanney's own detective novels (McIlvanney, *The Big Man* 140).[8] That is, McIlvanney aims his level of reference, not the depth of his use of it, at what people know, are interested in, using the allusions to popular culture to attract readers, to make them feel at home. It is a strategy of articulation.

[8] "I believe in popular forms. I haven't this massive indifference to the public, 'They will know a hundred years from now'. I really don't give a shit about that, I'd rather talk to people now. So you take a form like that because you want to communicate" (McIlvanney, "Inhabit the Paradox" 25).

Similarly, Gavin Wallace's argument is noteworthy for its comments on the language debate surrounding McIlvanney's works:

> Perhaps the most significant 'war' characterising McIlvanney's aesthetic is the consistent argument between a highly literary English narration and an equally sophisticated urban Scots dialogue, between two antithetical backgrounds —university education, and the escape it can offer from working-class origins. For McIlvanney no such escape is possible, no more than it is warrantable, from a dichotomy he insists on challenging by forcing opposed and schismatic cultural identities into an equivalence in which they articulate *for each other.* (Wallace, "Stubborn" 33)

Herein is an implicit statement on the need for words from different cultures —cultural hybridity that stresses mutual learning and building. McIlvanney speaks in two distinctive voices, one *showing* experience, one *telling* of experience, polyphonically articulating one man's praxis (Dan Scoular's) and one man's theory (McIlvanney's) to underscore a message about and for social change.

Emma Wood's perceptive personal journey through the language of "Scottishness" and "Englishness" is a useful corollorary here. For, if we are to impede discussion on the basis of how Scottish the form of the communication is, then any future community will implode from its own cultural and linguistic essentialism. With Wood, with McIlvanney, we view their literary forms and their practice; these critique any limits on articulation and thus, action. Reflecting on the 1997 Referendum, Wood, a transplanted English woman, is a model of commitment and inclusiveness: "How would we ever live with ourselves and each other if we didn't get it right this time?" (Wood 153).

With Tom Nairn, I believe that the way out of the impasse has begun because of the changed climate wrought by the writings of William McIlvanney *among* others: "The Scottish (and Gaelic) cultural renaissance of the 1980s has certainly altered the climate of Scotland in ways more favourable to escape" (Nairn 11).

4. CONCLUSION

Laura Chrisman writes:

> Theorizing the nature of colonized subjectivity and of cultural and political resistance raises a number of questions: the place of nationalist culture in relation to political liberation; the nature of colonialism's cultural impact on the psyches of the colonised and vice versa; essentialist views of cultural identity. (Williams & Chrisman 23)

There does not seem to be an essentialist view of the Scottish nation or personality —outside the unthinking stereotypes we occasionally hear— as critiques of 'Tartanry' have illustrated; indeed, McIlvanney's description of Scotland, in an unpublished 1992 speech, at the Meadows, Edinburgh, as "this mongrel nation"

suggests the desire for inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness. Alex Salmond, leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party, recently borrowed the phrase, at the 1994 SNP Convention, to portray a less inhibiting nationalism; that was appropriation too.[9] So too is the pub scene in David Leland's film of *The Big Man* a denial of essentialism, as both Dan Scoular (portrayed by the Northern Irishman Liam Neeson) and the Sikh-descended Scot (as portrayed by Subash Singh Pal), in the pub scene, regale in the achievements of *their* people.[10] Colonialism's effect on the colonised has been theorised quite fully —Ngugi and Fanon's work comes immediately to mind. If McIlvanney has made a contribution to the debate, it is in the area of a need, somehow, for individual awareness and exploration to be achieved prior to blood-letting. Then, the place of nationalism is likely to resolve itself without the cultural chauvinism and outright espousals of hate that have come to characterize such movements. How is the people's voice heard without appropriating it to non-humanistic ends?

The critical response to McIlvanney's writing, predominantly in daily newspapers, indicates, along with successive reprinting of his books, that he is being read and I assume his work's import attended to. It seems that only the academy —in general terms— is reluctant to engage with his works beyond a superficial stance about his apparent prolongation of cultural stereotypes.[11] At the Castlemilk Writers Weekend (29 September to 1 October, 1994) in Glasgow, McIlvanney read, and then spent considerable time engaging with the audience on any aspect of his work and their reception of it. He sees literature as a "straight exchange between the writer and the reader", as "a means to clarify experience", which should combine "intelligence and passion." These are laudable and exemplary goals, perhaps out of fashion, but unnecessarily so.

McIlvanney's work emphasizes the necessity for detailed examination of theory and praxis, and hopefully a move from theory's semantic loitering into an active, intentional breach of barriers between thought and social action. Then, the myopia and isolation prevalent in social and literary theory can join with literary and community practice, in their hard won movement away from class, gender and race essentialisms. We need, cautiously, to take that step or we risk loitering *without* intent.

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[9] McIlvanney, far from denying the use of what is in this instance political expediency and Mr. Salmond's cashing-in on McIlvanney's reputation, is a bridge builder between groups. See, for example, his comments to the SNP Conference in Dundee, in 1987: "The second reason for declaring my affiliation relates to place. I'm speaking at the Scottish National Party Conference; therefore, to a Party of which I am not a member but a Party for whose limited but significant achievement I have respect" (McIlvanney, "Stands Scotland" 19).

[10] Where Leland enforces a visual cultural hybridity, McIlvanney's text does not: "'John Logie Baird,' *someone* was saying..." (*The Big Man* 158, emphasis added).

[11] See examples cited in Craig W. McLuckie, *Researching McIlvanney.* (Mainz: Centre for Scottish Studies International, 1999).

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