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M A R Y M C G L Y N N

“Middle-Class Wankers”
and Working-Class Texts:
The Critics and James Kelman

The first time James Kelman was nominated for Britain’s prestigious Booker Prize, in 1989, he skipped the awards ceremony. Kelman’s excuse was a writing course that he would not cancel, but his decision to stay at home announced his disconnection from the literary establishment as well. His wariness was confirmed in 1994, when one prize-committee judge, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, resigned in protest as Kelman’s *How Late It Was, How Late* was named the winner. Conflating discomforts with regional patois, profanity, and stylistic experimentation, Neuberger said she found that the novel, in “broad Glaswegian dialect, littered with F-words . . . was too much, too inaccessible, and simply too dull”; “the novel does not appeal to me, I do not find it amusing—and it never changes in tone” (27).¹ Essentially, Neuberger’s objections to tone, character, and action in the novel suggest a thwarting of both her literary expectations and her expectations for a realist working-class novel.

This sort of opposition is no surprise—the public at large regularly rejects postmodern fiction as unreadable, humorless, or over-

1. The issue of how to refer to vernacular language is often highly political, perhaps more so in the United States than in the British Isles. To American ears in particular, Neuberger’s use of the word “dialect” may sound especially charged, as it echoes the marginalization of African American forms of English. Throughout this essay, I follow Kelman’s own practice, as seen in “Vernacular,” of using the terms “vernacular,” “patois,” and “dialect” positively and somewhat interchangeably; the terms “demotic” and “slang” also come into play in reference to specific vocabularies.

the-top. Yet curiously, Neuberger's evaluation resembles contemporary academic criticism of working-class literature, even that of some of Kelman's staunchest advocates. Where Kelman himself takes pains to interrogate nationalism and, more importantly, idealization of the working class, both types of essentialism have sometimes been wistfully reinscribed by his critics. Kelman's supporters approve the endorsement of Marx they find on the narrative level without accounting for the less positive commentary embedded in other levels. *How Late It Was, How Late* and *A Disaffection*, Kelman's most recent novels, both buck expectations of narrative control, genre conventions, and lexical norms, not to mention political and national poses, to create a language and a form free from overt hierarchy, ready to critique with one gesture Britain's class system and literature's class system.

Rejecting Realism

The British public's hate for and love of Kelman's prose stems from fluency in and expectations for several novelistic traditions, all challenged and violated by fiction that resists easy classification. *How Late It Was, How Late* uses standard English only when it must, opting to rely instead on Scots, specifically Glaswegian, dialect; the novel seems anti-English on a number of levels. Contemporary England, with its (post-)Thatcherite budget cuts and continual de-industrialization, represents for Kelman an unacceptable status quo, a continuing system of exclusion and repression. At a 1988 conference in Glasgow, he connected his critique of Britain's class system to his simultaneous discontent with "literature" and "pulp":

Ninety per cent of the literature in Great Britain concerns people who never have to worry about money at all. We always seem to be watching or reading about emotional crises among folk who live in a world of great fortune both in matters of money and luck . . . Or else we are given straight genre fiction . . . The unifying feature of all genre fiction is the way it denies reality. This is structural—in other words, if reality had a part to play in genre fiction then it would stop being genre fiction.

(qtd. in C. Craig, "Resisting Arrest" 99)

Kelman rejects the tastes and norms of the British metropole he is "supposed" to please. He writes instead for a local audience, his

prose showing as well a studied application of both the techniques and ideas of continental European modernism. His unwillingness to fulfill the reading public's desire for easily consumable working-class Scottish voices places him at the epicenter of a movement shifting literature from the universal to the local. Diasporic voices and those rejecting metropolitan norms have sprung to the forefront of global literature; the work of the Glasgow school, including Tom Leonard, Alasdair Gray, and Janice Galloway, epitomizes this move to the local, the nonstandard, the fractured. Along with Jeff Torrington and Liz Lochhead, and most notably publicized in the *Trainspotting* frenzy of a few years ago, Kelman articulates the distance of a majority of Scottish voices from a mainstream British language and identity.

In many of his theoretical pronouncements, Kelman calls for a more realist fiction, but his novels reveal a nuanced awareness of the oxymoron regularly overlooked in that term. Kelman makes us aware that although we have come to accept certain modes as more realistic than others, any act of writing involves so many conventions that the claim of approximating reality may be misdirected. Moreover, he questions why realism ought to be the continuing project of the working class. With Kelman's reworkings of a stream of consciousness and his disavowals of a single, verifiable truth, he operates on the level of realism as a goal rather than a style.² As Cairns Craig puts it, "Kelman's working-class realism is tactical rather than essential" ("Resisting Arrest" 105); that is, it is not a product of an uncritical belief in an author's ability to reproduce accurately a fixed, knowable external reality. While his rendering of working-class life offers a fresh approach to reality and may for a time seem more realistic than earlier forms, Kelman plays on the limits of realism. Such a realism works to create, not the most representational prose, but one that "offers a representation of the *act* of representation" (Valente 190). This writing at one remove from representation includes a number of devices and modes of storytelling generally undefined by the conventions of realism.

2. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam suggest such a classification system in *Unthinking Eurocentrism*. Particularly useful is the proposition that "Realism as a goal is quite compatible with a style which is reflexive and deconstructive" (180).

Still, despite his technical artistry, Kelman is regularly seen as a “mere” realist, a spokesman for his class. Fay Weldon has claimed that Kelman’s novels are not literature because their language of “rough, recorded vernacular” could be overheard on any night in a Glasgow pub. Relating this statement, Angela McRobbie laments that because of assumptions about “high” and “low” literature, “the writer whose material is working-class life is destined to be understood only as a realist.” I want to leave aside for the moment the disparaging of realism implicit in both Weldon’s and McRobbie’s remarks and suggest that Kelman’s novels defy both realist and genre expectations, achieving at a formal level a simultaneous pose of realism and sense of estrangement through their narrative innovations and their transliterations of Scottish pronunciation and dialect.³ *How Late It Was, How Late* and *A Disaffection*, drawing on modernist, realist, and regional ancestors, make stylistic innovations that level linguistic hierarchies; the novels’ reworkings of narrative control, genre conventions, and lexical norms generate a form which inextricably links critiques of Britain’s class system and a literary canon with its own notions of the working-class writer.

The class-based society and the canon are to Kelman interchangeable in their romanticizing of class distinctions, making such differentiations seem natural, inevitable, and aesthetic. Kelman has noted that, historically, the working-class characters whose language is so quaintly garbled have been equipped with an equally inaccessible inner life:

What larks! Every time they opened their mouth out came a stream of gobbledygook. Beautiful! their language a cross between semaphore and morse code; apostrophes here and apostrophes there; a strange hotch-potch of bad phonetics and horrendous spelling—unlike the nice stalwart upperclass English hero (occasionally Scottish but with no linguistic variation) whose words on the page were always absolutely splendidly proper and pure and pristinely accurate, whether in dialogue or without. And what grammar! Colons and semi-colons! Straight out of their mouths! An incredible mastery of language. . . . the narrative belonged to them and them alone. They owned it. . . . We all stumbled along in a series of behaviouristic activity; automatons, cardboard cut-outs, folk

3. This paradox of mimesis and estrangement is Derek Attridge’s in *Peculiar Language*.

who could be scrutinised, whose existence could be verified in a sociological or anthropological context. In other worlds, in the society that is English Literature, some 80 to 85 percent of the population simply did not exist as human beings.

(“Importance” 82)⁴

The protagonist of *How Late*, Sammy Samuels, lower class and disgusting, on the margins of the margins of society, is exactly the sort of character Kelman sees as usually having no more than a stock role, never getting a break from social services or society at large. Not only does Sammy have no job and no prospects, his fortunes take continual turns for the worse. As the novel opens, Sammy awakens from a drunken sleep in a trash-ridden vacant lot. Unable to remember where he has been, he vaguely recalls elements of a two-day drinking binge. Almost immediately, he has a fight with passing “sodgers” (police) and is thrown in jail, only to wake up blind from the beating he has received. The remainder of the novel traces Sammy’s efforts to recall what has happened, resist the coercive assertions of the police that he is involved in political terrorism, and figure out how to carry on his life, especially given that his girlfriend seems to have disappeared. We are inside Sammy’s head for the entire novel, free-associating with him as songs and sayings and memories direct his consciousness, deciphering with him the voices and inflections that must replace visual cues.

The fact that Sammy is blind places a particular weight on the novel’s voices: they are responsible for conveying all of a Barthesian “world effect” themselves, with no third-person omniscient narrator providing descriptions of the scenery. Like a reader reduced to the typographical, dependent on imagination to construct images and voices from the words on the page, Sammy relies largely on his hearing, his perception limited to interpreting voices and pauses. Kelman parallels the novelty of Sammy’s state by omitting from his text most of the descriptors or speech tags readers

4. In an excellent article that I read after having substantially completed this essay, Nicola Pitchford discusses at length how both supporters and detractors of *How Late* replicate the marginalization of working-class fiction by “sounding more sociological than aesthetic” in their evaluations (701).

are accustomed to. In scene after scene, we experience the same disjunction as Sammy, uncertain of who is speaking, where the voices come from:

Voices at last. He kicked the kerb again. Could ye give me a hand across the street? he said.

What?

I cannay see.

...

I'm blind.

Ye're blind?

Aye.

Sammy heard the guy sniffing like he was making up his mind if it was true. I left my stick in the house, said Sammy.

Aye right pal okay, hang on a minute till the lights change . . . Then the guy whispered something and somebody whispered something back. And Sammy's bottle went completely. A sudden dread. There was more whispering. What was it christ it was like he knew the voice, like he knew it; and it wasnay good man it wasnay fucking good: it could be any cunt.⁵

(53)

Especially this early in the novel, the dialect and the pauses combine with sporadic punctuation and the lack of quotation marks, attributions, or narrative tags to make the passage tough reading, a parallel to this period in which Sammy's blindness is brand-new to him. There seem to be at least three speakers in this scene (and limited narrative interjections), but the text never lets us know who they are any more than "they" tell Sammy who they are. Instead, we are confronted with vagueness ("something" and "somebody"), as well as slang (his "bottle went completely," that is, he lost his nerve). This colloquial speech acquires regional valence with the presence of words like "cannay" and "aye," which locate us specifically in Scotland.

Kelman's use of such regionalisms would seem to place him in a tradition of provincial literature; at the same time, as I will discuss later, he intersects with the bulk of the modernist canon in his treatment of urban space and the disaffected individual. A third clear

5. In Glasgow, while "cunt" is not at all a polite term, its reference to female genitalia is far less common than its meaning of "guy" or "bloke."

influence is the realist tradition and its proletarian/working-class tendencies. Early criticism of Kelman has tended to notice two of the three legs of this triangle: "Urban realism and existential modernism are not mutually exclusive in Kelman's work," says Simon Baker (245), while Robert Crawford's reading of modernism as provincialism/regionalism allies these two phenomena in the "barbarian, but also sophisticated" voices Kelman creates (285).⁶ And from the social realism of the 1930s to the present, the connection of realism and regionalism has been common, a link that Marxist readings of Kelman enjoy noting.⁷ Yet little criticism to date has remarked on Kelman's discomfort with these labels, his refusals and reinterpretations of them both within his fiction and in forums such as interviews, speeches, and essays.

To examine how Kelman contests constructions of working-class literature, let us revisit briefly the idea of realism as a style. According to Peter Hitchcock, novels of the working class retain a residual form, because even two hundred years into the project of working-class novels, "literary expression is bound by a dependence on received or traditional forms" and is not "autonomous or specific in purely formal terms" (101, 108). In other words, a working-class novel uses forms first developed in other novels; it is distinctive mainly on the levels of plot, setting, or character conversation and assumed, as McRobbie points out, "to be unconcerned with experimentation and even with shape" (40).

Hitchcock cites Alan Sillitoe as an exemplary working-class novelist, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* demonstrating what working-class writing that uses a residual form looks like. *Saturday Night*, a novel about a boozing, rakish factory worker named Arthur Seaton, retains a narrative in the third person and firmly conventional plot development and narrative sequencing. Ironically, even a working-class novel in part about how the working class

6. Like Craig and McRobbie, Baker applauds Kelman's ability to draw on multiple traditions, while Crawford's project works to recuperate the term "provincialism"; I prefer the label "regionalism," which avoids conflating the political (as implied by "province") and the geographical.

7. The connection of realism and regionalism of course extends further back, including Scottish kailyard stories, which relied on dialect to tell sentimental stories about simple working folk.

seldom speaks for itself does not let the main character narrate the tale. Rather, the narrative voice uses standard English, with nearly all regional and class dialect relegated to the space between quotation marks. Arthur would never say that the “wood smelled of primeval vegetation” (45), which is how the narrator characterizes an outdoor lovemaking scene, an episode in which Arthur himself declares, “We’s’ll be comfortable ’ere” (45). The ancient and almost condescending sound of the word “primeval” suggests a speaker who feels more highly evolved than his narratees.⁸

In the words of Barbara Foley, at stake here is whether or not “proletarian writers who worked in the form of the realistic novel ended up confirming the very world order that they originally set out to oppose” (48), whether realism is wedded to a worldview.⁹ Kelman, unlike Sillitoe and other prior working-class writers, rejects the inherent linguistic superiority of narrator over character. Moreover, he avoids equating narrative progress with economic advancement, even shunning the notion of plot development. David Craig credits Sillitoe with perhaps the “first passage . . . which evokes a factory worker’s experiences from the inside with . . . finesse” (103), yet he still seems to emphasize “the tragic impossibility of escape from the working class for those with special gifts . . . [and] the implication of a lost potential” (C. Craig, “Resisting Arrest” 100). Middle-class consciousness and status remain norms and even goals, implying the desirability of a trajectory of progress in much the same way as plot resolution is desirable in conventional novels, radically different goals from Kelman’s choice to disintegrate narrative hierarchies as a means of critiquing social ones.

Christian Mair brings up a relevant point in his comparison of Caribbean writers Sam Selvon and V. S. Naipaul, who both create narrators who have emigrated from Trinidad to Britain. But Nai-

8. In an essay in *Brick*, Kelman recalls a reviewer (Warner) who referred to Kelman’s characters as “‘preculture’—or was it ‘primeval’?” because of their use of vernacular (“Vernacular” 68).

9. Foley answers that while formal constraints assert a conservative textual politics, a radical theme often manages to overcome formal limitations. The fact that Arthur does marry and keep his job in a bourgeois capitalist society suggests that in his case the message of the form may win out.

paul's narrator in *Miguel Street* speaks standard English while sentimentally looking back at the Port of Spain slum of his youth: "the narrator's mastery of the 'high' variety, the literary standard, becomes an outward sign of his personal growth," whereas Selvon "refuses to place his fiction within the 'diglossic' sociolinguistic framework of Caribbean society" and "develops 'nonstandard' Creole into the language of the third-person narrative" (Mair 145–46). In novels such as *The Lonely Londoners*, to which Mair refers here, Selvon uses Creole outside passages of direct speech, while Naipaul, more in line with Sillitoe, contains such dialect within quotation marks and opts for an assimilated, normative narrative voice that uses standard English. In this way, even novels that deal sympathetically on a thematic or plot level with marginalized populations may, on a structural level, reinforce the exteriority of non-conventional speech and speakers.

Such exteriority is seldom absolute; in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, the narrator occasionally shifts into free indirect discourse, allowing Arthur's speech rhythms and slang into the narrative framework. For instance, Arthur suspects that his affair with a married woman is evident to her husband: "[Jack] must know: no man could be that batchy" (46).¹⁰ Mainly, however, Sillitoe again seems wistful; it is the anarchist thoughts that Arthur has that are allowed to bleed into the narrator's discourse, such as "They think they've settled our hashes with their insurance cards and television sets, but I'll be one of them to turn round on 'em and let them see how wrong they are" (115). Sillitoe does want his characters to seem to be in control of their lives. The final chapter, ceded entirely to Arthur's mode of expression through free indirect style, shows Arthur deciding to marry and join the status quo. Arthur sits alone, thinking about how "you couldn't concern yourself too much" (188) with fears of war, his only hope of escape from his working life coming in a vague rumbling of anarchy. The moment of capitu-

10. As a grammatical tool that Arthur probably would never use, the colon here seems a literary touch and may bespeak a continued narrative regulation of Arthur's thoughts. While Arthur is the focalizer throughout the novel, to draw on Genette's formulation, we can sense the distance between the overt narrator representing Arthur's perspective and the covert narrator whose vocabulary and politics are more self-conscious than Arthur's.

lation to societal expectations and norms is enacted in the character's own voice. Yet the choice of free indirect discourse here is revealing. We never enter a realm of direct free thought; there is no first-person narration. Sillitoe clearly hopes that Arthur will take action someday (a point reinforced by the handing over of the narrative reins to Arthur's language), but he seldom allows his character an entirely unmediated voice in the text, a choice unconsciously paralleling the passive containment of the working class in the comfortable and ever-rising standard of living of late-fifties Britain.

While Sillitoe obviously wrote with a political agenda, he repeatedly declined classification as a working-class writer, resisting the likelihood that his sentiments would be attributed to the working class as a whole. Sillitoe wanted people to see Arthur Seaton as "an individual and not as a class symbol" (qtd. in Hitchcock 80). Still, his voice has come to represent the postwar generation's teddy boys, a group who, as Dick Hebdige points out, "acted out" on weekends with elaborate dress while ultimately conforming entirely to society's expectations (51).¹¹ The tension here between creating a portrait of an individual and speaking for an entire class too often already presumed to be monolithic in its tastes and desires leads Sillitoe to downplay the class elements in his work and instead emphasize the personal, his insistence on the individuality of his characters itself becoming a political statement.

Kelman's position is made possible by this earlier refusal. Indeed, Kelman's novels build on the individuality of Sillitoe's characters but work as well to dethrone the normative narrative voice, refusing to translate for middle-class readers. Previously, Kelman argues, working-class characters "were confined to the margins, kept in their place, stuck in the dialogue. You only ever saw them or heard them. You never got into their mind. You did find them in the narrative but from without, seldom from within" ("Importance" 81). In freeing his characters from quotation marks, Kelman makes it very difficult for us to distinguish between direct speech,

11. See also Hebdige describing his efforts to avoid a Marcuse-like embrace of subcultures as the repository of truth: "there is evidence that cultures of resistance actually sometimes serve to reinforce rather than erode existing social structures" (167). Roger Bromley refers in *Lost Narratives* to the British working class as one "normally characterized by its passivity" (139).

narration, and interior monologue. Drew Milne points out that this blurring “offers neither a representation of speech as speech, nor an authoritative written register which might distinguish author from character” (395). Unlike the authority of Naipaul’s or Sillitoe’s narrators, no one portion of the text seems dominant or can act as a key to understanding the rest.

Milne’s remarks posit a hierarchy of modes of expression, a range of registers from pure to patois, raising the question of who controls speech and language in narratives. For instance, nineteenth-century realist fiction, as Hitchcock aptly describes it, “articulates social relations through the construction of a hierarchy of discourses and appears to present history without a narrator while confirming omniscience as the guiding principle of subjectivity” (96). An invisible omniscient narrator exists on a different textual level than do a novel’s characters and has access to their thoughts and vocabularies. Of course, Kelman’s rupturing of such hierarchical language boundaries is not new: William Faulkner, James Joyce, and others have not only challenged the conventions of omniscient narrative but have done so in a working-class context. In *As I Lay Dying*, Dewey Dell, Jewel, and Vardamon will occasionally speak with language that they clearly would not realistically have knowledge of or access to. As Stephen Ross explains Faulkner’s technique, the valuation of “‘substandard’ dialect over ‘correct’ English” (106) works precisely because a hierarchy exists. Without prior knowledge of the perceived superiority of standard English, readers would not be able to appreciate its displacement, a fact that ultimately reinforces the existence of a hierarchy of linguistic registers. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin, Ross states, “The mimic always remains in some sense superior to the speech (or gestures) imitated, for he or she possesses mastery of both the originating and the mimicked voice” (108). Additionally, the reader’s place in social hierarchies is presumed: he or she must be someone capable of recognizing and understanding both standard and non-standard language. Ross argues that for Faulkner this means readers who are in the position of well-off whites, able to mimic and understand black and lower-class characters who could not in turn mimic standard English. “Transcribed speech, the product of mimicry, always occupies an inferior position in relation to the diegetic

discourse of its production. The mimetic voices we hear are always secondary, indulged and condescended to by the reader who shares . . . the author's power over all the voices" (108).

Kelman opens this analysis of how language hierarchies function. His characters, like Faulkner's, can access language likely to be beyond their purview. Yet while Faulkner's tendency to attribute "sophisticated, highly figural rhetoric to ordinary or even uneducated dialect speakers" serves to "fulfill narrative goals" (Ross 85) such as the creation of a collective psychic mood, Kelman uses disruptions of narrative hierarchy as places to contest our assumptions regarding the limitations of working-class minds, reconfiguring conventional hierarchical distinctions between narrator and character, between educated and uneducated speech, and between written and spoken expression. While in jail for the second time in the novel, Sammy recalls a cellmate who died in prison, perhaps from a beating by guards. Thinking of his unexplained estrangement from Helen, he conflates his situation with the other man's: "yer man, lying cold in his lonely room, a dark cavern of mental solitude. That was definitely the line from a song man no question" (190). There appears to be no distinction between the narrator's voice and Sammy's in this paragraph: the sentence begins in Sammy's own voice, "yer man" ("that guy"). Sammy himself recognizes the lyrical phrase that follows as a departure from his own voice, but unlike credited song lyrics throughout the novel, this one is not set off via indentation on the page. Rather, it is incorporated into the main body of the text, implying that it is part of the body of country music lyrics that Sammy aspires to create someday. Sammy's identification of the phrase as a song lyric suggests that he is aware of its melodramatic excess, implying in turn a sophisticated grasp of the concept of varied speech registers (something the police, Ally, and all social-service employees fail to detect in him). His scan of his own words places him in the role of interpreter, not just interpreted.

Even more important are the conclusions that follow if we accept that a narrative voice with Sammy's limited education and background can generate phrases such as "cavern of mental solitude," or later, "So all in all he had entered a new epoch on life's weary trail" (214). Again we see a full sentence in standard English, again

with an ironic tinge to it. Sammy, it seems, is not only able to mimic standard speech but to parody it. Contrary to Faulkner in Ross's reading, Kelman's reworking of speech hierarchies questions the assumption that those who mimic speech must necessarily see "standard" as the norm. Rather than calling attention to the author's manipulation of all the voices in the text, Sammy's momentary use of standard English reveals the traditional conception of the relationship of dialect to normative language to be limited in its failure to see that dialect speakers have the capacity to be multivoiced as well. By using demotic speech as the lingua franca, Kelman furthermore unsettles the usual placement of readers and critics near the top of a social hierarchy.

Thus the presence of demotic speech outside quotation marks keeps Kelman's text close to its characters, to the point that a shift to first-person narration might create a hierarchy or insert distance between reader, writer, and character, all of whom seem to be the subject of the second person often used in especially emotional moments in the text. On the other hand, when Sillitoe moves into free indirect discourse in *Saturday Night*, the shift is always clearly marked; it is evident that Arthur is supposed to be speaking. When the narrative voice resumes, it is again formal and controlled, distinct from Arthur's voice, with none of the slang he would use. Kelman's text is permeated with slang throughout; there is no point at which a nondemotic narrative voice is in control.

In his review of *How Late It Was, How Late*, Denis Donoghue mentions that he thought at first that Kelman "was using Standard English to denote authority and demotic to give Sammy the only freedom he enjoys, freedom of speech" (46), but this pattern turned out not to hold up. Seeking normal narrative hierarchy, Donoghue sees the inconsistency first as problematic, then as nihilistic.¹² But Kelman defies such an easy compartmentalization of his narrative or his characters: letting Sammy speak only in nonstandard English would actually rob him of the very freedom Donoghue implies he could retain, would replicate centuries of narrative condescension.

12. The charge of nihilism is leveled at Joyce as well (see Moretti, "Long Goodbye"), for his concatenation/profusion of styles, which replicates on a narrative level what Kelman achieves on a linguistic one.

Rather, an inconsistent concentration of dialect ensures an unpredictability that encourages us to consider all languages in the text as equally qualified to express a particular thought. Moreover, the novel with dialect outside the quotation marks makes “a broader attack on the claim to objectivity of the class which controls writing” (Milne 396), undermining the foundations of consistency.

Of course Joyce was another metropolitan colonial writer who sought to destabilize the reader’s experience, in part, like Kelman, through his disinclination to use quotation marks. As Richard Ellmann notes, Joyce “was eager to preserve one typographical feature of the manuscript, the use of dashes instead of quotation marks, on the grounds that the latter ‘are most unsightly and give the impression of unreality,’ in short, are ‘an eyesore’” (353). Joyce’s call for realism here resembles Kelman’s; neither seeks an established realism so much as a way beyond it. As with Kelman, in Joyce the lack of quotation marks works simultaneously to liberate historically underrepresented modes of expression (whether dialects, inappropriate thoughts, or fragments of advertisements) and to suggest that the notion of the individual is flawed, that we are all, in fact, collections of voices and phrases. As André Topia points out about *Ulysses*, “This disappearance of quotation marks is crucial. . . . Nothing permits us to know *a priori* if the sentence ‘belongs’ to Bloom or not” (108).¹³ Indeed, the idea of “ownership” of sentences, even phrases or words, is what is being explicitly interrogated.

This seems in part to be why Kelman relies less and less on speech tags in his later work. *A Disaffection* has no quotation marks, but the narrator still offers us lots of direction: people say, reply, ask, exclaim, grin, smile, nod, chuckle, mutter, glare—all words that offer more or less subtle instructions to the reader. In *How Late*, however, not only are there far fewer attributions, but—in another parallel with Faulkner—the tag is recurrently “said.” Even in situa-

13. The only problem with Topia’s statement is that it does not account for the fact that Joyce’s rejection of quotation marks dates to the proofs of *Dubliners*, though he was compelled to acquiesce to publishers of early editions of his work. While the absence of quotation marks in *Ulysses* is interesting in the way that Topia suggests, Joyce’s polyphony predates the novel where Topia discovers it, implying that the dissolution of narrative hierarchy predates the novel in which many critics locate it.

tions where characters ask questions, if Kelman provides a tag at all, it is the most neutral, nonjudgmental one available: "he said." Sammy will occasionally sigh or sniff or smile, but he is the only character for whom we regularly have such details. The "said" ensures a narrative levelness. In a related technique, Kelman regularly eliminates all speech tags in extended dialogues, making it extraordinarily challenging to keep track of who is speaking. Together, these practices leave the reader unmoored, far removed from a comfortable position of narrative knowingness. The effect is again to render us as blind as readers as Sammy is in his world (both he and we are used to far more cues than we're given), as well as to render all voices and moments potentially equal. But the most important aspect of these stylistic choices is the way they work against plot or development of story: the flatness of the narrative gives it a static, redundant feel, preparing us stylistically for the denial of narrative satisfaction at the novel's end.

As in *Ulysses*, where Bloom's stream of consciousness places a variety of external discourses on the same level, equating the authority of a line from a book with that of a music-hall song fragment, in Kelman's work, a number of discourses attain authority in the text; the traditionally subordinate regional dialect is now on a par with the Queen's English. Certain strains of stream of consciousness, those full of epiphanies and lyric, ordered syntax, make evident strict authorial control. While Kelman's wandering prose is certainly the result of carefully controlled artistry, we sense ourselves less directed, wandering with the characters, both physically and linguistically. Indeed, as Kevin J. H. Dettmar discusses, it may be the refusal to remain consistent within a style that is important. Dettmar characterizes current literary criticism as plagued by modernist readings even of nonmodernist texts. By "modernist reading," Dettmar means an interpretation that accords highest value to an aesthetic of continuity and inner formal logic, which he characterizes as primarily a modernist concern. Current critics, he argues, stress such cohesion even when it is not a major feature of the text, his main example being *Ulysses*. Dettmar suggests, for instance, that Joyce tried to downplay the novel's mythic overtones and continuity by leaving the Homeric titles out of the final draft

(chapter 1 instead of “Telemachus”).¹⁴ Dettmar wants criticism to move beyond a “modernist” reading of *Ulysses* that praises—even insists upon, “discovers,” or invents—formal cohesion to one that allows for and even valorizes inconsistencies of style. The strength of *Ulysses*, he feels, lies in its variety and chance discoveries.

This interpretation of *Ulysses* dovetails nicely with Franco Moretti’s notion of literary evolution, in which “rhetorical innovations . . . are the result of chance” (*Modern Epic* 6). Old forms discover new functions by accident—experiment generates solutions to textual problems. In the case of *Ulysses*, a multitude of styles is the solution to the question of how to characterize modernity, and stream of consciousness is the answer to the question of how to critique the notion of the individual. Moretti emphasizes the intervention of the fortuitous in the development of new techniques; here I want to look more at what problems a new technique can solve, at the question of why to use a new form. Kelman opts to use demotic speech outside quotation marks, creating a studied randomness of style, and thus solves the problem of how to write a working-class novel that doesn’t merely replicate the style of the dominant class. The decision to evade traditional language hierarchies and maintain a chaotic style throughout a novel enacts Kelman’s challenge to traditional authorial authority.

Through such innovations, Kelman builds on what Bakhtin perceives in *The Problems of Dostoyevsky’s Poetics* as Dostoyevsky’s success: “A character’s word about himself is just as fully weighted as the author’s word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character’s objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author’s voice” (6–7). We sense less certainty, an “eschewal of a privileged position of authority for himself, his own voice, a turning loose of his book to his characters” (Dettmar 32). A number of critics have noticed Kelman’s willingness to allow his characters ample space and control of the narra-

14. Franco Moretti excoriates the Joyce industry for relying on the “facile metaphors” and Homeric frame provided by the “Linati” schema: “It remains a mystery why . . . Joyce’s high-school fixations (‘Menton = Ajax’; ‘Incest = journalism’), should ever have been taken so seriously” (*Modern Epic* 184n).

tives they occupy. Ian Bell notes that “Kelman removes himself from the scene entirely,” remarking upon the fact that characters are “apparently unsupervised by an authorial presence” (232, 231).

But this ceding of control is complicated by the issue of class in Kelman’s writing in a way not emphasized by Bell, nor in Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoyevsky. Literary merit is rarely a criterion for works by members of the working class, obliging Kelman to establish his artistic expertise while turning over his text to voices that would presumably lack his elegance, being “almost wholly unmotivated, inarticulate and marginalised” (Baker 245). Kelman’s position poses an interesting paradox: he needs to demonstrate that, contrary to conventional assumptions, working-class writers are capable of rhetorical heft and stylistic verve, yet this point is somewhat in tension with his political and technical desire to allow control of his narrative by his characters, whose voices have long been the defining counterweight to notions of learning and eloquence.¹⁵

Certainly Kelman, more than his critics, sees the need to balance his stylization with his politics. His novels give the appearance of dialogic freedom through an extreme stylization. Kelman’s spelling, for instance, reveals a strategic use of Glasgow dialect, his rhythms impersonate speech, and his supposed realism flouts realism’s conventions. In each case, what seems to be casual (to Kelman’s supporters) or incomprehensible (to his detractors) turns out to be a highly literary choice, down to the commas: “Every comma in my work is my comma. Every absence of a comma or a full stop or semicolon or colon is my absence” (qtd. in Lyall C20).

The consciously literary quality of Kelman’s writing is part of what helps him to escape the pitfalls of stereotypic urban realism, “caught as it usually is between the limited scope of the strictly urban voice and the intrusive commentary of the urban narrator”

15. For an early rehearsal of this very dilemma, see Wordsworth’s claims to authenticity in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* and Coleridge’s rebuttal in *Biographia Literaria*. Unfortunately, many of Kelman’s critics, like Wordsworth, focus on the natural and not the shaping; their eagerness to endorse parts of his working-class politics replicates the very essentializing they laud him for critiquing. Sillitoe’s earlier refusals to speak for the working class take on a new resonance in this context.

(Baker 247). His language is neither fully slangy nor anthropological. Rather, the “English energized with Scots” that Robert Crawford identifies in Kelman becomes the lingua franca for all speakers in Kelman’s novels. Drawing, then, on Kelman’s negotiation of working-class literature and his stylistic expertise, what we see emerging here is the wedding of antihierarchical prose to regional identity, simultaneous to the divorce of realism and authority. The regional, working-class speech in Kelman’s novels, realistic and disordered, confronts the neat conventions of realism as a style.

Breaking with Britishness

Kelman’s explorations via dialect of working-class themes, settings, and characters mean that despite his protestations, his Scottishness occupies the forefront of critical interest and reception right now. Moreover, unlike most writers of his class or subject matter, Kelman has clear connections to a European modernist tradition, both in his influences and mode of allusion. Crawford sees much of the textual innovation of modernism as a consequence of provincialism, marked by the work of outsiders: “[T]heir most characteristic effects are gained by combining the materials on the outer edges—slang, foreign, dialectical—rather than simply rearranging the common pool with the literary and colloquial. There seems to be a geographical correlative of this, inasmuch as most of the High Modernists did not come from the centre of English culture” (269–70). Kelman’s major Anglophone modernist influences are Crawford’s “provincials,” most significantly Joyce and Beckett.

Such an aesthetic pedigree would seem to contradict the critical resistance to *How Late It Was, How Late* in particular. But while Kelman’s influences are highly canonical, his use of them often goes against mainstream readings, emphasizing the exteriority and class tensions present in texts sometimes lauded for aesthetics alone. The way that Kelman comments on the Scottish social system, for instance, owes a great deal to Kafka’s sense of the absurd, inflecting it with a Marxist critique of bureaucracy: the depressed and lonely schoolteacher Pat Doyle, in *A Disaffection*, receives a transfer that he does not remember applying for. He refers to the principal of

the school where he teaches by a number rather than a name, and he continually suspects surveillance by various authorities. Pat himself consciously alludes to "The Metamorphosis," when he compares his state to Gregor Samsa's. In *How Late*, Sammy is required to re-register with the employment bureau after being beaten to the point of blindness by the police, but first he must get a doctor to certify his loss of sight. Unwilling to grant him an appointment, the state medical system eventually refuses to confirm that he is blind. Sammy is removed from the rolls of his original work program but is not allowed access to openings for the visually impaired without a doctor's corroboration of his claim, because, as a Social Service representative who interviews Sammy tells him, "Some jobs demand the capacity of sightless dysfunction" (108), a reversal that makes his disability seem like an advantage, even a privilege. Sammy's blindness makes literal the concept of faceless bureaucracy that Kafka saw around him.

But Kelman's frustration with bureaucracy has a more explicitly political edge to it than Kafka's, making its location and the class positions of its characters explicit, largely through reference to accents. The cunning language games of those in power constitute one of the most Kafkaesque elements of Sammy's world at the same time as they form the center of Kelman's social commentary.¹⁶ One of the major doublespeak debates throughout *How Late It Was, How Late* is about when and how Sammy became blind, the police and doctors all happy to contend that his condition is self-imposed, psychological, or false. At the police station:

It's peculiar you know but I cant see a thing wrong with this chap's eyes. Can you?

No, I cant.

Of course he keeps closing them and it's difficult to see. But I wouldnt be at all surprised if his allegation were to prove unfounded. I suspect there's nothing fucking wrong with them at all. . . . Are you sure you're suffering sightloss?

(181)

16. Sammy's plight is based on Kelman's frustrating efforts to aid asbestos victims alienated by a bureaucracy more interested in avoiding responsibility than in helping them (Wroe).

And at the doctor's:

Aye sorry for interrupting doctor but see when you say "alleged"?

Yes?

Are ye saying that you dont really think I'm blind? . . .

Of course not. . . . In respect of the visual stimuli presented you appeared unable to respond.

So ye're no saying I'm blind?

It isnt for me to say.

Aye but you're a doctor.

Yes.

So ye can give an opinion?

Anyone can give an opinion.

(225)

Just as the text offers no anchors through punctuation or attribution, the bureaucrats Sammy encounters offer nothing he can hold onto. Even phrases that would seem fixed ("Of course not") are ambiguous here: does the doctor mean he is or isn't saying Sammy's blind?

Sammy's interlocutors assume that his low social status means that he will be easy to manipulate verbally, and he is regularly upbraided for not knowing his place. During Sammy's interrogations by the police:

[W]hat did you call him?

Tam Roberts.

Tam Roberts, the political, that's correct.

. . .

Eh?

It's you the serjeant's talking to Mister Samuels.

Sorry.

. . .

Well?

What?

Tam Roberts, he's a political? . . .

Sammy smiled.

What then?

I didnay say that.

Aw, must've been somebody else.

. . .

So what did ye say?
I didnay say he was a political.
We're no asking what ye didnay say, it's what ye did say, that's what
we want to know.

(168–69)

In this passage we see how what Sammy says, as well as what he does not say, can be used against him. His wary refusal to affirm the statements of the interrogators is read as an indication of his complicity in a terrorist plot. The Kafkaesque runaround here is not so much about bureaucracy as about how language works, the gymnastic contortions that words can be forced into. This betrayal by the language one must use to express oneself (silence being not allowed) suggests a connection to the works of Beckett, who is probably one of the sources for Sammy Samuels's name.¹⁷

Beckett is certainly a presence in *How Late*, not just in name. Sammy's difficulties walking, the ill-fitting shoes that are not his, his love of a wet and rainy countryside, his bleak yet funny insights—elements such as these evoke Molloy, Moran, Knott, Vladimir, Estragon. On a textual level, as well, the text has a Beckettian feel to it, its stream of consciousness, its cadences and rhythms, and its repetitions and contradictions calling to mind one of Beckett's novels: "Even getting from here to the house, ye couldnay take it for granted. Ye couldnay. Ye thought ye could but then ye found ye couldnay" (329). The passage reads like Beckett spoken in a Glaswegian accent.¹⁸

While Goethe, Balzac, and Dostoyevsky all receive mention in *A Disaffection*, stylistically and thematically Kafka and Beckett are the most prominent literary forefathers.¹⁹ Less immediately obvious than Kafkaesque absurdity or Beckettian bleakness might be

17. Pitchford discusses the connection that Kelman makes to Milton's Samson (719).

18. Patrick Kane refers to "our 'New Beckett'" and credits the "London criterati" with the epithet (126).

19. Of note here is the absence of clear British influences, less a nationalist or isolationist statement than a matter of necessity, according to Kelman: "[B]ecause of this dearth of home-grown literary models I had to look elsewhere. As I say, there was nothing at all in English literature, but in English *language* literature—well, I came upon a few American writers," as well as writers in Russian, German, and French ("Importance" 83).

the Joycean references and roots, but they constitute a frame and point of reference for Kelman, providing a structure both in his use of allusion and his negotiation of a sense of identity within a nation whose language he loves but whose current situation he rejects. Some of the Joycean intertextualities are quite clear: "The penis floats on the sudsy surface of the water. . . . Masturbation could never be a possibility here," thinks Pat Doyle, incapable of a Lotus-Eaters moment of relaxation (*Disaffection* 108–9). Certainly the anxious and irritating Pat is much more of a Stephen Dedalus figure, with his pretensions, his distaste for humanity, and his aesthetic theories. He fantasizes about meeting, or even being, Hölderlin, philosophizes to his students, and frets in a ponderous stream of consciousness. We regularly hear echoes of Stephen in Pat, from disillusioned efforts to teach adolescents, to a lack of respect for the schoolmaster, down to the strained communication with siblings and awkward weak teas with parents.

Sammy, in *How Late It Was, How Late*, has much more of the peripatetic Bloom to him—thirty-eight years old, sentimental (even mawkish), unaffected in his appreciation of songs, ambling quickly and superficially through a million received images, memories, and allusions. Sammy's now-vanished girlfriend is named Helen, a Trojan War allusion that may provide a further connection with *Ulysses* as Sammy embarks on the wander of his life at the end of *How Late*. While the specificities of Kelman's geography of Glasgow are not nearly so exhaustive as the Dublin rebuildable from the pages of *Ulysses*, the specific mentions of actual pubs and the negotiation of the city evoke a Joycean sense of urban space, as well as continually underlining their own reference to a local identity.

For Kelman, using a local setting involves negotiating between often conflicting definitions of the Scottish and the Glaswegian. His writing comprises a seemingly contradictory blend of distinctively Scottish speech rhythms and an utter disavowal of Scottishness. This localism is distinct from a Scottish tradition yet steeped in it, at a time in which the literary renaissance, as it is being called, is paralleled by a renewed interest in Scottish studies as critics (mostly in Scotland thus far) draw on elements of postcolonial theory to account for the longtime assumption of Scottish writers into the British canon. Upon political union in 1707, many Scots sought

cultural integration with England, reinforcing the tendency to view the Scottish tradition as archaic and obsolete. Crawford sees the study of English literature, as well as the creation of a British literature that examines an island identity, as stemming mainly from the efforts of Scottish writers and teachers (unlike Benedict Anderson, who argues that Scottish "Anglicization was essentially a byproduct" rather than a "selfconscious policy" [90]). In this vein, we can consider that perhaps more like Robert Burns than any Scottish writer since, Kelman is aware of his connection to a tradition he would shun.

Burns exploited his regional identity as a way to avoid, but ultimately dominate, a nascent British (as opposed to English) literature. Not actually of the extremely humble birth often attributed to him, he allowed himself to be perceived as a peasant, a "mere child of nature" (Crawford 97). He appropriated (with extreme, if unnoticed, irony) the degrading term "Scotch bard." The presence of extraordinarily learned images in his poems was regularly overlooked by those wishing to emphasize his racy Scots dialect; such emphasis came both from those proud of their Scottish identity and, more regularly, those wishing to reinforce a sense of Scottishness as a throwback to a romantic earlier age. What both contemporary supporters and detractors of Burns generally failed to note, however, was his cagey use of a range of dialects from standard English to educated Scots to peasant Scots, as well as a blending of classical and folk allusions.²⁰

Burns, then, inadvertently serves as "one of the major figures in the Scottish invention of British Literature" (Crawford 109) through his combination of standard English, Scots dialect, and even Gaelic. Kelman's relationship to the British tradition is similar. Like Burns, he writes in "English energized with Scots" (Craw-

20. In "To a Mouse," for example, Burns speaks to a mouse whose nest he destroys with his plow; the whimsical device of addressing an animal combines with the scenery of the field to create the image most often seen of Burns, the clever rustic. Yet the metrically perfect quatrains confront issues of mortality and foresight, recognizing a crucial distinction between humans and other animals to be an understanding of the passage of time. While the occasional elevated word, such as "foresight," seems colloquial in the context of so many apostrophes and slang words, the mock-heroic tone contains a level of irony often overlooked in Burns.

ford 127). Like Burns, he firmly and clearly draws on a lower-class Scottish identity, complete with a rejection of middle-class morality. And Kelman is perceived, again much like Burns, as merely recording the minutiae of his class. Yet Kelman's careful allusions in his novels suggest where, in a larger Western literary tradition, he thinks he belongs, English references avoided in favor of specifically Scottish ones, as well as European Enlightenment and modernist ones.

But even as Kelman manifests anti-British stances, he shows himself to be wary of Scottish nationalists who would enlist him in their cause. While it is productive to talk about Kelman as a Scots writer in order to emphasize his similarities to Burns, he hardly prefers this label to that of Britishness. Instead, as Drew Milne puts it, "[t]he city rather than region or nation is the key analytic category" (394). The urban elements of Glasgow writing are significant on at least two levels. First, in response to the critical tendency to emphasize Kelman's Scottishness, Simon Baker offers the interesting theory that Kelman should not be viewed as Scottish because his native Glasgow, as a city that came of age in an industrial and imperial boom long after Scotland ceased to exist as a nation in 1707, is alien and even antithetical to the imaginary Scotland critics draw on (237). The patterns of immigration to Glasgow even render it ethnically distinct from the idea of a Scottish race. Second, "in the cities, many Scots saw the real Scotland in terms of a proletariat whose identity was with other proletarians around the world, rather than with a 'people' or a nation in which the industrial city happened to be situated" (C. Craig, Introduction 6). Kelman's very existence as a writer shows the strain of an overarching nationalism while suggesting a new model for burned-out international Marxism.

If the best approach to Kelman is through a Glaswegian, rather than a Scottish, or certainly a British, lens, we must deal with a host of Glasgow-specific issues. "Glasgow is domestic, historyless, and so unimagined; there is no narrative to its existence, and consequently its life cannot be translated into artistic forms which depend on narrative for their effects," says Cairns Craig (*Out of History* 33). On a structural level, then, a Glaswegian novel would not conform to conventional notions of plot. Scotland is not a place

where narrative exists as a way to cope with the present, not a place where stories work. Rather, like those of the Joyce who was affected by Irish nationalism and the ravages of World War I, these narratives are open-ended, circular, pointless, plotless, unresolved. *How Late* in particular denies the reader any sense of narrative closure, leaving us uncertain as to Sammy's future or his past, as to Helen's whereabouts or Sammy's physical health. A reconciliation with his son is incomplete; any political activities are both unsubstantiated and unrefuted. The book's final sentence, ending with the words "out of sight," connects this lack of closure to the blindness throughout the novel.

What takes place on a structural level with unfinished stories is recapitulated on a linguistic level with unfinished sentences and uneven dialect. The introduction to *The Scottish National Dictionary* questions the value of Glaswegian as a dialect, arguing that it is constructed rather than natural, bastard rather than legitimate: "Owing to the influx of Irish and foreign immigrants in the industrial area near Glasgow the dialect has become hopelessly corrupt" (qtd. in Morgan 195). Not a national capital like Edinburgh and certainly not an imperial metropole like London, Glasgow sits on the margins of history and of linguistic uniformity.

This state may parallel the peripheral condition of other nonmetropolitan urban centers. According to Luke Gibbons, urban marginalization in nations with a powerful sense of mythic history stems in part from the supposition that the locus of authentic culture is the countryside; the city is always corrupt, suspect, and inauthentic.²¹ Moreover, the very size of the population leads to inevitable dilutions of dialect. Nationalism is hence denied to city dwellers, as one cannot be an "authentic" nationalist on the periphery of nationality, a condition characterized sarcastically but pertinently by Tom Nairn's criteria of "ethnic purity, rural bliss, ancestral gemeinschaft, [and] ineffable idiom-truths" (qtd. in Kane 178). Such a disavowal of a genuine, pure identity is well in line with Kelman's own take on where he is from: "There is nothing about

21. Gibbons notes that Ireland's faith in the rural as a site of cultural authenticity seems to have been born precisely out of the modernization that drew people to the cities (84–89).

the language as used by the folk in and around Glasgow or Ramsgate or Liverpool or Belfast or Swansea that makes it generally distinct from any other city in the sense that it is a language composed of all sorts of particular influences, the usual industrial or post industrial situation where different cultures have intermingled for a great number of years" (Kelman, "Importance" 84).²² Kelman goes on to suggest that the idea of Glaswegian identity is a late twentieth-century construct, the state from which he inevitably must write rather than a glorious or burdensome condition. Glasgow, in many ways the New York City of Scotland, only tangentially related to the rest of the country, rougher, distinct from it, anchors Kelman's prose, rather than Scotland. And Glasgow, in the Scottish imaginary, is explicitly working class. It is to this dimension of Kelman's fiction that we now turn.

"Middle-Class Wankers"

The issue of working-class identity is explored most fully not, as in classic social realist texts, at the level of plot development, but, as I have suggested in my discussion of realism, at the level of a character's or a narrator's language. For example, the choice to narrate *A Disaffection* through the perspective of a working-class-born teacher allows Kelman, like Selvon, space to undermine the notion of "mastery" of standard English as a sign of personal growth. For one thing, Patrick Doyle is not more personally grown than the blue-collar characters in the book. A teacher of working-class adolescents in Glasgow, Pat experiences ongoing existential crises which he seeks to resolve through an attempted affair with another teacher, through musical creativity in the form of a homemade wind instrument, and through reconnection with his estranged family. None of his efforts is totally successful, however, suggesting that perhaps the solution lies beyond the personal, that it is the isolation of modern industrial society causing his anomie. Within Pat's self-styled *Weltanschauung*, then, lies an indictment of

22. See Terry Eagleton's remark that *Ulysses* in its very specificity suggests "with its every breath just how easily it could have done the same thing for Bradford or the Bronx" (15).

the hearty individualism and companion work ethic which turn out not to function in contemporary Glasgow. An earlier or more standard working-class novel might follow one of two predictable plotlines: either the success of the hero would show the advantages and freedoms offered by an education and a good job, or failure would end in the bitter disillusionment of expectations not met. With Pat's disaffection, however, Kelman manages both to point to the limitations of progress through social mobility and to make a critique of such progress as a goal.

If anything, Kelman seems to imply that Pat's education and supposed insights have led him only to a form of bourgeois ennui in place of the more physical suffering of his family. Though Pat does on occasion make use of sophisticated linguistic or grammatical forms, such as the subjunctive mood, for the most part even his intellectual ruminations take place in part in his boyhood vernacular; a full range of thought inheres even in uneducated argot: "When I am dead I shall be thingwi and there shall be no more problems insofar as the world ceases to exist when I shut the fucking eyelids. Okay! I'm going to fucking wipe you out ya bastards" (221). Pat's existential questioning, reminiscent of Piaget and Descartes among others, yet slangy and profane, implies that deep thoughts are not just the territory of sophisticated speech.

But Kelman does more than merely point out that educated speech is not unique in its access to complex ideas. There's a further twist in Pat's musings: not only does the use of slang demolish the idea of appropriate forms for certain subjects, but the subject itself here critiques the very terms of the philosophical debate Pat would enter. In fact, reality is the exact opposite of Pat's philosophical fantasy. In his thought experiment, closing his eyes would wipe out his aggressors; in reality, their relentless rules and conformities are wiping him out. Again, the value of a good education in the face of such an overwhelming System is questioned, at both a conceptual and a linguistic level.

To complicate the matter, Pat himself is aware of the disjunction between the language he grew up with and the one he now speaks; his egalitarian politics are confronted by assumptions about the superiority of educated speech that are seemingly contained within language itself. During a strained visit to his parents, as Pat con-

templates his guilt in avoiding them, the narrative moves toward their grammar: "He should have gone straight home after the match. He just shouldni have come here. How come he came? He shouldni have fucking came" (114). From a prescriptively proper use of the past conditional, the language shifts to slang, "shouldni," and then slides into an incorrect construction, "have . . . came," perhaps brought on by the intrusion of the demotic, or perhaps by the presence at the dinnertable of parents who would say "have came," and who, Pat senses, would feel awkward in the presence of their son's learned (in both senses of the word) speech.

Pat's relations with his brother similarly show Kelman to be simultaneously less idealistic about a working-class call to action than earlier writers like Sillitoe and more willing to cede control of his narrative. Where Sillitoe's working-class Arthur stood alone at his machine, Gavin, Davie, and Arthur, Kelman's working-class characters in *A Disaffection*, sit together at home. All three are unemployed, drinking afternoons away, collecting their dole, wishing for work. They identify with each other's plights and feel a working-class allegiance, even to the point of thinking Marx is "Fucking great" because "He was for the workers and that's that, end of story" (274). The endorsement of Marx here by the lads is so casual as to render it dismissive on a textual level. Kelman is obviously wary of the "implausible 'conversion' plots" (Foley 46) marking earlier proletarian novels, but he seems aware as well that his characters, while not insincere, lack conviction. The nod to Marx is a platitude, not a dogma.

Indeed, the scene highlights the "illusoriness of . . . traditional modes of solidarity" revealed by "the destruction of the traditional Scottish industries" (C. Craig, "Resisting Arrest" 101), including the construction work Gavin is trained to do. Kelman's text is wary of traditional Marxism because, although they are united, its workers remain disempowered, with nothing to lose. Yet such a reading falls short of the commentary that Kelman makes. Certainly, Kelman in no way discounts the presence and power of class tensions in modern-day Scotland. Pat has been trained as a teacher and had access to a university education that his older brother did not. When he arrives at his brother's house, mid-afternoon, it is because he has decided to leave his stable teaching job, even though he

has no clear plans in mind. Throughout the scene, Gavin expresses anger and resentment: "More than half of Scotland's no got a job. So you dont start treating it with impunity if you're lucky enough to have one." Even jokes bear sharp edges, to the point that "The levels of irony were become slippery" (255). Tensions finally reach a head when Gavin calls teachers "middle-class wankers" (281), a charge that applies by extension to Pat. Gavin sees nonmanual labor as pointless, as evidenced by his substitution of "wanker" for "worker," which links the unproductivity of masturbation with class standing. Pat, who wants to quit teaching expressly because of his powerlessness to effect changes in the lives of his disadvantaged students, cannot bear to hear the charge from his exploited brother that he would likely level at himself. He begins to hope that Gavin's friends will "step into the fray and fix things so that all would be okay again and they could all be muckers and just sit back and I dont know christ anything, tell stories or something, wee yarns about going over the sea to Skye and Heraclitus and genies" (282).

Pat's response, then, is to return to the working class (and here he embraces the usually degrading term "mucker"), swathe himself in regional speech—the word "wee" in particular has a Celtic feel to it—and enter the world of myth. The first myths Pat thinks of are those of the island of Skye, a locus of Scottish national, and in particular the more "authentic" Highland, culture. He then moves to Heraclitus, a seeming stand-in for a European or Western tradition, and then to genies, the exotic representatives of the rest of the world.²³ His list is significant in a couple of ways: first, he leaves Britain out of his geographic progression, implying the irrelevance of that category. Second, Pat ends up in the international sphere again, wanting to exchange myths with the workers of the world. In both his need for local myth and his internationalism, Pat seems to want or need to reromanticize the very working class about whose future he is so cynical.

23. Given that Heraclitus is somewhat obscure and known for his cryptic sayings, it seems unlikely that Pat really wishes to chat about him; Hercules is a much more likely, more mythical subject. Just when Pat longs for connection, his distance from his family is again underlined, as it is doubly unlikely that they have ever heard of Heraclitus, could participate in a conversation about him, or would even wish to.

Even more ironically, the scenario Pat hopes for, the sitting back and trading of stories, is precisely the scene taking place, a scene more possible in the world of the unemployed. In romanticizing the workers, Pat eliminates work from his fantasy, using the term “mucker” for all of its connotations of fraternity while ignoring its implication of coarse (even disgusting) manual labor. Not unlike Gavin’s uninformed embrace of Marx, Pat’s supposedly more educated view, in its failure to account for labor, misinterprets what it means to be a worker. Here, then, we see the limitations of Cairns Craig’s reading of such scenes as social critique. Like Milne, McRobbie, and others, Craig praises Kelman for eluding the very proselytizing that such criticism can recapitulate. The idealism Kelman takes pains to critique with his slippery irony is wistfully reinscribed by both romantic Pat and sanguine Craig. Much as Kelman’s characters make ineffectual nods to Marxism, Kelman’s advocates approve the endorsement of Marx they find on one level without accounting for the critiques taking place on other levels.

What other levels? This is one crucial point at which Kelman’s formal choices begin to interact with and influence thematic and narrative ones. Amid his longing for the Highlands and his wish for universal identification, Pat remains rooted in distinctly unromantic Glasgow. His reaction to his brother highlights the distance of contemporary Glasgow from the image of Scotland maintained through myth and tourism. In fact, this Scotland has little to do with postnational Glasgow at all. Realizing that part of his depression is a consequence of a sense of both physical and social entrapment, it occurs to Pat to drive away from Glasgow and from predictability, though this possibility seems unlikely to his narrator/ consciousness:

Hang onto your hat! He will not do it. He’ll never get beyond the outer reaches of greater Glasgow. Such a thing is scarcely possible. He has always lacked a certain bon vivre, a certain affirmatio, a certain

Patrick Doyle, drove right out of Glasgow, late that Friday evening.

(69)

Within this short passage, there are layers upon layers of language. Pat mocks the clichéd, upbeat mood of early newsreel reporting: “Hang onto your hat!” The passage becomes cosmopolitan, redun-

dant, and novelistic, passing through British, French, and Latin characterizations of his problem. Then it trails off, leaving the sentence grammatically and thematically unfinished, the condition undefined. When the voice resumes in a new paragraph, it becomes temporarily, parodically formal, traditional, and pedantic, sticking in extra commas and using Pat's full name.

Just as the surplus commas create grammatical errors, however, this authoritative final voice is wrong. Pat does not leave Glasgow, this night or any other in the novel. Like Sammy in *How Late It Was, How Late*, Pat may repeatedly wish and plan to leave, but he is contained entirely within Glasgow. The only possibility of escape is offered by the multitude of unfinished sentences in the novel, the gaps and pauses that the narrative voice has left for him. More precisely, it is the absence of any dominant narrative voice that allows for this freedom. Indeed, the fact that the narrative voice is mistaken raises the possibility that much of what happens does not happen as described. Unlike novels where a patently unreliable narrator is often so undermined by his or her own text that careful readers can distinguish the "real" and "true" story, what "actually" happened, beneath or around the lunatic rantings, the text here seems to invalidate the possibility of any narrator or reader being correct all the time. A character can escape the generally prescriptive power of narrative trajectory through actions that belie the narrative voice. Less illusory than myth or Marxism, grammatical freedom and formal change here have the possibility of generating a way out through emphasis on the local. Whether this is a genuine freedom or not is arguable—Pat's escape of the narrative voice equals his failure to escape Glasgow—but Kelman's formal decisions do allow him to depict working-class Glasgow without relying on the clichés of gritty realism.

This refusal to idealize emphasizes the difference between the situations of reader and character, handing narrative power to the historically disempowered. There seems to be a possibility in *How Late*, for instance, that Sammy knows more than he's letting on, that he's hiding from the middle-class wanker/reader the same stuff that he may be hiding from the government, that he's making up stories and trusts the reader no more than anyone else:

Ye blunder on but ye blunder on. That's what ye do. What else is there man know what I'm talking about what else is there? fuck the suicide rates and statistics, Sammy was never a huffy bastard, that's one thin. Know what he felt like? A can of fucking superlager. Aye no danger. He had a drouth, a drouth. Know what that means it means he's fucking thirsty. Fuck yer coffee and fuck yer tea and fuck yer fucking milk if ye're fucking lucky enough to fucking have any of the fucking stuff know what I'm saying. Plus nay tobacco.

(319)

The definition of the word "drouth" here seems specifically directed at readers who would not know its meaning otherwise because of regional or class differences—class especially, as the question of privilege enters into Sammy's tirade. I said above that Kelman declines to define or translate his working-class speech for middle-class readers, and this passage is a partial exception. But while Sillitoe stood between readers and Arthur, if Kelman is in this passage at all by the end, he is standing next to Sammy, in opposition to the reader. Grammatically, this passage is among Kelman's least conventional—run-ons, fragments, uncapitalized words. Sammy's distance from the dominant national language, and from any middle-class reader, is never greater.

Yet Kelman categorically avoids glorification of his wayward hero. While Sammy himself may have moments of self-pity or self-romanticization, Kelman resists the temptation. Even the essentially trivial subject of the rant above—beer and smokes—diminishes our tendency to see Sammy as an emblem of the plight of the working class. Indeed, the vernacular itself is rendered such that it declines to offer "an ideal of the Scottish working-class as maintainers of a distinctive Scots language" (C. Craig, "Resisting Arrest" 102). The spellings of demotic words are not consistent throughout the text, nor do they follow traditional renderings of a generalized Scots accent. Rather, the pronunciations are "specific," "geographic" (102), Glaswegian rather than Scots. Kelman's use of this specific urban dialect deconstructs the notion of a homogenized working class.

What emerges in Kelman's novels, then, is a form which emphasizes the inevitable failure of a normative narrative voice to articu-

late the local or the working class. Instead of a standard hierarchy of narrative control, disorder and cacophony reign. Resisting a standard realistic style, Kelman reinterprets both what constitutes realism and what its status is. His reshaping of the genre involves an embrace of incompleteness and fragments, textual experimentation, pastiche, antinovel, nonstory—the territory of the postmodern. What is significant in Kelman is how closely tied these elements are to his working-class regionalism. Efforts to isolate aspects of his style and his politics seek to normalize an author resistant to critical incorporation; moving beyond existing categories will allow fuller understanding of his radical ground.

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