

Feminist Crime Fiction:

An examination of embodied feminist intentions in Denise Mina's *The Field of Blood* (2005)

Abstract

The writing of award winning *tartan noir* author, Denise Mina, “crime queen of Glasgow” has been identified with “explicitly feminist politics,” and Mina herself claims, as a feminist, she wants to use crime fiction to present a “narrative about very disempowered people becoming empowered.” This paper explores how Mina’s avowed stance on feminism plays out in her novel, *The Field of Blood* (2005), and examines whether her concerns are reflected in the embodied actions of her young protagonist, would-be investigative journalist, Paddy Meehan. It asks whether Mina has succeeded in working against entrenched patriarchal codes of crime fiction’s dominant narrative construction or whether her feminist intentions have been undermined by traditional stereotypical conventions of the genre.

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Contemporary feminist theory (Butler 1990, Grosz 1989, Bordo 1993) supports the premise that the concept of woman is socially constructed and that the shape and conduct of women’s bodies are influenced by a range of entrenched cultural forces that reflect the existing patriarchal hegemony. Iris Young explains that women are “denied the subjectivity, autonomy and creativity that are definitive of being human” because they are “frequently regarded as objects and mere bodies” (1980, pp. 30-44). Fredrickson and Roberts argue further that in our culture women are “viewed as bodies which exist for the use and pleasure of others” (1997, p, 175), while Sandra Bartky asserts that the “disciplinary practices of femininity” are insisted upon by a universally “oppressive and inegalitarian system of sexual subordination” (1990, p. 75).

In this view, men can be seen in a sense to own the space that bodies occupy; female bodies within that space signify a conditional occupation, dependent on male approval. Therefore the body of woman is excess and contentious, forcing female bodies to be contained not only by a prescribed size and shape, but also by what Young terms the “inhibited intentionality” (1980, p. 37) of feminine bodily existence, a strictly limited motility and agency.

The empowered woman contravenes what has been delimited in regard to women and their bodies, and thus represents a disruptive force that threatens to break through the perimeters that confine women. Crime fiction written by women since the 1980s seeks to position women in stories where, at least imaginatively, women can be seen to enter the more traditionally male sphere of the police station, the law court, the coroner’s laboratory, or the newspaper copy room. Women crime writers envisage a world where their female characters take a vigorous role in crime detection placing their bodies on the line in the name of curiosity, justice or truth.

Women’s bodies lie at the heart of the work of award-winning ‘tartan noir’ author, Denise Mina, whose crime writing has been noted in the press as evincing “explicitly feminist politics” (*Scotsman*, 2010). Mina acknowledges she is a “lifelong feminist[s]”, which for her simply means, “we all have an equal right to legal protection, to work and be independent, to not have our faces kicked in while we’re cooking the dinner” (qtd in Mullin 2012). Mina also comments on the plight of women writers, claiming ‘we get paid less, are written out of history and have to talk about our ovaries all the time’ (qtd. Kane, 2013). Mina focuses on the personal and professional struggles of individual and often underprivileged women, addressing themes of family, friendship, social injustice, violence and revenge in her work.

In this paper, I examine Mina's novel, *The Field of Blood* (2004) to determine how convincingly she projects feminist themes onto the embodied actions of her protagonist, eighteen-year-old Paddy Meehan, a female 'copy-boy' on the *Scottish Daily News*. I assess whether Mina represents women and their bodies in a positive and powerful manner or whether she succumbs to what many (Klein 1995, Munt 1995, Plain 2001) have claimed is the intrinsic patriarchal undertow of the genre.

Set in Glasgow in the nineteen eighties, *The Field of Blood* tells the story of the young Meehan as she struggles to pursue her dream of becoming a journalist. Meehan works within a hostile culture that undervalues her because she is a woman. Not only that, Meehan must challenge the traditional expectations of her working class Irish/Scots Catholic family to survive a troubled adolescence and establish her own adult identity.

The plot centres on the arrest of two ten-year-old boys charged with the abduction, torture and murder of two-year-old Brian Wilcox¹. Meehan inadvertently stumbles across the fact that one of the arrested boys is her fiancé Sean's ten-year old cousin, Callum Ogilvy. Out of family loyalty, Meehan refuses to write up the story, but mistakenly confides in her friend – student-journalist Heather Allen – who immediately recognises it as a career-advancing scoop. When the story is published, Meehan's family and fiancé assume Meehan has written it and are outraged, refusing to acknowledge or even to speak to her. Depressed and rejected, Meehan concentrates on the case, searching for the unknown adult/s she believes orchestrated the murder. By posing as Allen, Meehan is able to interview a number of suspects and informants and by cleverly linking the murder to a similar case eight years earlier, she uncovers the adult killer and his complicit parent; but Allan is murdered as a result of Meehan's impersonation. Intertwined with this story is that of real life criminal namesake Patrick Meehan, a safe blower unjustly convicted of murder in 1969 but granted a Royal pardon due to the campaigning efforts of British journalist, Ludovic Kennedy. Mina's character, Meehan, imagines an affinity with the criminal counterpart who shares her name, while citing Kennedy's work as the inspiration behind her ambition to be a reporter.

¹ Mina admits the story is roughly based on the 1993 murder of two-year old James Bulger by two ten-year-old boys in Liverpool. See her comments in the *Daily Record* (Glasgow, Scotland) August 26, 2003. <http://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-106897271.html>

The world Paddy Meehan inhabits is fiercely chauvinist and seems completely untouched by the sexual revolution of the 1960s. Though young, she is already engaged to her high school sweetheart, Sean Ogilvy; their families connected by a shared Irish heritage and "religious duties" (Mina, 2004, p. 11). When we first meet Meehan she is on an errand in the Press Bar, full of journalists from the *Scottish Daily News*, a bastion of male privilege and overt sexism; a place where pictures of naked women adorn the walls and linotype operators stare at Meehan's tits (p. 17). In the pub, Meehan covets inclusion within the very club that won't have her as a member, wanting "a place among them, to be a journalist instead of a gofer" (p. 5). When one calls out to Meehan, "Fuck the Pope" she knows her body and appearance – "bog Irish, with black hair and skin the colour of a paper moon" (pp. 7-8) – has betrayed her heritage. She also overhears Terry Hewitt, a young journalist she likes, asking, "Who is that fat lassie?" (p. 9), and feels "hurt that her weight was the only thing he had noticed about her" (p. 21).

In this opening scene, Meehan's body conspicuously represents her subaltern² status by being fat, visibly Catholic, young and female. We also learn she is poor and has to wear "cheap shoes that let in the rain" (p. 9). In this environment Meehan's body and appearance codify a set of expectations that she constantly acknowledges, but fights against. She is painfully aware of her 'fat' body and smarts at comments made by others regarding her size; such as those of George McVie, veteran journalist of the overnight 'calls car' who tells her: "[You] get fatter every time I see ye" (p. 160), who jokes that she is "fat, but funny" and even refers to her as a "fat cow" (pp. 241-242). Meehan is clearly hurt by his remarks but "couldn't let him see that she cared" (p. 160).

Meehan wants to lose weight, puts herself on a "disgusting diet" of boiled eggs and constantly avoids "newsagents with sweet counters" (pp. 10-15); she does not happily reside within her own body. She dreams of telling Terry

² The concept of 'subaltern' was originally formed by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937) and applied to those of inferior rank and station, excluded from the hegemonic power structure due to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. Gayatri Spivak employed the phrase in her seminal 1988 essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' originally published in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg's *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), strongly associating the term with postcolonial theory.

Hewitt, “actually, Terry, I’m not fat any more” and fantasises about wearing tight clothes that she’d “need to be really slim to wear” not her usual black skirts and jumpers which are “baggy enough to cover her lumps and bumps” (pp. 20-21).

Mina emphasizes the ‘incorrectness’ of Meehan’s body size and shape and constantly reiterates Meehan’s adolescent view of herself as “lumpen and graceless” (p.46), “dumpy” (p. 53) with a “small, squat body” (p. 87) and “chubby” hands (p. 185). The reader is repeatedly reminded of Meehan’s feelings of inadequacy because of the way her ‘fat’ body looks. She tells her colleague Heather Allen, “I broke my diet really badly...I can’t stick to it at all ... I think I’m actually getting fatter”. Meehan even tells her mother, “Mum, I am fat. I just am” (pp. 73-77). She thinks everyone at work regards her as a “fat joke” (p. 126) and when she runs or walks up stairs, she abhors “the feeling of pockets of fat jiggling on her stomach or hips” (p. 139), refers to herself as a “fat girl” (p. 147) and when she catches her face in the mirror she notices that “her chin sloped straight into her chest [visible evidence that] she was putting on weight” (p. 299).

Meehan’s body dysmorphia is at its worst when she is feeling stressed or under pressure. When her family blame her for revealing the identity of Callum Ogilvy as one of the killers of baby Brian Wilcox, her poor body image is coupled with insecurity in her job: “She wasn’t a journalist at all. She was just a fat lassie who was afraid to go home” (p.152). When she is questioned by the police following the murder of her colleague, Heather Allen, she sees herself in the eyes of the police as a “wee fat bird” (193) and feels “belittled and stupid” (p. 196). By the end of the police interview Meehan cries, wondering whether she is really “nasty and mean and fat and stupid” (p. 199). Towards the end of the novel, when she is called to her boss’s office and mistakenly thinks she is to get the sack, Meehan imagines the whole newsroom watching her, “noting how fat she was” (p. 315).

Meehan’s preoccupation with her body size is the core to her identity and signals not only an adolescent insecurity but also an acknowledgment of guilt in transgressing strict cultural codes. Susan Bordo argues that concern with weight and eating disorders arise out of “the normative feminine practices of our culture, practices which train the female body in docility and obedience to cultural demands while at the same time being experienced in terms of power and control” (*Unbearable*. P. 27). It is therefore, unsurprising that Mina would portray Meehan as a woman and a body devoid of power who exhibits behaviour complicit with her own subjugation, exemplified by a self-assessment of her shape as ‘not acceptable’. Yet despite the obsessive preoccupation with Meehan’s inadequate body, the reader’s interest in the

novel is not invested in Meehan’s ability to lose weight or accept herself as she is, but in whether she can solve the crime and fulfil her ambition to become an investigative reporter.

In Meehan’s working class world, women’s bodies do not belong to themselves but to their husbands and families, and are overseen by an ever-present community of relatives, neighbours and friends. As a ‘fat woman’, Meehan represents a destabilising factor, a challenge to the social order that requires women’s bodies to be attractive, passive and fertile. As such a ‘misfit’ she is a target for criticism. She is berated by Catholic union leader, ‘Father’ Richards, who asks: “Are you saving yourself for your husband? Do you pray each night to bear children who’ll uphold the faith of our Fathers?” (Mina, 2004, p. 8). While he is making fun of Meehan’s background, he accurately outlines what is expected of young Catholic working class women. Indeed, Meehan is already engaged at eighteen and her fiancé talks of having a baby. “As soon as our name comes up on the council list and we get a house,” says Sean, “we can start working on getting one” (p. 41).

Meehan’s response to the idea of settling down and staying amongst the people she has known all her life is “panic” (p. 41) and fear that “there was no escape” (p. 26). She has a poor view of the role of wife and mother: Every mother she knew worked unlauded all their lives, ageing before anyone else in the family until the only thing that differentiated them from old, old men was a perm and a pair of earrings. (p. 117)

Despite her negative attitude towards motherhood, in Meehan’s community, engagement and marriage confer status on young women. Meehan actually feels “thinner and taller” (p. 24) when she is with her fiancé. When interviewed by the police regarding Heather’s murder, Meehan tells them; “She [Heather] got pretty jealous when I talked about my fiancé” (p. 195). Visiting the mother of one of the jailed youths who lives in a Glasgow slum, Meehan reflects on the fall-out she’s had with her own family, concluding, “if women didn’t conform, this is what happened. She would end up in a rundown council house with a hundred starving children and no extended family to help out during the hard times” (p. 58).

Realising that being tied down with children would stifle her, Meehan breaks the engagement, telling Sean, “I want a career and I don’t think I can get married and have one, so I’m choosing the career” (p. 308). However, later when she goes with Sean to the hospital to visit Callum Ogilvy, Meehan

temporarily puts her ring back on and keeps “her engagement finger on view to show that they were decent” (p. 324).

While Meehan’s body is culturally marked out for early marriage and child bearing, her sexuality is also governed by society. Farquarson warns her when she goes out with McVie in the ‘calls car’ to “keep your hand on your ha’penny when you’re with him” and Richards advises her, “if ye were my daughter I’d say no” (pp. 50-51). When Sean refuses to sleep with her on the grounds that they should wait till marriage, Meehan feels shameful, thinking “she shouldn’t want to touch him, shouldn’t want any of it because she was a girl. Her virginity would never be hers to give, only his to take” (p. 84). So in essence, Meehan’s sexual identity is linked to her powerlessness and her status as female.

When Meehan does have sex, it is joyless and given in exchange for shelter. In a scene where she observes the killer’s car waiting for her outside the newspaper office Meehan, unwilling to go home to her hostile family, walks through the rain to Terry Hewitt’s flat. Hewitt helps Meehan dry off and then kisses and touches her. Meehan feels nothing, but is more worried about her body: her “rolls of fat seemed to multiply under his hand”, while during sex she “blankly bided her time until it was over” (pp. 274-275).

Mina is describing an experience of sex in which her character regards herself as an object: “She suddenly saw herself, lying on a stranger’s grubby bed without her ring” (p. 274). This is explained by Iris Young who claims that “for feminine bodily existence, the body frequently is both a subject and object for itself at the same time and in reference to the same act” (p. 148). In this case, Meehan has felt compelled to provide sexual favours for a young man she previously regarded as a friend and colleague as a trade for the comfort and support she needed in a time of distress. During the act of sex, she is passive and compliant. Sandra Bartky supports Young’s theory, contending that “a woman’s situation, i.e. those meanings derived from the total context in which she comes to maturity, disposes her to apprehend her body not as an instrument of transcendence, but as an object destined for another” (1990, 38). Mina’s depiction of her character’s experience describes the confusion and social pressures on a young woman coming to terms with their own sexuality. While particularly specific to the period in which the novel is set, it is clearly relevant to young women today who also find themselves “grappling with expectations imposed by a culture that sexualises girls at younger and younger ages and depicts promiscuity as the norm” (Siebold, 2011, p. 124).

When Meehan instigates sex with her fiancé, she is rebuked and feels shameful. When she has sex with Hewitt she is not emotionally involved or physically aroused but merely experiences a sense of relief: “Her virginity was no longer a giant, weighty gift. She didn’t have to find someone to bestow it on. It was gone” (Mina, 2004, p. 275). Meehan regards her virginity then, as an encumbrance, because it is freighted with cultural expectations designed to reinforce masculine dominance and maintain female subordination. In a very real sense, Meehan has not participated in the act wilfully, but regards it as something that ‘has happened to her’. In this way, she feels less responsibility and therefore has less cause for guilt. At the same time, the ‘sanctity’ of her virginity loses its power. While the sex act has been physically and emotionally meaningless, and Meehan has been objectified, it nonetheless holds some significance for her, symbolising a release from the restraints that have bound her life. Later when she reflects on the sex with Hewitt, Meehan is pleased but not shameful because “she wasn’t a virgin anymore and no-one knew but her. She crossed her arms, hugging herself and tried not to smile” (p. 300).

For Meehan the real road to independence and self-fulfilment is not via sex but through her work. In her own job as a writer, Mina has described the difficulty she had, as a woman, getting her start as a crime fiction writer: You had to pretend you were a man to get published, it was very helpful if you pretended never to have kids or any female type activities, and if you could go to the bar and get slaughtered all night that would be great, and then if you were in a punch up with some sailors that again would promote your work (Mina, 2012, ‘Glasgow Film Festival’).

Mina’s intention with *The Field of Blood* is to demonstrate that as late as the nineteen eighties, women were still encumbered by prejudice and limited expectations both at work and domestically. She shows how a generation of women struggled to forge new pathways to realise second wave feminism’s promise of ‘equality for women’, by seeking personal fulfilment in the workforce, rather than by keeping-house and raising families.

At the start of the novel Mina reflects this ideal of equality by depicting Meehan’s burning desire to capitalise on the opportunities offered by her job, however menial: “The *Scottish Daily News* was a fresh audience, and without seventy-odd relatives preceding her she felt she could be anyone” (Mina, 2004, p. 21). Meehan had secured her a place as a ‘copy-boy’ but wanted to become a journalist as fast as possible. Soon after starting work, she attends the scene of an accidental death and is “surprised at her cold reaction. She felt nothing, just hot excitement at being there, bearing witness” (p. 65). This

is a turning point for Meehan who instantly knows that “this was exactly what she wanted to do for the rest of her life. Exactly” (p. 65). However, she soon learns that it is a cut-throat business when her friend, Heather Allan betrays her and sells the story about the two boys arrested for the murder of the toddler. Infuriated, Meehan flushes Heather’s head in the toilet but consequently gains the respect of the journalists in the newsroom, who begin “using her name, not just calling her boy” (p. 138). In this aggressive act, Meehan has shown that she can in fact ‘play rough’ and be just as savage as the ‘real men’ of the copy room.

Mina’s story highlights a point in time when there was little space for women’s bodies except as subordinates in a serious place of work; Meehan must act like a man to be taken seriously. She must take on a job title which includes the designation of ‘boy’ and be treated and act like a ‘boy’ to gain a foothold on the ladder to a legitimate career. The incongruousness of having a young woman identified as a ‘boy’ in the workplace highlights the difficulty Meehan faces if she wishes to succeed. The superimposition of the title of ‘copy-boy’ onto Meehan’s identity is matched by the duality of the androgynous name, ‘Paddy Meehan’. Her namesake, the criminal, Paddy Meehan is male and his story threads its way through the novel. Paddy identifies with the convict who becomes “a noble hero to her, maligned and defamed in a thousand different ways” (p. 108). The criminal’s story has been her childhood obsession and remains a subject of interest and conversation in her adult life. But, Meehan must outgrow these masculine signifiers to create her own identity and strive against her background to achieve her ambitions. Males ‘own’ the career of investigative reporter Meehan covets and her bodily presence in the newsroom is registered as a challenge, marking her out as fair game.

For Mina it is important to have a woman succeeding, not because of her body or her looks, but due to her intelligence, skill and application. Mina’s other female character at the *Daily News*, Heather Allan, is everything Meehan is not: middle-class, educated, and confident. Allan is one rung higher than Meehan at the *News* because she has managed to wangle a union ticket. Where Meehan is “ashamed of her ambition,” Allan is “decidedly bombastic” about hers, “with the definite air of someone passing through on their way to a national paper” (pp. 46-47). Allan is very pretty; “she had a dainty little button nose and nice teeth” (p. 206), “a mane of wavy blonde hair” (p. 47), is middle-class, “posh” (p. 205) and well-dressed. It would appear that Allan is the prototype that Meehan fails to measure up to. The author could easily have cast Allan as the main protagonist, yet has Allan

trading on her good looks, “sidling through the tables, her tight little bottom drawing the eyes of the men she passed” (p. 48).

This is borne out when the police interview Meehan following Allan’s murder. Detective McGovern suggests that Meehan must have been jealous of her colleague:

‘It can’t have been easy for you: two girls working in an office, one of them –’ He caught Patterson’s eye and broke off.

‘When one of them’s beautiful and I’m a right dog?’ [Meehan replies]

‘I didn’t say that.’

She could have slapped his perfect face into yesterday. ‘It’s what you meant.’ She talked fast and loud to hide her hurt pride. ‘To be honest, it’s easier working here if you’re not good-looking. With Heather they were always making sexy jokes about her and then hating her for not fancying them back.’ ‘Did it bother her?’

‘It must have. She wanted to be a journalist, not a bunny girl. But she played on it. She’d have used anything to get ahead. Even her looks.’ (p. 196)

In this exchange, Mina is highlighting a paradox faced by women who want to be regarded seriously in their careers. Women are judged on their appearance at work and if they are attractive they may do well. Economic researchers Markus Mobius and Tanya Rosenblat also conclude that “physically attractive workers derive sizeable rents from their looks” (2006, p. 222) earning about 10 percent more than below average looking workers, while economist, Daniel Hamermesh in *Beauty Pays*, argues “above average looking women earn 4 percent more than average looking women” (2011, p. 45). However, a study by Madeline Hellman and Melanie Stopeck found that “women who are attractive seem to be disadvantaged by their appearance when they apply for managerial positions” (1985, p. 401). They argue that this is because attractiveness is linked to perceived gender stereotypes, so that if a woman is regarded as attractive she is also regarded as more feminine, and less likely to be able to be strong and make difficult executive decisions. They conclude that at a managerial level, “the person-job fit seems poor indeed for attractive females and their prospects for success are judged to be quite dim” (p. 401).

Mina’s point is that initial success based on a woman’s appearance can ultimately be self-defeating when this approval is linked to the sexual gratification of males, rather than a systematic fair and equal treatment of a woman’s professional capabilities. Mina portrays Meehan’s observation and assessment of the way Allan is objectified because of her appearance and flirtatious behaviour: Meehan “had catalogued and coveted every one of

Heather's advantages, envied her clothes and her figure" (Mina, 2004, p. 196), but Mina shows that Meehan believes intelligence is a bigger asset to career advancement than attractiveness. Meehan knew she "was smarter – that's where she was a winner" (p. 196). Mina contrasts the qualities of Allan and Meehan to demonstrate that it is women's intellectual ability and astute application, not their bodies or their appearance that is most important in their work.

Through all that the characters emerge as multi-dimensional. Heather Allan, middle-class and attractive, is a fully realised character with whom we can have some sympathy. Paddy Meehan's whole personality is dominated by her weight-obsession, a very real phenomenon for a young woman who is physically 'unacceptable' and fails to conform to a desirable body type. With regard to their values, the tension arises: Allan is imbued with middle-class aspiration and of course has more opportunities (e.g. university), which makes the working class Meehan envious.

As the novel proceeds, Meehan matures, has sex, starts smoking and drinking, becomes more independent from her family and breaks her engagement with Sean. Instead of impersonating a journalist, she begins to act like one. She interviews the mother of a child killed eight years before the recent murder and suspects the woman's ex-husband, Harry Naismith, is the killer of both boys. (We in fact learn later it is the husband's son, Gary – stepbrother to the first murdered child – who is the real killer).

Despite her progress from copy-boy to 'virtual' journalist, Meehan is still feeling her way and returns to the Press Bar, (so effectively drawn earlier as the seat of masculinist power). She seeks advice from the wily but degenerate journalist, Dr Pete, who encourages Meehan's theories on the murder, but is dealing with his own issues, having found out he has terminal liver cancer. What Mina is foreshadowing here is a dying out of the old order in the presence of the new, but Meehan is not yet ready to take her place; "She didn't belong here and wanted to leave" (p. 233), but stays to comfort Dr Pete:

So they sat together, a man facing the end of his life and a young girl struggling to kick-start hers. They drank together and then Paddy started smoking with him. Cigarettes and drink complemented each other perfectly, she discovered, like white bread and peanut butter. (p. 234)

The scene indicates that Meehan is on the verge of her career, but it is evident that while she has shown initiative and courage to proceed with her investigation, she must conform to an established order that is governed by hard drinking men. Meehan also has to rely on Hewitt, the man she has slept with, to plant evidence in Naismith's car because the police won't listen to her. Dr Pete also covers for her, claiming he made a call to the police advising the location of the 'evidence', when in fact Meehan made it.

The actions of Dr Pete and Hewitt are troubling for the feminist reader, because here Meehan is trading on her position as a young 'helpless' female, an almost universal trope of contemporary crime fiction. This serves to undercut Mina's attempt to demonstrate that, as an intelligent and focussed young woman, the Meehan character can make it on her own without reverting to the traditional role playing that ultimately places women in a susceptible and subordinate position.

These concerns are further compounded when, following Naismith's arrest, Meehan discovers that she has made a terrible error and that it is Naismith's son Garry who has set up the children to murder the toddler. Before Meehan has a chance to set things right, Garry captures and imprisons her in his house. He plans to rape her: "He knew she wanted it – is that what she was crying for? Because she wanted it so much. She had to take what she could get because she was fat." Infuriated at being "called fat at her last moment on earth" (p. 357), Meehan struggles desperately with the killer but suddenly the police break-in and rescue her, following a tip-off from Dr Pete. Meehan is saved, receives medical attention and is released.

By plotting an ending where an imperilled young woman is rescued by the actions of a number of men, Mina has missed an opportunity to empower her protagonist. If Mina had envisioned an opportunity for Meehan to affect her escape by cunningly outwitting her assailant, or by keenly noticing an unlocked window, for example, or by grabbing a strategically placed carpentry tool, then the Meehan character might have emerged as a much more successful exemplar of women's agency and strength. Such a plot device would have indicated non-compliance, of course, with ingrained crime fiction stereotypes that perpetrate the weakness and vulnerability of women and their bodies.

In the final passages, Mina shows Meehan returning to the Press Bar to celebrate with all the male journalists. Hewitt arrives and announces that the story will be in the morning edition with Meehan's name in the by-line. No

one notices Dr Pete quietly passing away in a corner as Meehan is finally accepted as 'one of the boys'. While Mina may hint at a passing of the baton here, her efforts in *The Field of Blood* fall short of fashioning a reverse feminist discourse which might have explored positions of resistance and agency centred on the character of her female protagonist. But the author has created an engaging and inspiring character in the person of young Paddy Meehan who, despite the drawbacks of being female, having an 'unacceptable' fat body and being from the Catholic working class, actually succeeds in her dream of becoming a journalist.

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