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DIALECT(IC) NATIONALISM?: THE FICTION OF JAMES KELMAN AND RODDY DOYLE

This article contrasts the use of dialect in the work of James Kelman and Roddy Doyle. It seeks to contextualise their writing within the divergent historical moments in Scotland and Ireland that inform both the production and location of their fiction.

The historic cross-pollination between Scotland and Ireland has a pedigree that is both ancient and diverse. The prolific volume of human traffic has, of course, been in both directions: from the Ulster plantation of Scots Presbyterians in the 1600s, to the nineteenth-century influx of Irish into industrial Scotland, this transmigration has had a profound impact on the economic, social and cultural co-ordinates that define the modern landscape of each nation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, whilst T.S. Eliot was declaring that there was no such thing as Scottish literature, it was Ireland's Celtic Revival that inspired Hugh MacDiarmid to resurrect a sense of Scotland's unique cultural heritage and consequent right to self-determination.¹ And it is MacDiarmid's specific reconfiguration of nationalism around the language question that resonates throughout our subsequent discussion of contemporary urban vernacular. Contemporary Scotland intermittently directs similar looks towards Ireland, not least as the realisation of a national, political, and economic success story which has so far remained elusive. For Alex Salmond, the leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party:

Looking across from Scotland we see what a small nation can achieve [...] In Scotland we can only envy Ireland's international visibility, and all the advantages in tourism and investment – not to mention self-respect.²

The Republic of Ireland embodies many ideals to which certain Scots aspire, but have ultimately been denied through their continued incorporation within the body politic of the British state. However, Salmond's idealised perception of the independent nation state is deliberately elliptical. His use of 'Ireland' is self-consciously contrived, and would seek to ignore the political reality of the North, where questions of independence continue to be articulated with violent and bloody consequences. Leaving this aside, Salmond's look across the Irish Sea is doubly green: somewhat envious whilst simultaneously reflecting the Republic's highly visible international presence, the global ubiquity of the Irish green. But what exactly have the Irish achieved that provokes this jealous glance from Scotland? During the 1990s, whilst Scotland was mustering the courage to vote for devolution, the Republic of Ireland transformed itself from

one of Europe's poorest nations into one of its wealthiest. Figures estimate that, on current growth rates, by 2007 the average income per capita in the greater Dublin region will be 250% of the EU average, making it the second richest region in Europe after the city of London.³ A radical government finance policy unleashed unprecedented economic growth, a period of boom subsequently christened the 'Celtic Tiger'. By comparison, Scotland continued to endure a process of relative economic stagnation. It is this wider political and economic contrast that forms the contextual background to the following juxtapositioning of James Kelman and Roddy Doyle.

The literary connections between these authors are significant. Both have won the prestigious Booker Prize and more strikingly still, in consecutive years. Roddy Doyle took the award in 1993 for his novel *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha* and Kelman in 1994 for *How Late It Was, How Late*. More than this, however, it is their intimate concern with the role of language, and in particular dialect, that makes a detailed comparison of their work both intellectually fascinating and long overdue. For the purpose of my argument, I understand 'dialect' to refer to a non-standard mode of speech, in particular one arising from regional or class differences within the nation state. In this way, I will argue that dialect frustrates any attempt to appropriate either Kelman or Doyle's work within any culturally nationalist paradigm.

Dialect is one of the most distinguishing features within contemporary Scottish literature. It exudes an irresistible gravitational force throughout almost every genre. From the poetry of Tom Leonard and the plays of Liz Lochhead, to the novels of William McIlvanney and Irvine Welsh, all have been compelled to navigate the particularities of Scotland's unique linguistic inheritance. For Cairns Craig:

Modern dialect writers [...] continue to call on the moral and linguistic authority of the literary tradition of Scots to make their dialect speakers the representatives of a 'higher' rather than a 'lower' morality, representative of a tradition of national freedom and resistance to oppression going back through Burns to Henryson.⁴

It is this constructed vernacular canon that would lend credence to Michael Gardiner's claim for Scotland's necessary and just inclusion within the remit of the postcolonial debate.⁵ For T.M. Devine, the prevalence of dialect within the Scottish literature of the 1980s and early 1990s accords with his analysis of a new found national confidence, a declarative affirmation of cultural difference that formed a catalyst for the success of the 1997 devolution referendum. Spearheaded by writers such as Kelman, the early 1990s were 'At Last: the Real Scottish Literary Renaissance'.⁶ For Douglas Gifford, the heterogeneity and internationalism of this 'New Renaissance' can only be salutary, offering a cultural engagement that is actively strengthened by its very concern with the self-reflexivity and contradictory aspects of contemporary identity politics in Scotland.

There has been some detailed analysis of the linguistic inheritance from Scots that characterises modern, urban dialect writing in Scotland. Annette Hagan's *Urban Scots Dialect Writing* (2002) is a coherent and persuasive argument for the evolution of contemporary Glaswegian from this historic language. As her title suggests, what Kelman and his contemporaries write is a specifically urban version of Scots. Her thesis is primarily a linguistic analysis of this development and is candid regarding its own limitations; Hagan concludes by calling for a more literary analysis of urban dialect which would foreground not just how it is manifest, but rather its significance as a literary trope. A novel like William McIlvanney's *Docherty* (1975) is similarly conducive to reading modern dialect writing within a specifically nationalist, post-colonial paradigm. Set at the dawn of the twentieth century, the novel follows the lives of the Docherty family, growing up in the working-class town of Graithnock. Structurally, the demotic speech patterns of the characters is juxtaposed with the Standard English of the third person narrator. In one infamous episode, the Docherty's youngest son Conn is beaten at school for speaking Scots rather than 'proper English'. This physical violence is symptomatic of a linguistic violence imposed upon generations of Scottish children by the 1872 Scottish Education Act, whereby funding for schools north of the border was contingent upon their exclusive use of English as the medium for education. Though *Docherty* exposes the violence manifest in this type of linguistic colonialism, it is a mistake to apply this type of analysis to all contemporary uses of demotic speech within Scottish Literature. For Kelman in particular this type of reading has led to perniciously narrow understandings of both the aesthetic and political intent of his work. It would seek to characterise him as the bitter Scot, defining him through concerted and stereotypical notions of a latent anti-Englishness: for example, at the press conference following his Booker Award in 1994 the very first question asked by a journalist was: 'Why do you hate the English?' This inevitably immuring critical paradigm persisted throughout the 1990s as the Scottish devolution question was asked, answered and politically realised with the achievement of the Holyrood Parliament. In 2002, Catherine Lockerbie, the Director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, commented:

Now that devolution has been achieved, people don't have to prove they are Scottish writers anymore [...] I think we have moved on from the days of the stereotypical writer. Young writers today don't have to write those quasi-political novels.⁷

Lockerbie's analysis offers an invariably reductive account of what was a prolifically fertile period within Scottish literature. It would reconfigure the radical politics of all pre-devolutionary writing as simply different verses sung from the same nationalist hymn sheet. It would imply a derisive political and cultural homogeneity within what is an unequivocally diverse, complex and often contradictory body of literature. Furthermore, it would argue that the political

imperative which underlies the charged aesthetic of writers such as Kelman, should ultimately become satisfied by the partial restoration of self-governance in the form of the Scottish Parliament. However, this has clearly not been the case. In contrast to these nationalist readings, Berthold Schoene seeks a continued analysis of Scotland's cultural specificity beyond the Manichean dualism offered by narrow postcolonial readings. For Schoene this type of critique has an inherently truncated analytic value.⁸ What needs to be remembered is that the postcolonial experience is markedly different across the hierarchy of social classes within the assimilated polity. Historically, in Scotland many prospered and continue to do so through the political union with Britain. Kelman's aesthetic is concerned with exposing subliminal systems of power which persist below and also beyond the confines of an exclusively postcolonial paradigm. Through re-examining the language of Kelman's fiction, this article seeks to renegotiate fundamentally the coordinates set by this binary opposition. It is in this spirit that a look towards Ireland, as a different yet similar political and cultural topography, becomes both propitious and provocative.

In the past, Roddy Doyle has spoken openly about the irrelevance of the postcolonial question as a framing context for his work:

I think it's true to say that we no longer live with a post-colonial mindset. It's a long time since I heard the Brits being blamed for something [...] We're at a point now where we're starting to take responsibility for our own disasters.⁹

With echoes of Alex Salmond's earlier comments, Doyle too would seem to disregard completely the significance of Northern Ireland within the context of the Irish debate. It would seem that the North has been purged from the collective consciousness of the Republic, which no longer regards the achievement of a united Ireland as fundamental to its sense of cultural identity. This objection will be left aside in order to focus on the main theme of my argument, namely, the issue of class in the work of both Doyle and Kelman. In order to do so I will first consider the possibilities for dialect writing in an independent and sovereign nation state: namely, Doyle's Republic of Ireland. *The Barrytown Trilogy* consists of Doyle's first three novels: *The Commitments* (1988), *The Snapper* (1990) and *The Van* (1991).¹⁰ These novels centre on the Rabbittes, a working class family living in the fictional Barrytown estate on the geographic and economic periphery of Dublin. *The Commitments* records the efforts of the son, Jimmy Jr, to form a soul band in Dublin, the name of which lends the book its title. *The Snapper* is the story of his sister Sharon's unplanned pregnancy and her father's attempts to reconcile himself to this. And the final novel in the series, *The Van*, deals with the dad Jimmy Sr's struggle to navigate the economic and psychological trauma caused by long term unemployment.

For the Russian formalist Mikhail Bakhtin, 'the novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of [a] social diversity of speech types.'¹¹ This theoretical model

offers a useful platform from which to approach Doyle's work. For as Denis Donoghue rightly argues: 'Doyle doesn't deal in landscapes, cityscapes, backgrounds, or settings. His sole context is whatever is enforced by dialogue and a short communal memory.'¹² Our experience of Barrytown and the people that live there is constructed through the interplay of language, as Doyle's texts consist primarily of dialogue between various characters with a minimum of narrative exposition. For Bakhtin, a character in a novel is not so much the image of a man but rather the image of a language.¹³ The term 'heteroglossia' ('differentiated speech') describes the complex hierarchy of different linguistic codes within the literary text. Language is stratified according to social activity and every register is a typification, a style pertaining to certain groups. Hence, the linguistic hierarchy registers both historical and social distinctions between speakers of different codes (i.e. power relations). Within Doyle's fiction, the antagonistic interplay of dialect and Standard English articulates, whilst it simultaneously disrupts, the social and cultural inequality generated initially by class difference. We find the mother of the Rabbitte family, Veronica, continually policing her children's language: it's not 'yeah', but rather 'yes', and she tells her son Les: 'Don't think you can stroll in and out of here when you feel like it and shout language like a – like a knacker.' (V p.186) Veronica is acutely aware of the dominant social value system that would discriminate against her kids based on elitist ideas of linguistic identity. As such, her reprimands ought to be read as a symptom of this anxiety, rather than any latent snobbery on her part. The distinction between a polite or 'higher' register and the demotic, working class vernacular is illustrated by Jimmy Sr's persistent swearing, and the scolding from his wife that it invariably provokes. A class exercise in school sees the twins having to recall that morning's breakfast conversation. They quote verbatim their dad's colourful condemnation of the weather: 'It looks like another fuck of a day.' The teacher, as part of the state-sponsored educational apparatus, tells the twins unequivocally that their father 'should be ashamed of himself'. (V p.178) In Doyle's fiction, dialect functions to expose the prejudice inherent in the dominant value system which would seek to label and denigrate the working class of Barrytown every time they speak.

Doyle's novels are set during the early 1990s, a time when the 'Celtic Tiger' was radically transforming the social and economic fabric of Irish life. Jimmy Sr comes into direct contact with this metamorphosis when he journeys into the city centre of Dublin, ironically a trip designed to stave off the despair and boredom caused by poverty and unemployment. His experience of the regenerated Dublin is marked by a sense of unfamiliarity and estrangement:

He went into town and wandered around. He hadn't done that in years. It had changed a lot; pubs he'd known and even streets were gone. It looked good though, he thought. He could tell you one thing: there was money in this town. (V p.409)

This sense of alienation reverberates throughout the linguistic landscape of this redeveloped and commercialised metropolis. On a social night out in the city centre, Jimmy Sr is confronted by the moneyed voice of this new prosperous Ireland:

There were huge crowds out, lots of kids – they were on Grafton Street now – big gangs of girls outside McDonalds. Not like the young ones in Barrytown; these young ones were used to money. They were confident, more grown up; they shouted and didn't mind being heard. They had accents like newsreaders. (V p.580)

The idiosyncrasies of the local dialect have been supplanted by a softer, more homogeneous speech. For Ken Hirschkop this type of linguistic phenomenon is symptomatic of the cultural value system prevalent in advanced capitalist society.¹⁴ People increasingly begin to construct their identity from advertising and media sources. This process begins to affect Jimmy Sr: the best compliment he can muster for a freshly poured pint is that it looks like something from an ad. Later we follow him to a pretentious yuppie wine bar in Dublin's Leeson Street. Here he tries to chat up some women and conspicuously adjusts his speech, suppressing his natural accent for a 'higher' linguistic register. Working in the chip van is re-constituted as 'self-employed' in the 'catering industry.' Here we are witness to the contingent and ultimately arbitrary nature of both the linguistic and cultural hierarchies created by the dominant value system. That Jimmy Sr can embody the privileged discourse with such ease and fluidity demonstrates that its exclusivity is in fact a myth. Its position of privilege is neither inevitable nor is it guaranteed. A similar ability to code shift accompanies his son's attempt to become a successful radio DJ. Jimmy Jr takes elocution lessons in order to develop for himself a distinctive and commercially acceptable radio voice: 'This is Jommy Robbitte – All-over-Oreland.' Radio success, like the wider consumer culture of which it is a part, would encourage the suppression of local linguistic identity in favour of the 'newsreader' voices characteristic of the new Dublin. It is a linguistic prejudice which would deliberately subordinate any overt expression of a distinctive working class culture. For Doyle the Rabbits live in 'a society [...] that has no interest in them whatsoever [...] They live on the periphery. They look for themselves on the television and they're not there, so culturally they do not exist.'¹⁵ This affirmation of existence is central to the political aesthetic at the heart of Doyle's fiction. For Bakhtin, 'it is impossible to reveal, through a character's acts and through these acts alone, his ideological position and the ideological world at its heart, without representing his discourse.'¹⁶ Doyle's insistence on a text founded on dialect is a political choice, testifying to the existence of both a people and a culture that the grand narrative of economic progress would ignore, marginalise and ultimately silence.

But how does this relate to questions of national identity, which are what ultimately concern us here? It is significant that Jimmy Jr's radio *persona* must lose its regional specificity in order to experience national commercial success and be heard 'All-Over-Oreland'. The 'Celtic Tiger' is part of a specifically *national* narrative by which the Irish body politic has recently chosen to define itself. For the people of Barrytown the sense of belonging to this or any other coherent national narrative is simply non-existent. When Jimmy Jr addresses his band *The Commitments*, he tells them that their music will have nothing to do with Irishness or official notions of national identity. The band will sing about the things that are important to ordinary people, 'Not songs abou' Fianna fuckin' Fail or anythin' like tha'. Real politics.' Their identity is more socially specific than any national conception will allow:

- Where are yis from? (he answered the question himself.)
- Dublin. (He asked another one.) - What part o' Dublin? Barrytown. Wha' class are yis? Workin' class. (C13)

A similar theme of marginalisation is played out in *The Snapper* when Sharon visits her local Doctor. She complains about having to wait so long and the Doctor apologises, suggesting that she write to her T.D (Member of Parliament) (S214). Later in the pub Sharon and her friends mock the Doctor ('the stupid bitch') and her naïve belief that the political system has any concern or correspondence with the lives of ordinary people. It is important to recognise that the 'Celtic Tiger' of the 1990s was an economic trend initiated and fostered by the Irish Government in a desperate attempt to modernise an antiquated national economy. Deliberately low corporate tax rates attracted substantial foreign investment as it became increasingly profitable for multi-national companies to relocate major portions of their business to the Republic of Ireland. Significantly, however, the lion's share of profit from these industries leaves the Republic every year, as they are primarily owned overseas. The most profound impact of the 'Celtic Tiger' has been in the creation of work for a highly skilled labour force. As such it has continued to neglect families like the Rabbittes who live on or below the Irish poverty line. Re-training and re-educating the unemployed has become a rallying cry for contemporary government policy makers. When Jimmy Sr's friend Bertie attends a state-sponsored workshop, this process is manifested in a patronising lesson in how to use a telephone. This episode would seek to imply that poverty and unemployment are a result of stupidity, as these people are unable to perform even the simplest of tasks. This inferiorisation contrasts sharply with Doyle's intimate portrait of the ordinary citizens of Barrytown, who are more quick-witted and perceptive in their own terms than the official discourse would allow. What Doyle's use of dialect articulates is an experience of social inequality untold by the 'Celtic Tiger' myth: its hidden and rotten underbelly. In 2004, of the total population of 4 million, almost a quarter of Irish people (around 700,000) still live in poverty.¹⁷

Despite economic transformation, the Republic of Ireland is currently listed second only to the United States on the scale of social inequality for countries within the developed world.¹⁸ Fintan O'Toole provides a damning indictment of the mythology of the 'Celtic Tiger' in *A Mass for Jesse James: A Journey Through 1980's Ireland* (1990). The post-Christmas bargain hunting, described as 'The Sales Ritual – a fable for our times' is a prime example of the underlying vacuity that characterises this reborn, consumer driven Ireland:

When the doors of the shop burst open, the stampede to the counter becomes the purest image available of the rat race of consumer capitalism, every man and woman for themselves, the law of the jungle let loose in the struggle for things we probably don't want but have to have.¹⁹

Closer scrutiny of the Republic reveals it is far from being the utopian ideal of the modern independent nation state that Alex Salmond would imagine it to be.

At this point a qualification must be placed on the critical use of Bakhtin's term heteroglossia; namely, linguistic codes do not correspond as systematically or precisely to distinct social classes as this model would initially seem to suggest. As Stuart Hall argues, 'there are no separate, autonomous, and self-sufficient class languages, ideological universes or world views.'²⁰ In fact different classes will often use the same linguistic signs in their everyday speech. Therefore it is misleading to argue that the use of dialect relates to certain distinctive and internally consistent class-based resistance. The language of Doyle's fiction is aware of this complexity as it applies to language and misleading notions of homogeneous class identities. The characters of *The Barrytown Trilogy* each have their own unique linguistic habits derivative of their own individual world-views. Jimmy Sr's friend Bertie has a *penchant* for Mexican 'cowboy-speak', calling his friends '*compadre*' and continually wishing them '*buenos noches*'. He is a small time 'wheeler dealer' who reads the world through this Western mythology, a life lived on the edge of the law with danger and risk an everyday, heroic fact. In a similar vein, when Joey the Lips becomes the spiritual leader of *The Commitments*, it is partly a function of his idiolect. The band members are 'Brothers and Sisters' in the 'good Lord's' plan to bring soul to the people of Ireland and stop them 'shootin the arses off each other.' (C p.27)

If we are therefore unable to codify Doyle's fiction within a specifically class bound linguistic model, how are we to read his dexterous deployment of language? We must abandon any attempt to map a direct correspondence between overtly class defined politics and the interplay of artificially concrete linguistic codes, including dialect. This does not mean that the prestige languages no longer try to exert their control, and that subordinated languages cease to avoid or subvert this. Instead, our analysis must reconfigure this dialectic within a theoretical model that would privilege a discourse-power

conception of the ideological over a narrow, class-based reading of antagonistic linguistic identities. Having looked at the tensions underlying Doyle's Ireland it is propitious to turn to Kelman and examine the relationship between his use of language and the politics of national identity.

Kelman's fiction coincides on a number of levels with several themes we have drawn out so far from Doyle's work. As with Doyle, his writing could be categorised as a meditation on the dialectics of language codes. In a statement that crystallises his artistic manifesto, Kelman declares:

Language is the culture – if you lose your language you've lost your culture, so if you've lost the way your family talk, the way your friends talk, then you've lost your culture.²¹

Like Jimmy Sr in *The Barrytown Trilogy*, Kelman has also received severe criticism for his concentrated and sustained use of swearing. When he won the Booker Prize in 1994 for *How Late It Was, How Late*, the editor of the *Independent on Sunday* was so outraged that he actually counted the number of times the 'Anglo Saxon expletive' (i.e. the word 'fuck') appeared in the text: 4,000 apparently.²² Within the limited body of Kelman criticism there has been a consistent misreading of the author's work. Laurence Nicoll rightly argues that 'there is an exegetical deficiency within the secondary literature [...] which can simply be described as an inability to think outwith a critical taxonomy, the parameters of which are set by the concepts of "nation" and "nationalism".'²³ One example of this trend is Dietmar Böhnke who argues that 'the first aspect of Kelman's "nationalism" is found to be his place within the tradition of Scottish literature.'²⁴ It is the appropriation within a Scottish vernacular canon alongside writers like Henryson, Burns and MacDiarmid, that allows Böhnke to proclaim Kelman's inherently nationalist credentials. However, there are several factors which problematise the author's location within such a constructed literary tradition. The first relates to Kelman's own comments about the language he chooses to write in:

My language is English
I write
In my writings the accent is always in Glasgow
I am always from Glasgow and I speak English always with this
Glasgow accent²⁵

If Kelman's language is related to a tradition of Scots-language writing then it is only obliquely the case. Further discrimination between literary Scots (Henryson, MacDiarmid etc) and modern urban vernacular can be found in 1933 with T.D. Robb, a teacher at Paisley Grammar, who asked:

For what has the Doric of the populous centres of the county become?
It is not Scots at all, but a thing debased beyond tears. It is a mongrel
patois [...] Traditional vernacular is gone. The streets are sibilant with
'huz yins', 'wee wis'; ungrammatical with 'I seen', 'I done'.²⁶

It is important to recognise that Robb was not some isolated eccentric. As the Scottish National Dictionary in 1936 would confirm: 'Owing to the influx of Irish and foreign immigrants in the industrial area near Glasgow the dialect has become hopelessly corrupt.'²⁷ What we can see here is the fixing of the west of Scotland dialect within a linguistic hierarchy (Bakhtin's heteroglossia), whereby it is ultimately inferior to the literary Scots used by writers of the past. It is this fissure which opens up a space for debate, inviting us to re-examine Kelman's use of language beyond the ideological confines of a simplified, postcolonial critical paradigm.

How Late It Was, How Late (1994) is a novel centred on the experience of a single character, Sammy Samuels.²⁸ Following a heavy drinking session, Sammy awakes to find himself on an undisclosed Glasgow street. When he is hassled by a group of policemen he loses his temper and hits one of them. The 'sodjers' proceed to give him a 'doing' and he regains consciousness in a cell only to discover that he has become blind. The remainder of the novel details his attempts to navigate the labyrinthine landscape of post-industrial Glasgow in this state of sight loss. This unique novelistic device locates *How Late It Was, How Late* as a novel focused not on how Sammy sees the world, but on how he hears it. In this way it echoes both Doyle's preoccupation with dialogue and Bakhtin's assertion that the novel does not present us directly with images of the world, but rather with images of the world through language.

From the outset of the novel, Sammy himself is aware of the extensive linguistic prejudice that his own demotic speech generates: 'these sodjers man if ye're no a fucking millionaire or talk with the right voice, they don't give a fuck.' (*HL* p.4) As he confronts various representatives of the state (in the form of the Doctor, the DSS worker and the police) Sammy's blindness increases our awareness of the ubiquity of this linguistic discrimination. The Doctor, in his own pompous register, refuses to offer him any concrete help regarding either his blindness or how it will affect his claims for compensation:

Well I dare say that if a claim in respect of a found dysfunction is allowed then an application in respect of a customer's wants that may be consistent with the found dysfunction becomes open to discharge by the appropriate charitable agency. (*HL* p.224)

The subsequent confrontation illustrates Sammy's frustration with the Doctor's deliberate evasiveness:

Mister Samuels, I have people waiting to see me.
 Christ sake!
 I find your language offensive.
 Do ye. Ah well fuck ye then. Fuck ye! (*HL* p. 225)

It is significant that it is Sammy's language that the Doctor singles out as particularly distasteful. Sammy's demotic speech patterns are also juxtaposed with the speech of the DSS woman when he tries to make an appointment about his claim:

She had one of these mental ding dong middle-class accents ye get in Glasgow that go up and down all the time and have these big long sounds. Eh just an appointment, said Sammy, for Monday morning. An appoointment? For Monday mawwwring! (*HL* p. 123)

Here, we are forced to rethink the orthographic syntax of speech as it is recorded on the printed page. Traditionally it has been the demotic utterance that is presented in a phonetic syntax: e.g. 'tae' and 'doesnay'. This would imply that it is somehow a deviation from the standard pronunciation, or more pernicious still, that it is sub-standard.²⁹ Here, Kelman illustrates the equal perversity of a specifically bourgeois idiom. When the phonetics of this speech pattern is recorded authentically, middle-class speech is shown to be its own corruption of orthodox spelling. Received Pronunciation is as much a transgression from Standard English as other dialects. The novel can be seen to challenge several assumptions about language. Bourgeois authentication of its own linguistic habits as 'talking properly' is in fact a self-endorsement of its own ways of speaking about and conceptualising the external world. As in Doyle's work, this episode illustrates Kelman's awareness of linguistic identities that resist any simplified postcolonial reading which would seek to juxtapose Standard English with a generic Scots speech.

When he initially awakes in the police station and discovers he is blind, Sammy is taken to see the Independent Medical Officer to register his injury. The woman asks him:

You're asserting ye were subject to a physical beating by members of the police department?
 What?

...

What d'ye say?
 They gave ye a doing?
 They gave me a doing?
 That's what's entered here.
 Well I don't like the way it sounds.

I'm only reading out what ye told the Preliminary Officer; he entered the phrase in quotation marks to indicate these were your very own words But it's a colloquialism and not everyone who deals with your claim will understand what it means. I felt that it was fair to use physical beating by way of an exposition... (*HL* p.103)

Like Sammy himself, his language can be seen to suffer a 'doing' at the hands of the authorities. For the IMO woman, Sammy's own words provide an insufficient account of his experience. The implication is that you cannot correctly know reality through the medium of this 'mongrel patois': the vernacular clouds meaning, whereas RP English is a clear conduit through which it shines, unadulterated. The middle-class speaker knows reality; whereas the working-class experience is only a warped version of it. Like the traditional realist narrator, the interviewer incarcerates Sammy's speech within quotation marks, and proceeds to interpret his words in the language of the official discourse (Standard English). Ultimately, Sammy's language is antagonistic to the forces of authority. It doesn't fit. This is illustrated when the police type his statement and he is told: 'Don't use the word "cunts" again, it doesn't fit in the computer.' (*HL*160) They cannot textualise what Sammy says. Their only recourse is to silence him.

Having exposed and challenged narrative dominance within this linguistic hierarchy, Kelman proceeds to turn his artistic gaze back on himself. Remarkably, he questions the role of the author as potential agent of subjugation within the act of literary creation. At the doctor's surgery a man introduces himself to Sammy and offers to assist him in his case for compensation against the police. Their subsequent relationship highlights several of the tensions inherent in writing about working-class experience. The man, whose name is Ally, puts himself forward to 'rep' Sammy in his claims. Ally claims to have an intimate knowledge of the systems of power which remain hidden behind the bureaucratic labyrinth of the benefit system. This idea of invisible power structures resonates with several issues already discussed. The hierarchy of linguistic codes is something which we never experience with direct immediacy. The Ally / Sammy relationship is also symbolic of the literary author's role as representative (and ally?) to his working-class subject matter. Ally continually refers to 'reading' Sammy's situation. There is a suggestion that he may perhaps belong more to a literary culture than an oral one. Similar to an author and his subject matter, Ally's relationship with Sammy is in part a financial one. If their claim is successful, he will take one third of any compensation. The author likewise profits from a convincing portrayal of his working-class subject matter. We have briefly argued that the classic realist narrator would interrupt, edit and qualify the discourse of characters within the text. When Sammy tells him about his life, Ally replies:

If I can stop ye there.

What?

I'm no meaning to be cheeky. But it's best if I ask you questions and you give me answers. A lot of what ye're gony tell me is nay material and with respect it's best if I don't hear it... (*HL* p.233)

Ally deems to know what aspects of Sammy's life are relevant and what aren't; what is worthy of inclusion within the narrative and what isn't. He also claims to know more about Sammy's case than he himself does. He tells him: 'once ye win the diagnosis question and get yer sightloss registration ye'll drop a couple of quid on the full-function capacity'; and then condescendingly adds: 'Ye knew that already but eh?' (*HL* p.228) His arrogance is synonymous with the classic view of the author as a god-like figure, acting as the supreme power, the final arbiter of semantic meaning within the text. Like others before him, Ally attempts to police Sammy's use of language:

Right ... look eh pardon me; just one thing, ye're gony have to watch yer language; sorry, but every second word's fuck. If ye listen to me you'll see I try to keep an eye on the aul words. (*HL* p.238)

Ally is aware of the importance of linguistic codes in dealing with authority. He tells Sammy, 'How d'ye think I got ye yer referral! Cause I knew the right words to say, it's like abracadabra.' (*HL* p.239) However, he also confesses to having been the victim of his own linguistic over-confidence. Whilst in prison himself, Ally had written a protest letter to a broadsheet newspaper. They published it, only to include and highlight a spelling mistake. He had spelt victimising: 'victomising'. The newspaper inserted 'sic' beside the word, identifying it as an authentic copy of the original mis-spelling. The newspaper staked its own superiority and that of its readers by saying that they could spell correctly, whereas Ally, the prisoner, could not. This is again part of a wider system of cultural hegemony which remains conspicuously invisible. The dominant ideology would regard Ally as a law breaker, hence he is in prison. It is quick to highlight that he does not belong to the dominant class through the identification of and emphasis on his educational deficiencies. Criminality is conflated with intellectual inferiority as generically characteristic of those on the economic margins of society. In an act of pseudo-liberalism, whilst publishing and pretending to provide a platform for Ally's grievance, the newspaper nevertheless locates the letter within a meta-discourse which would ultimately authenticate social inequality and legitimise the ideology of the ruling class. As is the case elsewhere in the novel, the narrative doesn't intervene and provide any definitive interpretation of the Ally / Sammy relationship for the reader. Sammy has a clear distrust of anyone seeking to represent him. He continually warns Ally not to con him: 'I don't need a rep, thanks very much. Fuck off.' (*HL* p.215) Perhaps the oral working-class culture, which Sammy symbolises, is content to remain unrepresented. His suspicion that Ally might actually be

allied to the state is confirmed when his son reports a phone call he receives from the 'rep': 'He sounded funny[...I] thought he was a polis'. (HL p. 342)

The extended consideration of Kelman's work alongside that of Doyle succeeds in highlighting the complex inter-animation of a traditional class-based politics within the debate surrounding national independence. What makes Scotland's historic incorporation within the British state so comprehensive is the degree of Anglicisation which this entailed, in particular amongst the more prosperous strata of society. The aspirational look toward 'Ireland' is not one that can be adopted readily or easily. As is often the case, political reality proves to be more complex than political rhetoric would seem to allow. An anecdote from the 1916 Easter Rising provides us with a poignant reminder of the inherent complexity underlying such issues of national independence. Tradition has it that when the Edinburgh born James Connolly led the socialist Citizen's Army into the Dublin GPO to join the nationalist Volunteers, he turned to his men and warned them: 'If we should win, hold onto your rifles, because the Volunteers may have a different goal.'³⁰ Almost ninety years later this is a timely and pressing reminder for those contemplating the independence question for Scotland in the twenty-first century.

Notes

1. T.S. Eliot, 'Was there a Scottish Literature?' *The Atheneum* (1 Aug 1919), 680.
2. Alex Salmond, Keynote Address, Annual Conference of the SNP, 27 September 1996, quoted in Ray Ryan, *Ireland and Scotland :Literature and Culture, State and Nation, 1966-2000* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), p. 1.
3. Damien Kiberd, 'Don't be blinded by poverty claims', *Sunday Times* (10 Oct 2004), p. 6.
4. Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), p. 79.
5. Michael Gardiner, 'Democracy and Scottish Postcoloniality' in *Scotlands* 3.2 (1996), 24-41.
6. Douglas Gifford, 'At Last – The Real Scottish Literary Renaissance?' *Books in Scotland* 34 (1990), 1-4.
7. From Alex Massie, 'Sir Walter Scoterati', in *Scotland on Sunday* (16 June 2002), p. 1.
8. Berthold Schoene, 'A Passage To Scotland: Scottish Literature and the Postcolonial British condition' *Scotlands* 2. 1. (1995).
9. An interview with Roddy Doyle by James Drewett, *Irish Studies Review*, 11.3 (2003), 337-350.
10. All quotations are taken from Roddy Doyle, *The Barrytown Trilogy* (London: Miverva, 1992). Hereafter page references are cited in the text alongside the title of the individual novels: *The Commitments* (C), *The Snapper* (S) and *The Van* (V).
11. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel' in Michael Holquist, ed. and trans. and Caryl Emerson, trans., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Austin, TX: University of Texas, 1981), p. 263.
12. Denis Donoghue, 'Another Country' *New York Review of Books* 14.1. 3 (3 Feb 1994), 3.

13. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 336.
14. Ken Hirschkop, 'Introduction', in Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd eds, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 4-5.
15. Margaret Reynolds and Jonathan Noakes, *Roddy Doyle: the Essential Guide* (London: Vintage, 2004), p. 14.
16. Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', p. 335.
17. Source: Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) quoted in Damien Kiberd, 'Don't be Blinded by Poverty Claims', *Sunday Times* 10 Oct 2004, p. 6.
18. Kieran McDaid, 'State does not value nurses...' *The Irish News* (12 Nov 2004), 16.
19. Fintan O'Toole, 'The Sales Ritual – a Fable for our Times' *A Mass for Jesse James: A Journey Through 1980s Ireland* (Dublin: Raven Arts Press, 1990), p. 144.
20. This argument is derived from Hall's reading of V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York, 1973). See Stuart Hall, 'Metaphors of Transformation', in Allon White, *Carnival, Hysteria and Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 14.
21. James Kelman interviewed by Duncan McLean, *Edinburgh Review* 71 (1985), 72.
22. Simon Jenkins, 'An Expletive of a Winner', *The Times* 15 Oct 1994, p. 20.
23. Laurence Nicoll, 'This is not a Nationalist Position: James Kelman's Existential Voice', *Edinburgh Review* 103 (2000), 79.
24. Dietmar Böhnke, *Kelman Writes Back* (Cambridge, MA: Galda and Wilch, 1999), pp. 26, 27, 94.
25. James Kelman, *Three Glasgow Writers: a Collection of Writing by Alex Hamilton, James Kelman and Tom Leonard* (Glasgow: Molendar Press, 1976), p. 51.
26. Quoted in Tom Leonard, 'Literature, Dialogue, Democracy', *Reports From the Present: Selected Work 1983-1994* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1995), p. 53.
27. *Ibid*, p. 54.
28. James Kelman, *How Late It Was, How Late* (London: Vintage, 1994). Hereafter cited as (*HL*).
29. The Scottish National Dictionary's (1936) specific use of the adjective 'corrupt' is evidence of this.
30. R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1989), p. 478.

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