

From Alignment to Commitment: The Early Work of James Kelman

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James Kelman
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Abstract

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams argues that writing is in an important sense always aligned. This sense of alignment, however, may be distinguished from a sense of chosen commitment, which is “conscious, active, and open.” Through a close analysis of the early work of the Scottish working-class writer James Kelman, this essay examines how an ideologically committed writer learned to refashion the dominant forms of novelistic discourse for his own political purposes. For Kelman, commitment in writing involves the recognition of the “distinction between dialogue and narrative as a summation of the political system.” This distinction was “simply another method of exclusion, of marginalizing and disenfranchising different peoples, cultures and communities,” Political commitment thus required Kelman to break successfully with the tradition of “‘working class authors’ who allowed ‘the voice’ of higher authority to control narrative, the place where the psychological drama occurred.”

. . . the relation between the language of the novelist — always in some measure an educated language, as it has to be if the full account is to be given, and the language of these newly described men and women — a familiar language, steeped in a place and in work; often different in profound as well as simple ways — and to the novelist consciously different — from the habits of education: the class, the method, the underlying sensibility. *It isn't only a matter of relating disparate idioms, though that technicality is how it often appears.*

— Raymond Williams, *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence* (139; *my emphasis*)

In prose fiction I saw the distinction between dialogue and narrative as a summation of the political system; it was simply another method of exclusion, of marginalizing and disenfranchising different peoples, cultures and communities. I was uncomfortable with 'working class authors' who allowed "the voice" of higher authority to control narrative, the place where the psychological drama occurred.

— James Kelman, "And the Judges Said . . ." (40)

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams notes that "writing, like other practices, is in an important sense always aligned, that is to say, that it variously expresses, explicitly or implicitly, specifically selected experience from a specific point of view" (Williams 199). The Welsh socialist intellectual then goes on to distinguish this sense of "alignment," which is inevitable, not always entirely conscious and occasionally subject to change, even within a given work, from what he called "commitment," which is "conscious, active, and open: a choice of position" (1977 200). An analysis of the earliest writing of the Scottish working-class writer James Kelman offers a graphic instance of how a particular writer learned to refashion novelistic discourse in order to move from a fiction of implicit alignment to one embodying open working-class commitment. For James Kelman, what this involved was the gradual recognition of the function of the narrative voice in mainstream English fiction in subordinating working-class character and dialogue. That is why from the time of his earliest writing, Kelman has rebelled against the narrative voice, creating in so doing a distinct narrative style, one that more adequately reflects an independent working-class worldview.

Beginnings: Intention and Method

James Kelman's earliest models of artistic freedom and independence were not literary ones. Instead, he sought inspiration in the working-class musical pop stars of the early 1960s. It was in the music of these young rebels that the Scottish writer discovered an open celebration of the lives of working-class people:

Those musicians had a massive impact on Great Britain and Ireland during the late 1950s, early 1960s. They sang of their own existence, in their own voice, from their own emotion, whether rage, hatred or love. At the root of what they were about was self-respect, especially these great blues musicians, and they had assumed the right to create art. ("And the Judges Said" 37)

In contrast, Kelman had no sense of a literary tradition with which he could make common cause. As he suggests, "in literature if anything similar was taking place I knew nothing about it" ("Judges" 37). The Scottish working-class culture into which he was born also appeared not to possess anything that could help him. "There were no literary models I could look to from my own culture. There was nothing whatsoever" ("Glasgow" 82). As Kelman states: "As a boy I was a great reader. I was lucky, there was a library at the bottom of my street in Govan, Glasgow, right in Elder Park. I started going along from the age of four with my big brother" ("Elitism" 57). His earliest reading was unremarkable. Among the writers he read were Enid Blyton, Frank Richards, and R.M. Ballantyne. Kelman made use of these writers in spite of the fact that "it was inconceivable that I would ever in my life meet up with boys from my own backgrounds, my culture and life experience, between these pages" ("Elitism" 57). Working-class children were simply not a part of the cultural universe of private boarding school privilege created by Blyton, Richards and Ballantyne. What is more, in the fiction that he did encounter, there was a distinct absence of Scottish people. In "the English literature I had access to through the normal channels" "people from communities like mine were rarely to be found" ("Judges" 38). And even when ordinary Scottish men and women were portrayed, it was Kelman's experience that "they were usually categorized as servants, peasants, criminal elements, semi-literature drunken louts, and so on . . ." ("Judges" 38).

When Kelman was fourteen, Penguin Books was brought to trial under the new Obscene Publications Act for its publication of D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Kelman immediately went out and purchased a paperback copy. He remembers being "struck by the extraordinary use of language by the central male character, a salt-of-the-earth working-class country-yokel sort of guy" ("Elitism" 58). "Oddly," however, he recalls how "the language reminded me of the earlier school stories" ("Elitism" 58). Another writer that Kelman read was John Buchan. As Kelman notes, "[Buchan] was actually Scottish, what you might call an assimilated member of British society. Probably that is what you would call him, British, an assimilated Scotsman. [. . .] He was an upper-middle-class guy who worked on behalf of the British Empire, and that was what he was paid for by the British State" ("Elitism" 59). As Kelman saw it, in Buchan's novels, "the heroes belonged to these incredible clubs that were extensions of boarding school, situated in secluded lanes around London's West End, all with log fires and great wee libraries, and these plush, leather-bound armchairs in which crotchety old bods with handlebar moustaches would nod off in a corner over the *Telegraph* obituary columns" ("Elitism" 59-60). The heroes of Buchan's fiction regularly employed servants. As Kelman suggests, "Colonial servants and underlings are integral to English literature and different literary conventions exist to deal with them. One such convention is the apparent attempt at phonetic transcription; I mean by that the spelling of words to give an impression of sound. I say 'apparent' because there is no authentic attempt going on" ("Elitism" 61). Unsurprisingly, then, the few Scottish characters who featured in Buchan's work tended to be servants, and "no matter where they come from the servants always exhibit peculiar speech mannerisms or patterns" ("Elitism" 60). Eventually, Kelman grew tired of Buchan. At about nineteen years of age, in a moment of epiphany, while he was "living in a lodging house and either . . . unemployed or else working as a labourer in a Salford copper mill," James Kelman "just gave up halfway through" "a novel by John Buchan . . . one of an 'omnibus' collection" . . . "and that was that" ("Elitism" 61).

Why did James Kelman have such difficulties discovering a literary tradition he could identify with? Why did he reject equally writers like the assimilated upper-class Scotsman John Buchan and the working-class Englishman D.H. Lawrence? As Mikhail Bakhtin has observed, "The language used by characters in the novel, how

they speak, is verbally and semantically autonomous; each character's speech possesses its own belief system, since each is the speech of another in another's language; thus it may also refract authorial intentions and consequently may to a certain degree constitute a second language for the author" (315). Within the English literary tradition, however, this interplay of speech forms tends to be restricted. Virginia Woolf, for example, as a representative instance, endorses the view that dialogue should be subordinate to narrative. In her essay-review, "Ernest Hemingway," Woolf suggests, "A writer will always be chary of dialogue because dialogue puts the most violent pressure upon the reader's attention. He has to hear, to see, to supply the right tone, and to fill in the background from what the characters say without any help from the author. Therefore, when fictitious people are allowed to speak it must be because they have something so important to say that it stimulates the reader to do rather more than his share of the work of creation" (208). Woolf's concern with restricting unnecessary dialogue, with preventing the emergence of a Bakhtinian second language, is an attempt to prevent the fictional anarchy created by too wide a play of verbal and semantic autonomy.

By the time he came to complete his first published novel, James Kelman had come to see this view of the unpredictability of character and dialogue as alien. He suggests:

If a writer is continually having to intercept the narrative in order to make a concrete distinction between reality and the characters' perception of reality then it must imply the overall lack of distinction: by extension, perhaps there is no fundamental distinction between the two. ("Kafka" 281)

In a talk with students at the Glasgow School of Art in November 1996, Kelman argued more pointedly: "In prose fiction I saw the distinction between dialogue and narrative as a summation of the political system; it was simply another method of exclusion, of marginalizing and disenfranchising different peoples, cultures and communities. I was uncomfortable with 'working class' authors who allowed 'the voice' of higher authority to control narrative, the place where the psychological drama occurred" ("Judges" 40). In summing up the artistic struggle he had been engaged in, Kelman noted in conversation: "Getting rid of that standard third party

narrative voice is getting rid of a whole value system” (Kelman quoted in McMillan 2001: 43).

Having abandoned writers like Buchan who employed the “naturalistic” style in which the voice of the narrator tends to dominate, the young Kelman was now reading Franz Kafka and the tradition of “existential” Continental writing — “Gogol, Hamsun, Dostoevski, Sartre” (“Kafka” 268). He was strongly attracted by “a strain in European literature that asserted the primacy of the world as perceived and experienced by individual human beings. It was a society far removed from my own; both in place and time. But for some reason I could read the works of these nineteenth-century writers, mainly Russian with a definite empathy. Gogol and Dostoevski made me chuckle in ways that seem a contradiction in respect of mainstream English literature” (“Judges” 38). Part of the attraction of these writers was discoverable in their understanding of irony. As Kelman notes, “Irony requires some sort of a mutual recognition of selfhood, and I was not excluded from it. English literature did not allow this; people like myself were a sub-species and generally excluded by definition” (“Judges” 38). Kelman’s criticism of the British novel then was that its dominant discourse served effectively to prevent any serious examination of working-class idiolect and ideology. As he suggests:

Whenever I did find somebody from my own sort of background in English literature, there they 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 the outside, never from the inside, always they were ‘the other’. They never rang true; they were never like anybody you ever met in real life. (“Elitism” 63)

Buchan, Lawrence and the English Literary Tradition

An exploration of the relationship between narrative and dialogue helps to shed light on the reasons why the Scottish writer came to reject both the more obvious “reactionary” qualities of a novel like Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and eventually even that more interesting representative of the mainstream literary tradition, Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928). Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* begins when the narrator, London-dwelling Richard Hannay, is alerted to the

existence of a large international conspiracy and subsequently flees to Scotland by train to avoid the men who wish to kill him:

Three minutes later, as we were roaring through the northern tunnels, an irate guard interviewed me. He wrote out for me a ticket to Newton-Stewart, a name which had suddenly come back to my memory, and he conducted me from the first-class compartment where I had ensconced myself to a third-class smoker, occupied by a sailor and a stout woman with a child. He went off grumbling, *and as I mopped my brow I observed to my companions in my broadest Scots that it was a sore job catching trains. I had already entered upon my part.*

‘The impidence o’ that gyaird!’ said the lady bitterly. ‘He needit a Scotch tongue to pit him in his place. He was complainin’ o’ this wean no haein’ a ticket and her no fower till August twalmonth, and he was objectin’ to this gentleman spittin’.’

The sailor morosely agreed, and I started my new life in an atmosphere of protest against authority. I reminded myself that a week ago I had been finding the world dull (46-7; *my emphasis*).

In this short passage, the major stylistic aspects of Buchan’s mainstream literary style are evident. The writer utilizes a standard educated narrator, with the Scottish working class voices conveyed exclusively through directly quoted speech. Despite Buchan’s own Scottish background, his hero Richard Hannay only “becomes Scottish” by entering “upon [a] part.” His Scottish identity is then explicitly a masquerade, involving the donning of an alien identity in which Hannay speaks using the “broadest Scots.” Crucially, however, this voice-in-disguise is never actually represented in directly quoted speech. Instead the narrator monitors what is presented as an alien dialect, suitably upgrading it to the level of the educated diction of the novel itself. Throughout the novel of this nominally Scottish writer, Buchan exploits a conscious divide between the educated speech of the first-person narrator and a host of characters who speak supposed Scottish dialect. When the first-person narrator himself speaks in dialect, this speech is not represented as directly quoted speech on a par with the speech of the other characters. Instead, it is filtered through the narrator’s mollifying standard educated speech to remove all traces of the original speech.

This method for representing the directly quoted speech of working-class characters strikes Kelman as false. For him, Buchan's use of directly quoted speech involves only an "apparent attempt at phonetic transcription . . . the spelling of words to give an impression of sound." If Hannay's monitored representation of Broad Scots is intelligible to all readers, Buchan's misguided use of only apparent phonetic transcription would pose difficulties even for genuinely Scottish working-class readers.

D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* represents a more subtle test case. Nonetheless, in spite of Lawrence's class location, his narrative style conforms to the mainstream literary tradition. For example, when Lady Chatterley first encounters Mellors, her groundskeeper and eventual lover, the narrator represents him as idiolectally ambiguous. Lady Chatterley's first impression is of a man "like a gentleman" who uses both standard speech and broad dialect interchangeably:

The man lifted his hat as he stood, showing his thick, almost fair hair. He stared straight into Connie's eyes, with a perfect, fearless, impersonal look, as if he wanted to see what she was like. He made her feel shy. She bent her head to him shyly, and he changed his hat to his left hand and made her a slight bow, like a gentleman; but he said nothing at all. He remained for a moment still, with his hat in his hand.

"But you've been here for some time, haven't you?" Connie said to him. "Eight months, Madam . . . your Ladyship!" he corrected himself calmly. "And do you like it?"

"Why, yes, thank you, your Ladyship! I was reared here. . . ." He gave another slight bow, turned, put his hat on, and strode to take hold of the chair. *His voice on the last words had fallen into the heavy broad drag of the dialect . . . perhaps also in mockery, because there had been no trace of dialect before.* He might almost be a gentleman. Anyhow, he was a curious, quick, separate fellow, alone, but sure of himself. (Lawrence 84; *my emphasis*)

In this passage too, the idiolect of the working-class character is not actually represented but rather monitored by the narrator. The effect of this speech monitoring is actually disconcerting. This is because it forces the reader to attempt a re-reading of the passage, in an effort to imagine that point where directly quoted speech without

“a trace of dialect” suddenly becomes speech infected by “[a] heavy broad drag.” Later, Mellors and Lady Chatterley will form a more equal human relation; but even as they do so, the novel will continue to represent their idiolects unequally. In this scene, for example, Lady Chatterley openly mimics Mellors’s dialect in a spirit of post-coital fun:

When he came back she was still lying there, glowing like a gipsy. He sat on the stool by her.

“Tha mun come one naight ter th’ cottage, afore tha goos; sholl ter?” he asked, lifting his eyebrows as he looked at her, his hands dangling between his knees.

“Sholl ter?” she echoed, teasing.

“Ay, sholl ter?” he repeated.

“Ay!” she said, imitating the dialect sound.

“Yi!” he said.

“Yi!” she repeated. (Lawrence 184-5)

But Mellors is never allowed to mimic Lady Chatterley’s own idiolect in return. Given the minority status of that speech within the wider community in which they both live, this is somewhat surprising. What is more, as Kelman suggests, the reader never gets inside Mellors’ mind. Unlike Lady Chatterley, whose monitored thought forms a large part of the fiction, the groundskeeper is “in the narrative” but is never “portrayed from the inside”; he is permanently “confined to the margins, kept in [his] place, stuck in the dialogue.”

An Old Pub near the Angel, and Other Stories (1973)

Within the literary tradition of English-speaking writers, one artist with whom James Kelman could sympathize was James Joyce. As Joyce’s fiction attests, the Irish colonial situation inevitably raises issues of what Bakhtin calls “second language.” This is noticeably evident in the famous scene from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) in which the Irishman Stephen Dedalus and the English-born dean of studies confront each other over the meaning of the word “tundish”:

The dean repeated the word yet again.

— Tundish! Well now, that is interesting!

— The question you asked me a moment ago seems to me more interesting. What is that beauty which the artist struggles to express from lumps of earth, said Stephen coldly. The little word seemed to have turned a rapier point of his sensitiveness against this courteous and vigilant foe. He felt with a smart of dejection that the man to whom he was speaking was a countryman of Ben Jonson. He thought:

— The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words HOME, CHRIST, ALE, MASTER, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language. (Joyce 1960 165-66)

While standard educated speech is used consistently in both Buchan and Lawrence to monitor the idiolects and ideologies of the characters, Joyce breaks dramatically from this tradition. The Irishman's sense of English as an "acquired speech" is what serves to differentiate him. Joyce's use of the technique of dialogic monologue, or what is often called the stream-of-consciousness, is one manifestation of this. A second technique, evident in the passage from the *Portrait*, is the much more fluid and self-conscious relationship between the narrative voice, monitored thought and directly quoted speech.

The title story of Kelman's first short story collection offers evidence of how closely he had read Joyce. In "An old pub near the Angel," the main character, Charles Donald, is a partially disabled working-class man for whom the abstract possibility of human generosity has become a living preoccupation. For Charles, too much depends on the whims of bureaucratic procedure that occasionally and unexpectedly throw open windows of light on his life:

Charles wakened at 9.30 a.m. and wasted no time in dressing. Good God it's about time for spring surely. Colder than it was yesterday though and I'll have to wash and shave today. Must. The face has yellow lines. I can't wear socks today. Impossibility. People notice smells although they say nothing.

Think I will do a moonlight tonight, I mean five weeks rent? He has cause for complaint. Humanity. A touch of humanity is required. He has fourteen tenants paying around £3.00 each for those boxy wee rooms, surely he can afford to let me off paying once in a while. One of his longest serving tenants. Man I've even been known to clean my room on occasion with no thought of rent reduction. (55)

The use of dialogic monologue demonstrates how Kelman had found a technique for describing what he felt had always been missing from the mainstream English tradition. This inheritance from Joyce provided the young Scottish writer with a means to get inside the minds of the working-class characters, to describe them from inside. Nonetheless, the second major problem was still unsolved. As Kelman indicates, the main idiolectal and ideological tensions do not arise so much with interiorized thought but rather at those points where that thought collides with the standard educated speech of the narrator.

In their seminal work *Style in Fiction*, Geoffrey Leech and Michael Short argue that “the essential semantic difference between direct and indirect speech is that when one uses direct speech to report what someone has said one quotes the words used verbatim, whereas in indirect report one expresses what was said in one’s own words” (318). The example that they offer is as follows:

- (1) He said, “I’ll come back here to see you again tomorrow.”
- (2) He said that he would return there to see her the following day. (319)

The main difference between the two versions are formal ones that pertain to grammar. Essentially, these involve the removal of the quotation marks around the reported speech, introducing the subordinating conjunction *that*, switching pronouns and deictics, backshifting the tense of the verb, and changing the verb perspective (319). At another level, of course, broader issues are raised. When the narrator employs indirect speech, Leech and Short suggest “the effect that is produced . . . is one whereby the person who is reporting the conversation intervenes as an interpreter between the person he is talking to and the words of the person he is reporting, instead of merely quoting verbatim the speech that occurred” (320). The problem is that in the case of writers like Joyce and Kelman, this reporting of speech can come to seem

like a betrayal of character intention, something the critical orthodoxy fails to recognize. It merely highlights the function of this voice style as a rich source of irony. As Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short argue, “The irony arises because [free indirect speech] is normally viewed as a form where the authorial voice is interposed between the reader and what the character says, so that the reader is distanced from the character’s words” (1981: 334). Roger Fowler concurs: “By this device, a writer is able to juxtapose two sets of values, to imply a critique of the character’s views, without the direct judgment which an external perspective would produce” (1996: 174; cf. Fludernik 2001: 635; Leech and Short 1981: 334; Simpson 1993: 30). It is for this reason that Kelman sees the distinction between narrative and dialogue as a summation of the political system: “Irony requires some sort of a mutual recognition of selfhood. . . . English literature did not allow this; people like myself were a sub-species and generally excluded by definition” (Judges 38).

In rejecting this conception of irony, Kelman was able to learn from Joyce’s more strategic use of monitored speech. In Joyce’s “Counterparts,” for example, the savagely violent Farrington has just joined some companions for a night of drinking:

Nosey Flynn was sitting up in his usual corner of Davy Byrne's and, when he heard the story, he stood Farrington a half-one, saying *it was as smart a thing as ever he heard*. Farrington stood a drink in his turn. After a while O'Halloran and Paddy Leonard came in and the story was repeated to them. O'Halloran stood tailors of malt, hot, all round and told the story of the retort he had made to the chief clerk when he was in Callan's of Fownes's Street; but, as the retort was after the manner of the liberal shepherds in the eclogues, he had to admit that it was not as clever as Farrington's retort. At this Farrington told the boys to polish off that and have another. (Joyce 1967; *my emphasis*)

In the italicized portion of the text, the actually spoken words of the character are blended with — rather than upgraded by — the narrative voice. The result is an effortless rendering of the texture of Irish pub life and of easy informal male interaction. Downgrading the narrative voice to the level of character speech — rather than upgrading the character speech to the level of the narrator, as Buchan and Lawrence tend inevitably to do — is an important Joycean innovation. It is also an

integral aspect of Kelman's style. In "The Last Night," for example, Peter and Old Pat, who are working together during the summer, have gone to a local pub for a drink:

They settled down to the game, playing steadily for half an hour before one man who had been spectating for two games asked if he could have a hand. Peter said yes and the fellow sat in. He was a Newcastle man and *said his name was John and that his mate who liked a game would be in in ten minutes*. His mate duly arrived and was invited in. (Kelman, 1973, 39)

Not all the short stories contained in *An old pub near the Angel, and Other Stories*, are as successful in rendering the relation between dialogue and narrative, however. In this first collection, Kelman still experiences difficulty in achieving the proper critical distance from the dominant "internally persuasive discourses" of the mainstream tradition. The clearest sign of this problem is in the way in which in some of these stories, monitored thought becomes other-centred. In "This Morning," for example, the central character, Sam, is an older male who has taken on a paper route to get some money together. As the story begins, the narrative voice follows Sam as he carries out his typical morning routine:

Sam pulled on his boots and laced them, then lay back in the old armchair. It was too early yet. The newspaper bundles would hardly have arrived so there was no point in leaving for a while. He stared up at his books which were arranged in alphabetical order on the wooden shelves he had built a couple of years ago. Nowadays he looked up at them more than he read them. *Perhaps he would take a walk up the jumble sale on Saturday, see if there was anything doing*. (Kelman 1973 89)

The final sentence modulates from a third-person narrative into a zone of character interiority; the two clauses represent a melding of the narrative voice with the marked character's interior thought. The major signals for this are the use of the marked Theme *Perhaps*, the use of the character idiolect *take a walk up*, and the omission of the subject in the second idiomatic clause, *see if there was anything doing*. As the story progresses, this technique becomes more pronounced. The latter portions of the

story offer even more truncated sentences and phrases, causing zones of truly interior consciousness to emerge:

Would soon be a quarter to six and time to get going. *Doing a paper round at his age? Why not?* He had started two months ago and never regretted it. The customers were more embarrassed than he was, but slow to tip. One or two of the boys made over thirty bob a week in tips. Sam had yet to make more than a pound. *Still it helped his wage up to about two and a half so why grumble. Five minutes to go.* (Kelman 1973 89-90)

Nonetheless, Sam's inner questioning of his motivations a full two months after he has started his new job represents an inauthentic concession to an unvoiced ideological presence: "Doing a paper round at his age? Why not?" It is a question that derives from the pressures of the wider society of expectations and assumptions. The words are not Sam's but rather arise as an upshot of the fiction writer's inability to separate Sam's inner speech from the situation monitoring of the narrator. A related problem occurs in the title story, "An old pub near the Angel." Here, the narrator's voice inexplicably begins to blend in with the voice of the main character, Charles Donald:

"Been over long, man," [Charles] asked.

"Too long, Jock," he gave a short laugh, "Still skint."

He struck a match on the floor and they lit their cigarettes.

"Aye if I'd been buying that Guinness in shares instead of pints I'd be worth a fortune, and that's a fact. To hell with it."

"Your're next *Mick*," said Charles.

The Irishman went to the counter and received the signing on card from the young girl. He signed on and was handed his pay slip then he walked over to the cashier where he received his money and vanished.

Charles followed Mick to the counter and received the signing on card from the young girl. (Kelman 1973 57)

The two working-class characters, the first a Scotsman and the second an Irishman, have just met. In this scene, which represents their first and only interaction, the two characters call each other "Jock" and "Mick" in the familiar mode of working-class

address. In the ensuing passage, however, the narrative voice uses inauthentic coreference. The first coreference is correctly to “the Irishman”; but the second time, the narrative voice refers to the Irishman inauthentically as “Mick.” The narrator’s echoing or accidental mimicry of the spoken words of Charles Donald represents a form of unconscious parody.

Having come to understand the ideological function of the narrator, Kelman’s earliest fictional style threatens to collapse the distinctions among narrator, dialogue and interior thought altogether. In some sections of these early stories, the result is a narrator who inadvertently echoes the inner speech of the main character; on other occasions, the inner speech of the main character bears residual traces of the narrator. These two forms of inauthenticity are the signs of Kelman struggling to represent the typical idiolect and ideology of his working-class characters. These occasional lapses into inauthentic choices — both in the sudden appearance of the voice of the narrator in the zones of character interiority and in the parodic mimicry of the main character’s speech — show a writer searching for a new fictional synthesis. As Kelman comments:

You can’t write a short story without language. That seems an odd statement. Yet received wisdom in this society demands it. Yes, they say, go and write whatever story you want, but don’t use whatever language is necessary. [. . .] Go and write a story about a bunch of guys who stand talking in a pub all day but if you have them talking don’t have them talking the language they talk. Pardon? I’ll paraphrase: write a story wherein people are talking, but not talking the language they talk. By implication those in authority ask the writer to censor and suppress his or her own work. (“Glasgow” 83-84)

It is not difficult to see how this issue is usually resolved. To turn back to the passage from Joyce’s “Counterparts”:

After a while O’Halloran and Paddy Leonard came in and the story was repeated to them. O’Halloran stood tailors of malt, hot, all round and told the story of the retort he had made to the chief clerk when he was in Callan’s of

Fownes's Street; *but, as the retort was after the manner of the liberal shepherds in the eclogues*, he had to admit that it was not as clever as Farrington's retort. At this Farrington told the boys to polish off that and have another. (Joyce 1967; *my italics*)

In this passage, the one moment of genuine inauthenticity is caused by the introduction of a learned literary reference. Joyce, who was consistent in employing a narrator who does use educated speech, substitutes a classical euphemism for what is undoubtedly a swear word. In other words, Joyce abandons his sense of "scrupulous meanness" in the face of the censors.

At the time he was writing the stories in *An Old Pub near the Angel*, James Kelman also accepted this compromise. In his mid-twenties, he had not yet found a means to convey genuine working-class speech forms consistently in his fiction. In other words, although these early stories succeed in characterizing working-class males in a non-stereotypical manner, at the level of literary speech forms, the young writer has still not yet achieved hegemony in his "intense struggle . . . among various verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values" (Bakhtin 1981: 346). Instead, Kelman had set unconscious limits to what he was prepared to do with the language he had inherited.

Three Glasgow Writers (1976)

This recognition of the resistance of the literary medium to his intentions probably explains the major innovation represented by Kelman's contributions to *Three Glasgow Writers*. In his contributions to this anthology, the narratives forego any interest in a major story line in favour of a much greater exploration of working-class interiority. In this sense, his major technical advance in these stories is an innovative use of the dream or thought monologue. With its ultimate origins in Molly Bloom's bed-delivered soliloquy in Joyce's *Ulysses*, the interior monologue is a technique that Kelman uses to explore the comically rich interior life of immobile unemployed working-class men. The ideological and linguistic preparation for this new form of writing is undoubtedly "Nice to be Nice," the short story Kelman used to conclude *An Old Pub near the Angel, and Other Stories*. Like many of the subsequent short pieces in *Three Glasgow Writers*, "Nice to be Nice" is an interior monologue spoken by an immobile working-class male. In this case, however,

immobility has been caused by Sammie's unfortunate involvement in a violent altercation that results in his admittance to the hospital. The short story begins in the following memorable manner:

Strange thing wis it stertit oan a Wedinsday, A mean nothing ever sterts oan a Wednesday kis it's the day afore pay day in A'm ey skint. Mibby git a buckshee pint roon the Anchor, bit that's about it. Anyway it wis efter nine in A wis thinking about gin hame kis A hidny a light whin Boab McCann threw is a dollir in A boat masel in auld Erchie a pint. The auld yin hid two boab ay his ain so A took it in won a couple a gemms a dominoes. Didny win much bit enough tay git is a hauf boatlle a Lanny. (Kelman 1973 97)

In "Nice to be Nice," the detailing of working-class male consciousness still takes place within a dialogized style involving a struggle among a variety of different points of view. However, Kelman chooses to work with orthographically represented Urban Scots in order to elude the problems associated with the orthodox narrative voice. This innovation gives rise to an entirely unexpected literary exuberance and energy — as well to a rich working-class sense of comedy.

The short fiction in *Three Glasgow Writers* continue this linguistic exploration. Each short piece resolves the central issue posed by the "the voice' of higher authority" by dispensing with the third-person narrator — and occasionally even the presence of other characters — altogether. What Kelman offers instead is a richly detailed working-class male consciousness. Like Joyce in his representation of Molly Bloom, Kelman uses the device of the interior monologue to delineate the mental universe of an immobile central character. The use of the drunken interior monologue in a short story like "Jim Dandy," for example, requires the absence or effective silence of any possible interlocutor:

My dwelling. The state of the dump six days on my own. Crockery. Old layers of cold scrambled eggs. Smells of the place. Smells of the bedclothes. Nothing tucked in. Tangled sheets not covering my feet. Naked, along in here with ash lying by the ashtray, a spent match next to three books and an erotic one just below the bed. A neighbour perhaps may offer to clean the place before the wife gets back. (Kelman 1976 76)

While Kelman's focus on the interior monologue results in a drastic reduction in what Bakhtin labels fictional "energy and event" (248), this new technique also enables the young writer to win for himself much greater space for the exploration of the independent ideological life of his working-class characters. To reverse an emphasis of Bakhtin's, Kelman's use of the thought or dream sequence represents an intense focus on that "viscous and sticky time that drags itself slowly through space . . . [and which] often serves as a contrasting background for temporal sequences that are more charged with energy and event" (248). In other words, a greater exploration of independent working-class consciousness compensates for the drastic reduction in spatio-temporal flexibility and character interaction.

Just as Joyce eschewed the use of the quotation mark in favour of the dash in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, Kelman also experiments in his early stories with various ways of minimizing the typographical distinction between narrative and dialogue. As he elsewhere suggests, much of the previous novelistic representation of Scottish working class speech was deeply inauthentic.

Beautiful! their language a cross between semaphore and morse code; apostrophes here and apostrophes there; a strange hotchpotch 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. ("Glasgow" 82)

This critique of the mainstream tradition's treatment of the speech forms of the Scottish working class is as much a critique of standard orthography and punctuation as it is of stereotypical characterization. Kelman's growing recognition of the ideology buried within this set of orthographic choices helps explain part of the reason why the stories in *Three Glasgow Writers* dispense with quotation marks altogether. In the most accomplished story, "Remember Young Cecil? He used to be a very Big Stick indeed," for example, the only punctuation used for this purpose is the full colon:

You Young Cecil from the Y.M.?

Aye: says the young fellow.

Well I'm Danny Thompson. How much you wanting to play for?

Fiver.

Very good: Wee Danny turns and shouts: William!

Old Porter ducks below the counter and comes up with Danny's jar. Wee Danny always used to keep his money in a jam-jar in they days. And he had a good few quid in there at times. Right enough sometimes he had nothing. (Kelman 1976 53-4)

In this short story, the use of the first-person narrator contributes to a marked sense of ideological flexibility, with the dialogic concession in the final sentence typical of the story as a whole. In this sense, it is a mark of both working-class realism and humour, a world away from “the ‘voice’ of the third-party narrative [that] tells us ‘what happened’ and [that] does not tell lies.” The voice of the “I”-narrator in these early Kelman stories is entirely capable of exaggerating, lying and deceiving:

And she is leading me on not knowing what she is doing probably or maybe she does if she is at least eighteen or nineteen or seventeen or fifteen for fuck sake but she cant be or Big John would have spoken which he still will do if I go fill my glass. Good looking lassie Sue. Not bad yourself. Bit young but. Not so young as you think. Aye. (Kelman 1976 80).

Toward the end, the drunken interior monologue quickens in a way that is reminiscent of the climax of Molly Bloom's interior monologue in *Ulysses*. Besides the effective examination of the interior consciousness of Jim Dandy himself, the characterization is intentionally thin. This is consistent with the device of interior consciousness: the literary technique deliberately creates distance between the concerns of the first-person narrator and those of other people. Naturally, this can come to seem a weakness too.

***Short Tales from the Night Shift* (1978)**

The stories that Kelman published in *Three Glasgow Writers* lead into the even shorter prose pieces contained in *Short Tales from the Night Shift*. Containing some of the finest work he had yet written, including the brilliant short piece “Acid,”

these texts also highlight an acute danger that Kelman now faced. In “Busted Scotch,” the writer articulates the danger with marvellous humour:

I had been looking forward to this Friday night for a while. The first wage from the first job in England. The workmates had assured me they played Brag in this club’s casino. It would start when the cabaret ended. Packed full of bodies inside the main hall’ rows and rows of men-only drinking pints of bitter and yelling at this harrylauder thing complete with kilt and trimmings. A terrible disgrace. Keep Right On To The End Of The Road he sang with four hundred and fifty males screaming Get Them Off Jock. Fine if I had been drunk and able to join in on the chants but as it was but — he stuck it out till the last and turning his back on them all he gave a big boo boopsidoo with the kilt pulled right up and flashing the Yfronts. Big applause he got as well. The next act was an Indian squaw. Later on I saw the side door into the casino section opening. I went through. Blackjack was the game until the cabaret had stopped. I sat down facing a girl of around my own age, she was wearing a black dress cur off the shoulders. Apart from me there were no other punters in the room.

Want to start, she asked.

Aye. Might as well. I took out my wages.

O, you’re scotch. One of your countrymen was on stage tonight.

That a fact.

She nodded as she prepared to deal. She said, How much as you wanting to bet.

I shrugged. I pointed to the wages lying there on the end of the baize.

All of it . . .

Aye. The lot.

She concered the bet after counting what I had. She dealt the cards.

Twist!

Bust . . . (Kelman “Busted Scotch” 1)

The ideology of masquerade, as Kelman had come to recognize, is not exclusively the property of the mainstream tradition. In this short prose piece, he demonstrates his conscious understanding of the ease with which a writer can slip into a mode of writing that is essentially self-parodic. For the working-class Scottish writer, unlike the mainstream literary tradition, writing’s multi-accentual nature cannot be turned

into a source of irony, still less of parody. Instead, it must be focussed only as a vehicle for the representation of an “intense interaction, a *struggle* with other internally persuasive discourses,” including those ironic and parodic ones represented by “rows of men-only drinking pints of bitter and yelling” (Bakhtin 1981: 346). For Kelman, the attempt to rid his short stories of the ideological distance between his working class characters and the narrative line represents “an intense struggle . . . for hegemony among various verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (Bakhtin 1981: 346).

Not Not While the Gyro, and Other Stories (1983)

In 1983, the Minerva Press in London, England published a major collection of Kelman’s early short stories. The revisions that Kelman carried out to a number of these stories, the majority of which had been previously published, offer evidence for the Scottish writer’s more complex understanding of the relationship between dialogue and narrative. His revision process reveals a much finer ability to eliminate those elements of his style that still connect it loosely to what he elsewhere calls “the standard third party narrative voice”. In rewriting key portions of “An old pub near the Angel”, for example, Kelman’s artistic aim is to avoid the creation of distance between the narrator and the thought of the main working-class character. The revisions are thus designed to strengthen, rather than ironically undermine, verbal and semantic autonomy. In his revisions to this short story, Kelman demonstrates how he had learned to control language in order to reach the “place where the psychological drama” occurs. In Bakhtinian terms, Kelman embraces Charles Donald’s belief system, making it “constitute a second language” for himself. A comparison of the two versions of the story represents, in this sense, “the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness” (Bakhtin 1981: 348).

What Kelman does in his revisions is to eliminate those elements of irony and parody that result from the narrator interposing himself between the reader and the central working-class character. The first example of this elimination of irony occurs during a significant use of the character zone to categorize the bartender of the old pub. Immediately before this passage, Charles Donald has unexpectedly been awarded a large government cheque with back pay. As a result, he is in an excessively optimistic mood, an optimism born of actually quite limited prosperity:

He walked up Pentonville Road and decided to go for a pint rather than a breakfast. *Ten past eleven. Not too early.*

“Pint of bitter and eh. Give me,” Charles stared at *the miserable gantry*, “just give me one of your good whiskies eh?”

The ancient barman peered at him for a moment then bent down behind the bar to produce a dusty bottle of Dimple Haig. (Kelman 1973: 57; *italics mine*)

In this passage, the bartender is seen from Charles’s point of view: “*the miserable gantry*” and “*the ancient bartender*” are both terms drawn from Charles’s inner speech. But as Bakhtin suggests, “stylizing discourse by attributing it to a person often becomes parodic, although not crudely parodic — since another’s word, having been at an earlier stage internally persuasive, mounts a resistance to this process and frequently begins to sound with no parodic overtones at all” (Bakhtin 1981: 348). In the earlier version, Kelman has inadvertently used a narrative voice that combines an *authoritative* third party with a *parodic* version of working-class inner speech. When he rewrites this passage, Kelman makes an important change:

He walked up Pentonville Road and decided to go for a pint rather than a breakfast. *Half past eleven. Not too early.*

“Pint of bitter and eh — give me . . .” Charles stared at the miserable gantry, “just give me one of your good whiskies eh!”

The ancient bartender peered at him for a moment then bent down behind the bar to produce a dusty bottle of Dimple Haig. “How’s this eh?” (Kelman 1983: 16; *italics mine*)

Kelman recognizes more clearly now the dangers involved in a comic representation of working-class consciousness. By changing the time of the pub visit from “*ten past eleven*” to “*half past eleven*,” Kelman eliminates an easy joke at Charles’s expense. The writer now realizes that Charles’s lack of reflection about the very early visit to the pub is actually a form of satiric pastiche, a way in which the earlier version undermines the character’s dignity (Chatman 2001 30).

In Bakhtinian terms, what has happened in the revised version is that Kelman has succeeded in making Charles's voice "sound with no parodic overtones at all" (Bakhtin 1981: 348). Or as Raymond Williams might say: By the time of the publication of *Not Not While The Gyro, And Other Stories*, Kelman had succeeded in moving from alignment, "which is inevitable, not always entirely conscious and occasionally subject to change or contradictory, even within a given work" to commitment, which is "conscious, active, and open: a choice of position" (1977 200).

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