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James Kelman: Rethinking Some Major Aspects of Working-Class Fiction

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracoval samostatně a uvedl úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

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Introduction

It is widely held that working-class fiction follows a specific canon with respect to aspects such as the presentation of working-class life, the treatment of narrative 'voice' and mode or the plot's structure.¹ Recently, this long-established paradigm has been challenged by James Kelman, a tremendously influential writer from Scotland, who has introduced a new set of radical opinions concerning literature, culture and politics. Therefore, at least for the sake of broadening one's horizons regarding new trends in modern fiction and politics, it will merit a good deal of thought to analyse and comprehend Kelman's development as a committed writer and political activist with sympathy for the underdog. Consequently, several aspects of Kelman's major novels and short stories are going to be examined in regard to the traditional working-class fiction currents in order to state the chief characteristic traits of his work on one hand, and to distinguish it from the general paradigm. This will be achieved via assessing Kelman's fiction in a number of chapters covering issues concerning stories' themes and topics, as well as formal features comprising his aesthetic, linguistic, orthographic and narrative experiments. Moreover, a sufficient amount of secondary literature ranging from literary to political criticism should provide key support for critical appraisal and understanding of Kelman in context.

James Kelman is one of the most controversial and provocative contemporary Scottish writers. Kelman's prolific writing career encompasses short stories, novels, plays and essays which are autobiographical to a large extent, but in the first place mirror his commitment concerning culture and politics.

After leaving school at fifteen years of age, Kelman experienced a turbulent period of life which provided him with a great deal of inspiration for his stories. Under his father's influence, he entered an apprenticeship in his father's workshop specializing in restoration of picture frames. Although Kelman had been longing to become a painter thanks to his serious passion for paintings, his dreams did not come true until after he joined his family in leaving Glasgow and settling in America since work in Scotland became scarce. Even though his father established an American branch of his restoration company, which prospered for a while, it soon turned out to be a dead end. Once again along with part of his family, Kelman moved back to Glasgow where he started performing blue-collar jobs of various kinds. He picked up several job opportunities varying from bus-conducting to potato picking in the Channel Islands, and then returned back to England and Scotland where he worked in factories and building sites.

¹ see Cairns Craig, "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman," *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*, ed. Gavin Wallace and Randal Stevenson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1993) 100–5.

At that time, in his twenties, he was writing his early stories based on his daily experiences of an economically and socially marginalized individual who had to get by. Moreover, he decided to take up evening classes of creative writing, which he attended upon coming back from draining shifts on the buses or in factories. While participating in discussions over his own and other attendants' stories, he came in for the first wave of elitist criticism concerning his distinctive determination to portray his working-class community and its members in particular. Finally, after several unsuccessful attempts to find a domestic publisher who would publish his early stories, he managed to get in touch with a minor New England's publishing house which at length released his first collection of short stories **An Old Pub Near the Angel** (1973). Unfortunately, Kelman had to take care of the distribution himself, and thus ended up selling his first published book on the buses or supplying the local newsagents with copies that sold poorly while holding his regular job at the same time.

Being a Glasgow-based writer who has been heavily influenced by existentialist literature and philosophy, Kelman has become closely associated with the Glasgow Group which included writers like Alasdair Gray, Liz Lochhead and Tom Leonard. Relentlessly writing stories depicting life on the edge, he has managed to develop a specifically innovative style and techniques which have caused a great storm of criticism and controversy. Nonetheless, these changes have particularly questioned the course of the traditional working-class fiction.

Therefore, this paper examines the nature of Kelman's fiction with respect to several major aspects generally recurring in literature concerning working-class. First of all, we are going to investigate Kelman's portrayal of wage labour and its effects on the individual because work and its absence are omnipresent topics in the majority of his stories. Consequently, a great amount of time will be given over to Kelman's assessment of the issue of economic insecurity and how it is reflected in culture, literature and the individual's life in general. The analysis of socio-economic aspects of Kelman's fiction will be amply illustrated by numerous examples from his stories. These examples will provide an insight into the individual's self-awareness and prowess mirrored in their coping with society based on economic productivity, treating its members according to their work efficiency. Moreover, following Kelman's depiction of wage labour, we are going to question matters of managerial malevolence and its consequences with respect to poor working conditions that result in health risks and industrial accidents.

In addition to the individual's economic role in society, we will tackle the typology of Kelman's characters and their status within working-class communities they live in. Drawing on history concerning industrial development and new economic policies, this paper endeavours to account for the shift in Scottish working class caused by the new *laissez-faire* economy nurtured

by Thatcherism and its adherents, who privatized Britain's heavy industry and thus cut down the traditional reservoirs of working-class solidarity. An enquiry into Kelman's protagonists' thoughts and interactions will give us a few clues as to their function, importance and alienation both from their own microcosms and the state system they cannot avoid. Furthermore, a detailed examination of Kelman's interpretation of men-women relations will challenge the traditional gender stereotypes along with specific roles, which are typically associated with either sex.

Nevertheless, Kelman's innovations do not only concern his particular depiction of working-class communities and their members, but also a diverse variety of stylistic and aesthetic means by which he introduces the class conflict on textual level. We are going to ponder his specific method of establishing the story's plot, taking into consideration his attitude towards the literary canon of Realism. Therefore, it will be essential to consider Kelman's opinions concerning genre fiction and his critical comments on the traditional structure of storytelling. We are going to address the issue of the story's settings reappearing in Kelman's work and how it differs from the traditional pattern. Consequently, we will investigate his determination to stress and explore the horrors of the individual's daily routines and their significance with regard to Kelman's political views.

Apart from examining the devices developing the plot, we are going to deal with other formally distinctive features of Kelman's fiction that make him unique. Without a doubt, language and its implications play a crucial role in Kelman's stories which overflow with enormous quantity of expletives, local patois and demotic speech in general. His commitment to depicting the working-class environment with candidness and immediacy will urge us to explore Kelman's theory concerning gutter languages and their ostracization by the officially recognized literary circles, which can hardly put up with his excessive usage of four-letter words. Kelman's advocacy of gutter languages and colloquialisms, which are, as far as his theory goes, adequate parts of working-class culture that is being made inferior and devoured by elitist English culture and literature, will be reflected and documented by clear examples of his characters' conflicts with authorities brought about by the language they speak.

Speaking of authorities, we are going to question the role of the State and its agents of law enforcement, which possess an enormous amount of power to patronise, manipulate and discipline. Since the issue of control of the individual and the corruptive nature of power constitute one of the most solid pillars of Kelman's fiction, we need to go through them in order to understand his view of the extremely totalizing measures exercised by the State and all artificial authorities in general. Furthermore, we are going to analyse Kelman's experiments with the

narrative and orthographic techniques through which he tenaciously defies authoritarian tendencies to control and restrain both the reader and the individual.

Last but not least, we are bound to challenge the concept of Scottish identity with respect to Kelman's literary, political and cultural statements voiced in his fiction. Consequently, we are going to ruminate on the implications of nationalism and post-colonial theory in Kelman's stories, which, in a way, articulate the English-Scottish antagonism and cultural anxieties that are typical for the process of decolonisation. Therefore, an analysis of Kelman's employment of the stereotypes concerning national identity will at length throw some light on his stand concerning nationalism and the individual's identity.

Since Kelman is a tremendously prolific writer, this paper examines his fiction written until 2000, supported by comments expressed in his essays and interviews. As a matter of fact, the following chapters explore both his novels and short stories in order to carry out a detailed study. As Kelman puts it, "I always end up being annoyed by people making judgments without reading the body of my work. I often get criticized by people who know me only from my key novels, whereas, Christ, I've written a hundred and fifty short stories, but they never seem to be on the agenda."² Therefore, this paper will strive to avoid such narrow-minded and superficial criticism. Conversely, it will aspire to address a few aspects of the changing pattern of working-class fiction exemplified in Kelman's work.

² Tom Toremans, "An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman," *Contemporary Literature* 44.4 (2003): 572. **JSTORE**. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.jstore.org>>.

1. Socio-economic issues: The Backbone of Kelman's Fiction

Issues concerning social, as well as economic aspects of people's everyday existence constitute the very centre of Kelman's work, be it his short stories, novels or critical essays. At first glance Kelman's commitment to portraying life experience of underprivileged individuals tends to capture the attention of the working-class readership in particular. However, it can be argued that one is prone to arrive at quite a different conclusion; he addresses not only those depicted in his stories but simply all people who are in one way or another deprived of various comforts provided for those who enjoy economic security. Consequently, the scope of Kelman's appeal includes even people without a working-class background in general.

This section explores the nature of capitalism and how it is reflected in Kelman's fiction since there are several reasons why to pursue such course. First and foremost, the economic relations of production play an extremely important role in our industrial society which is so frequently depicted by Kelman, for almost every single human being is sooner or later confronted with the inevitable process of finding a job and adjusting the rest of his or her life accordingly. Therefore, we are bound to tackle a few topics recurring throughout his stories, namely the phenomenon of employment and its shortcomings comparing the way unemployment interacts with mentality and ethics of the individual.

Furthermore, as individuals are more or less products of the communities and environments they grow up in, we must also examine the background of Kelman's characters and the way they interact with others within their reach. Thus, we are going to ask to what degree, if any, these assumptions regarding the impact of one's origin and background on the individual's consequent development are valid in terms of Kelman's written works. In addition, not only their background and its influence, but also their actions and dispositions of the protagonists themselves require a concise analysis because no matter what outer determinism affects them, it is their individual nature and its conflict with traditional working-class stereotypes which challenges the reader. Consequently, as the title suggests, we are going to follow Kelman's portrayal of the class antagonism stemming from the economic and therefore social predispositions of the characters and the society they live in.

Speaking of the characters' nature we cannot avoid dealing with the gender issue, the urgency of which is striking in Kelman's fiction. The assessment will include a typology of characters and the frequency of gender stereotypes, the analysis of which will hopefully throw some light on to what extent Kelman takes advantage of these or whether he prefers challenging the traditional conservative notions.

Finally, the course of our inquiry urges us to ponder the character of Kelman's stories' plot and subsequently the significance of events which typically occur in his narratives. At the end we will be able to arrive at a generalization covering the fundamentals of the situations and conflicts which Kelman's protagonists are forced to experience and respond to.

1. 1. Work and Its Absence

Since the publication of Kelman's first collection of short stories *An Old Pub Near the Angel*, employment and its availability, or rather the lack of, has been the primary concern expressed by many of his protagonists. Hence the economic aspect of people's ordinary lives and jobs captures a large proportion of the following discussion.

Even Kelman's very early short stories in *An Old Pub Near the Angel* depict individuals facing the pitfalls of *laissez-faire* economy and their struggles to get by. In "The Cards," Jack Duncan, a local bus conductor, is sacked for his inappropriate work ethic, the reality of which he accepts in cold blood revolving the very fact:

Well, that was that. It was good to be free again. Still December? Bad time of the year for the broo. Probably be barred for misconduct. Yes bad timekeeping Mr Duncan ah ha. The ultimate sin, matched only by raping the district superintendent's wife. (...) A wife and a child?³

Obviously, paid work is referred to here as a kind of wage slavery, which is a recurrent motif in Kelman's fiction. Nonconformists resisting the conventional model of obedient employees are dealt with without any compassion and those deciding who should be fired seem uncompromising as Duncan's superior tells him off saying "I don't think you were suited for this type of job from the start you know."⁴

Conversely, the period of unemployment seemingly represents freedom without any imposed rules and routines devised by higher authorities. Duncan believes that he "could do with a couple of week's holiday anyway."⁵ Such liberty is unfortunately paid for by economic insecurity and fragile uncertainty as to what a man should do to provide for his family. The merciless mechanism of wage labour leaves Duncan contemplating the bleak situation of his wife, who by all means "would be worried"⁶ and a child apparently dependent on his regular income. Admittedly Duncan accepts his being laid off with humorous tone, derogating the act itself as well as he enjoys his restored freedom even though he admits that it was not "a bad job the busses. Hours were terrible right enough but you could knock up a decent wage if you put in the hours."⁷ Certainly, such compromise comprising one's submission to the system of requirements totalling the number of hours spent at work and other demands would ensure one's subsistence level and social reproduction.

³ James Kelman, *An Old Pub Near the Angel* (1972; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007) 2.

⁴ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 2.

⁵ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 8.

⁶ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 3.

⁷ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 3.

In fact, it all comes down to the matter of materialism and its impact on the individual as in the case of the short story “Abject Misery”. It features another society’s outsider striving to struggle by in a hostile world that obviously favours economically productive agents of wage labour. At least that is the assumption which Charles, a young unemployed wretch, who enjoys his “third month of poverty-stricken freedom”⁸ entertains. Like Jack Duncan and many others of Kelman’s characters he is also on the **broo** which is a Scots term for the Labour Bureau and **being on it** stands for receiving unemployment compensation⁹.

Charles knows the odds of not being able to make the ends meet and therefore assures himself that “one of these days he’d have to get a job” because he cannot make out how he has “managed to survive the past three days”¹⁰. He is forced to face the inevitable truth: “This no money was becoming a problem. How was one supposed to eat?”¹¹.

The realization of being better off having some job, and thus a regular income, crosses Charles’ mind wherever he wanders. For everyone he runs into seems to lack the respect for the likes of himself. The materialist perspective is the first concern when Charles tries to account for his troubles. In his opinion, economic security provides all joys and turns life into a fairytale. For if he had a job, he could perhaps “get a real good place with fitted carpets, refrigerators and TV sets. Easy to get a chick up then with a bit of comfort around.”¹².

Charles’ point is that money can buy one true happiness. Kelman does not strive to moralize about a noble cause condemning the materialistic truism. He simply shows that an individual raised in a society that worships private ownership and tries to make up for it by endorsing a set of moral values denouncing envy only follows the suit of the traditional pattern of consumerism. Therefore, Charles dreams about a home furnished by inorganic objects, the more of them the better as in the case of the TV sets he fancies.

Without a shadow of a doubt, being penniless is a topic peculiar to the major part of Kelman’s fiction. It is not the state of being **skint** itself, which is another important piece of the Scots vocabulary omnipresent in Kelman’s stories, a synonym of penniless, but rather its effects on the individual’s spirits and existence. In “Wednesday” Jimmy, a manual labourer, wakes up a day before he is to receive his salary finding that “today was Wednesday. Day before pay day. We had no money. No food. No cigarettes. Nothing at all.”¹³. His whole world shrinks to a few basic needs such as feeding himself and having a smoke. Consequently, if one does not have money,

⁸ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 19.

⁹ see Stephen Bernstein, “James Kelman,” *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* 10.3 (2000): 76.

¹⁰ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 19.

¹¹ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 19.

¹² Kelman, *An Old Pub* 19–20.

¹³ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 42.

there is 'nothing at all'; Jimmy is only a walking dead with no perspectives and what is even worse, nothing seems to work properly. He puts the kettle on to make some tea but realizes that the water does not boil for they did not pay the electricity bill. He cannot have breakfast because of his economic situation and thus feels miserable.

Nonetheless some protagonists enjoy being on the dole, even though the unemployment compensation is far from being satisfactory. In "The Best Man Advises," Mick, a man in his forties with a wife and a child, declares "I like it on the broo. Plenty of time to read and that, it's not a bad life."¹⁴ Kelman provides a wider spectrum introducing individuals who enjoy their 'poverty-stricken freedom'. Here, Mick joins the ranks of the unemployed but surprisingly the fact does not elicit any feelings of anger. On the contrary, he feels splendid for he manages to get by with his wife who buys him tobacco. When his drinking friend John cannot see why Mick has given up so easily he just laughs: "Nobody believes me I'm really enjoying life. Fuck them all!"¹⁵

Mick defies the traditional notion that one has to work in order to fit the pattern of a happy life. In comparison to other protagonists mentioned so far, he is held up as an example of coming into terms with his poor conditions and making the best of it. Conversely, he is not excluded from the economic system which maintains his existence by supplying him with an unemployment compensation. Therefore, he fails to act as a perfect rebel and furthermore his friend John tries to "lure" him back to work just for his son's sake. Mick ruthlessly suggests "if he [Mick's son] wants to get job down south I won't stop him"¹⁶. Eventually, such a selfish statement makes Mick fall short of winning the sympathy of the conservative reader.

In his second collection of short stories **Not Not while the Giro** (1983) and the subsequent writings, Kelman remains dead loyal in his depictions of life concerning the economically unproductive part of society. Having experienced the everyday struggles portrayed in his stories, he endeavours to explain why some of the readership cannot comprehend nor appreciate the themes of his stories:

(...) this is one of the class things that people who are economically secure and stable don't understand – what not to be secure means. They don't understand what it is to be on the broo for instance; they don't understand these things except as temporary phenomena – they don't realize that it can be a permanent situation from which there is no get-out.¹⁷

¹⁴ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 71.

¹⁵ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 73.

¹⁶ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 71.

¹⁷ qtd. in Bernstein 52.

According to Kelman's relentless railing against inappropriate job opportunities and the individual's economic insecurity, the title story of the collection, "not not while the giro," singles out a downcast misfit incapable of finding a steady job surviving day-to-day and waiting for the giro, which is a term for the actual amount of money provided by the Labour Bureau to for the unemployed.

The interior monologue, or rather meditation, over the protagonist's current existential concerns is basically a self-reflection of his miserable character and existence. Like Charlie in "Abject Misery," the narrator in "not not while the giro" ponders what could possibly make him happy and content. He eventually comes up with a list of necessities he lacks, in the first place "It's a meal I need, a few pints, a smoke, open air and outlook, the secure abode. (...) Satisfyingly gainful employment. Money. A decidable and complete system of life."¹⁸ Finally he regrets that he has "So many needs and the nonexistent funds."¹⁹

The narrator is dwelling in enormously poor conditions and the only positive prospect he enjoys is the vision of the unemployment compensation he is waiting for which is a hell to pay indeed. Depressed economically as well as socially, he gets upset for "How can in the name of Christ one possibly consider suicide when one's giro arrives in two days' time."²⁰ By exposing the narrators' anxieties, Kelman masters capturing the essential problem of what it means to be unemployed. Finding he is starving and lacking any chances of future improvement, the narrator considers committing suicide, which he dismisses immediately for the sake of the giro that is to arrive in two days. The question is how he is to survive until then. As a result, the reader who is either disgusted or appalled is confronted with an image of a vicious circle *par excellence*. The protagonist is trapped in a dead-end process of decision making. To highlight and account for such a bleak mood which his real-life characters all share, Kelman argues that we will hardly understand it unless we become aware of the fact that "your prospects won't improve next year, you can't borrow money on the strength of it because it's the strength of nothing."²¹

In the end though, the narrator finds out money will not make him happy at all. Instead, "When I have it I throw it away. Only relax when skint. When skint I am a hulk – husk."²² Consequently the issue of the so called 'poverty-stricken freedom' emerges again. Kelman's characters just can't help addressing their dearth although a great number of them find it suitable nevertheless.

¹⁸ James Kelman, *Not Not while the Giro and Other Stories* (1983; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007) 208.

¹⁹ Kelman, *the Giro* 208.

²⁰ Kelman, *the Giro* 208.

²¹ qtd. in Bernstein 52.

²² Kelman, *the Giro* 209.

Another bleak story in the volume, “No longer the warehouse man,” introduces a father who feels terribly down because he cannot provide for his family any longer. His whole world has just fallen apart after he realized that the low-quality job he put in for will not saturate the family’s budget. Sad and desperate he complains and tries to bargain for a better wage:

A small wage. I told the foreman the wage was particularly small. (...) This is barely a living wage I told him. Wage. An odd word. (...) I am at a loss. At my age and considering my parental responsibilities, for example the wife and two weans, I should be paid more than twenty five pounds. I told the foreman this. It is a start he replied. Start fuck all I answered.²³

Surrendered and resigned the narrator quits his job. The reason of doing so has nothing to do with any aspiration to be ‘free again’ like in the previous case. Indeed he is horrified by the idea of being unemployed because we will not be able to provide for his family.

First he tries to raise an objection against the inappropriate amount of money he is paid because he believes he is not treated fairly. Such a naïve notion of fairness is entertained and often criticised by Kelman who shows that capitalism teaches people an ingeniously well-designed work ethic on the one hand but defies the very concept of it at the same time. Kelman reveals the fact that employers do not provide jobs for their employees because they are in raptures to be altruistic and humane. Instead, they employ people to be used as mere tools that are thrown away after they wear out once they have themselves benefited economically from their usage.

The same principle applies to the concept of wage, the nature of which the narrator challenges. He feels the absurdity that accompanies its distribution and availability. In brief, the employer, whether it is the state or a physical person, always tries to maximize the profit while minimizing the expenditures – that is the essential fabric of capitalism by definition. Kelman’s point here is not to question the moral axiom but to state a mere fact. The narrator learns that he cannot expect any mercy nor compassion even if he is obliged to ensure his family’s living standard. The future prospect of a better wage is next to make him angry because how he is supposed to tell his children ‘it is only a start’. Kelman intends to draw a moral lesson by no means. He merely voices the disturbing truth. There is hardly any scent of moralizing because he believes that a lesson lived is a lesson learned. That is why he lets his characters tell their stories without interrupting them.

²³ Kelman, *the Giro* 151–2.

Quitting a job and going on the broo instead remains a key topic in Kelman's later short stories too. Even though **The Burn** (1991) focuses rather on character's inner lives and their problems with communicating their sorrow through recalling their past, the economic and psychological aspect of employment is preserved in most of the stories in this volume. In "events in yer life," Derek, a young man who comes back to Glasgow to attend his mother's funeral, meets his old friend Fin and together they recall their childhood life. Nonetheless, even here Kelman takes great pains to voice the nightmare of chucking a job when Derek contemplates his recent decisions that have had a considerable impact on his spirits. He feels that he was "mentally just fucking fuckt. For a start he shouldni have left the job; that was just silly. But he was silly."²⁴

So far we have followed the concrete examples of how the lack of employment affects the characters portrayed by Kelman and to what extent this phenomenon is essential for his fiction. The time has now come to look at what respect his attitude differs from the traditional paradigm of working-class fiction. According to Craig, who compares Kelman and his work to the older Scottish classics of the genre, Kelman's stories "take place not in the traditional sites of the working class struggle for power", like the typical industrial complexes ranging from factories to mines, "nor in the traditional sites of working class escape from work and exploitation", like leisure activities and summer resorts, "but along the margins of that traditional working class life"²⁵.

A typical example of the diachronic shift concerning the story setting and character's activities is found in **A Chancer** (1985), a novel featuring Tammas, a twenty-year-old worker and gambler who flits from the dog track to casino while chucking the job opportunities he encounters. First being employed in a factory, Tammas leaves the job after seven months working there and comments that he will be the "last in first out. I'll be heading as soon as the redundancies start."²⁶

Even though Kelman started the novel in the 1960s, it is important to note that like some other works from Kelman it came out during the period of a radical transformation of British industry and politics. The infamous era of Margaret Thatcher, who served as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1979 to 1990, "attacked consensus politics on every front: her government stood for privatization and a free-market economy, and for the reform of trade union law"²⁷.

²⁴ James Kelman, **The Burn** (1991; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007) 214–15.

²⁵ Cairns Craig, **The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination** (1999; Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002) 100.

²⁶ James Kelman, **A Chancer** (1985; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2007) 46.

²⁷ Dominic Head, **Modern British Fiction, 1950–2000** (2002; Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 30.

Therefore, the workers in Tammas' factory are constantly haunted by the idea of redundancies which were a consequence of the new industrial agenda initiated even before Thatcher came into office. Tammas becomes one of those marginalized individuals who wander 'along the margins of that traditional working class life'.

Tammas is enchanted by the world of gambling, be it either betting or casinos. The economic reason based on the industry's development why he ranks among the unemployed was clarified above. Now we should account for the fact why he prefers gambling to a job provided and designed by the state in terms of psychology. In order to understand Tammas' and Kelman's characters' decisions, we must examine the very nature of the traditional notion of **work** as a historical and psychological process.

Many psychologists marvel at the tricky question of why a great number of workers enjoy physical labour after coming home from a previous 10-hour shift of hard labour in a factory. Inconceivably, the labourers are happy to spend their leisure time digging in their gardens or doing some other mentally or physically challenging activities instead of going to bed straight ahead and calling it a day. The very same psychologists though, fail to introduce any effective innovative methods based on the findings just mentioned to enhance workers' discipline and their productivity at their regular job. The answer is simple nonetheless:

He [the worker] enjoys going home and digging in his garden because there he is free from foremen, managers and bosses. He is free from the monotony and slavery of doing the same thing day in day out, and is in control of the whole job from start to finish. He is free to decide for himself how and when to set about it. He is responsible to himself and not somebody else. He is working because he **wants** to and not because he **has** to. He is doing his own thing. He is his own man.²⁸

If we substitute any kind of activity that is carried out voluntarily and under the worker's total control for **digging in a garden**, we should understand Tammas' impetus to chuck the job and go to the betting shop instead. He is a real genius concerning betting, while he reads extensively on the prospects of the favourites he places his bets on. Furthermore, he works out calculations that are far beyond any other man. All these processes are contradictory to the nature of his regular job where he acts like a machine. When working out his bets he is not told which dog or horse to back at all – he masters all these activities on his own. Therefore, they are generated by his own ingenious spirit without any superior authority's guidance.

²⁸ Colin Ward, **Anarchy in Action** (1973; London: Freedom Press, 2008) 117.

Eventually Tammias even leaves his second job in a copper factory after experiencing a minor safety accident involving burning of his shoe after he fails to grab a hot copper rod. Tammias feels suffocating by the monotonous drone and toil in a factory and tells his sister Margaret that “it was really terrible you know I mean God sake, hh, terrible. You’d have to be crazy to work at it, that rolling machine – terrible!” and concludes “I would never’ve got used to it.”²⁹.

Therefore, Kelman’s characters stand for what Craig calls “the leftovers of the collapse of working class life”³⁰. Another example of such a pariah individual can be Rab Hines, a bus conductor in his late twenties, who suffers from the hideous monotony of his job and daily routines in Kelman’s first full-length novel **The Busconductor Hines** (1984). Hines is an unlucky outcast who often contemplates the nature of his job which he finds tedious and imprisoning:

It has never been acutely necessary to think. Hines can board the bus and all will transpire. Nor does he have to explain to a driver how the bus is to be manoeuvred. Nor need he dash out into the street to pressgang pedestrians. (...) Hines simply has to stand with his back to the safety rail beneath the front window and await the jerk of gear or brake to effect his descent to the rear and, with machine at the ready and right hand palm outwards to take in the dough, the left hand is extracting a ticket and dishing it up to the smiling person.³¹

As a matter of fact, Hines’ job does not require much intellectual activity and so he is engulfed with a dreadful apathy resulting from his job’s lack of a creative activity. He describes the character of the bus conductor’s monotonous occupation which assumes the worker’s thought submission. Hines is not a perfect cog of such clockwork though, he manages to mock his employer and the reader has no doubt that Hines despises his job.

To see in what way Kelman’s fiction challenges the traditional pattern of the working-class genre, we are better off exploring a seemingly related novel by Alan Sillitoe **Saturday Night and Sunday Morning** (1958) which features Arthur, a twenty-two-year-old lathe worker, who works in a factory only to earn enough money to enjoy his life to the full in pubs while he dates married women. Like Hines, Arthur also ponders his job and what it takes to carry out his assigned tasks:

The minute you stepped out of the factory gates you thought no more about your work. But the funniest thing was that neither did you think about work when you were standing at your machine. You began the day by cutting and drilling steel cylinders with care, but gradually your actions became automatic and you forgot all about the machine and the

²⁹ Kelman, **A Chancer** 359.

³⁰ Craig, **The Modern Scottish Novel** 100.

³¹ James Kelman, **The Busconductor Hines** (1984; London: Orion Books, 1992) 154.

quick working of your arms and hands and (...) If your machine was working well – the motor smooth, stops tight, jigs good – and you spring your actions into a favourable rhythm you became happy. (...) Everybody's happy. It's a fine world sometimes, if you don't weaken, or if you don't give the bastards a chance to get cracking with that carborundum.³²

At first glance the two passages seem quite alike because both Hines and Arthur describe the monotonous work which does not demand much thinking and after a while of doing it one becomes numb and apathetic with respect to the actions he performs. When examining the overall mood of the quotations, we will realize that Hines does not tie in with Arthur in one crucial aspect – he is not happy; none of Kelman's characters are.

It all has to do with the historical context which Sillitoe and Kelman depicts. While the former experienced the era of an idealistic post-war reconstruction when "Britain's people had enormous faith in the power of the state," because "social infrastructure was indeed dramatically improved by the welfare state, with centrally planned government intervention profoundly changing the relationships between state and society,"³³ and he criticised how the British state failed to live up to its promised reforms, the latter is deeply censorious in terms of a dissolution of 'the traditional sites of the working class struggle for power' as Craig defines it and the rise of the new world order. Whereas on the other hand, Arthur is content to earn enough money so that he can spend it in no time by purchasing suits and alcohol. Kelman's characters are disillusioned about their materialistic prospects because they can manage to earn enough money neither to provide for their families nor to enjoy their lives themselves.

Therefore, Kelman's fiction focuses on the great divide between the state of the post-war era working class and the new wave of the laissez-faire economy which accelerated the process of the disappearance of the Scotland's traditional mining industry in the 1980s³⁴.

Consequently, Kelman's characters are sick of working and living in a system which evaluates the individual on the basis of one's economic contribution to society while dehumanizing him as a mere unit of productivity that must submit to the state ideology. It is no wonder that they refuse to comply with what is expected of them like Tammis, whose idea about monotonous low-quality job is strikingly clear when he says, "Actually I didnt really want the job in the first place. I don't really want to work in factories any more."³⁵

³² Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958; London: Flamingo, 1994) 38–40.

³³ Rab Houston, *A Very Short Introduction to Scotland* (New York: Oxford UP, 2008) 107.

³⁴ see Houston 107–8.

³⁵ Kelman, *A Chancer* 360.

Beyond any dispute, the likes of Tammab abhor being dictated what to do and they tend to get laid off like Patrick, a twenty-nine-year-old teacher in **A Disaffection** (1989), simply because “I don’t like being forced into things. (...) If they would leave me to get on with things myself! (...) I don’t like being told what to do!”³⁶. Patrick dislikes the idea described by Ward above of ‘doing the same thing day in day out’ because it has been designed by his superiors employed by the Ministry of education whom he never sees and therefore pledges no allegiance to.

Apart from the realities of both keeping and losing a job Kelman also shows how private ownership preserves the gap between haves and have-nots and the consequences derived from such a conflict. While keeping a regular job provides some money to get by, it does not prevent one from facing the anxieties inextricably bound to economic inequality and injustice. Thus Kelman’s characters often happen to utter the tremendous frustration and depression caused by the class conflict.

For instance Hines educates his little boy on the matter of the unequal distribution of wages compared to the amount of work done: “That’s a girl who works in the Office, he said. She earns more money than I do for fewer hours,” and he further continues, “That man there he earns an awful lot more than I do; and he works fewer hours as well. He’s a Clerk, a Wageclerk. See; he has to wear a shirt and a tie and the rest of it...”³⁷. Hines points out the paradox that working longer hours does not necessarily earn more money like it most probably used to back in the glorious day of the Scottish industries’ prosperity. In Hines’ opinion, especially in the wake of the new economy and job re-development the rise of white-collar-preferred professions brought about the decline in the working-class wages. As a matter of fact he more or less holds that wearing a proper suit provides better salary.

In “Gardens go on forever,” the narrator who works as a horticulturalist along his associates wonders about the riches of the owner of the garden they are currently working on. In a discussion with his co-worker he marvels at the amount of money the white-collar profession offers:

When I followed him inside the gate the size of the place took my breath away. It’s like a fucking national park. This guy must be a millionaire.

He’s a multi-millionaire ken he’s a dental surgeon. He’s got private practices all over this place.

(...)

³⁶ James Kelman, **A Disaffection** (1989; London: Picador, 1990) 301.

³⁷ Kelman, **Hines** 190.

Has he got a swimming pool out the back? cause if he has I'm gon for a dip. (...) I diday know dental surgeons made this kind of money, I said, so they're wealthy fuckers eh!³⁸

The narrator yearns to enjoy the surgeon's riches at least via using his swimming pool provided he owns one. Kelman often makes use of class stereotypes and here the gardener entertains a particular notion associated chiefly with well-off people; i.e. they must possess an article proving their class status, a swimming pool at best.

The gardener is not a narrow-minded hater though but rather stands for a profound thinker. Previous to his pondering the surgeon's wealth he questions his role in a system which favours ambition and ruthless profiteering. He is wondering "Why should everything be defined by work that returned financial profit?" and voraciously yearns for "work that was great in itself" which would merit a "profit to the individual person"³⁹.

It is widely held that work provides self-realization and there is little doubt that it contributes to one's awareness of his capabilities and preferences. The question here is whether wage labour meets the individual's needs in terms of self-improvement and dignity. The gardener tackles the essential axiom that paid jobs are beneficial to the individual since they stimulate ambition and profit. Kelman again tries to show that being employed and earning salaries does not result in happiness. On the contrary, one becomes a wage slave who thinks only in terms of 'financial profit' as the gardener puts it.

Patrick Doyle ruminates on the issue of the material divide in a different way. He is the most affluent of Kelman's characters, for he enjoys a flat and a car of his own. Thanks to his higher education he makes allowance for rich people who nonetheless remained rebels like Picasso who was "a multimillionaire communist. So what."⁴⁰. As far as Patrick's reasoning is concerned, a nonconformist, namely Pablo Picasso who defies the conservative mores, has a right to be a multimillionaire. He is friendly towards the likes of these, while the gardener in "Gardens go on forever" expects the dental surgeon to be a 'wealthy fucker' by definition.

In addition to Kelman's obsession with the depiction of his characters' struggles to hold down a job he criticizes the actual conditions in which people have to work and the suffering and humiliation they entail. The fact that most of his characters come from working-class background and some of them have regular low-quality jobs determines the course of the following analysis which concerns the horrors experienced in industrial sites in particular.

³⁸ James Kelman, *The Good Times* (1998; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2009) 16.

³⁹ Kelman, *The Good Times* 10.

⁴⁰ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 169.

The narrator in “The bevel” who is working with his two workmates on a chlorine tank where they have to strip away the old filling becomes accidentally aware of the inappropriate working conditions when he discovers that “we were not supposed to stay longer than 30 minutes without at least having quarter of an hour break out in the open”⁴¹.

Furthermore, one of the narrator’s co-workers describes the overall atmosphere in the workplace where authorities neglect the safety code and those who might complain against their wanton are considered troublemakers: “They must be sick of the sight of us in this fucking place. Fucking boilersuits and breathing-masks by Christ we’re never done.”⁴².

The situation when the essential safety gear is considered secondary and the workers’ demands are frowned upon while they should be a priority, represents further dehumanization in a world where productivity and reduction of the costs at the expense of the worker dictate the way people are treated. The narrator justifies the point when he rails against their lethargic chargehand who sometimes “treats us as if we were the three fucking stooges”⁴³.

At the end of the story, a foreman arrives and urges the men to go and finish their job in the chlorine tank in order to carry off their task in shorter time even though they have misgivings about the stability of the platform they are supposed to stand on. He decides to participate in the job to encourage the workers but eventually the structure almost collapses and the foreman himself experiences the horrors of the accident when he is next to falling down: “Williams yelled, but managed to twist and get half onto the edge of the platform, clinging there with his mouth gaping open. (...) His face was really grey.”⁴⁴. After realizing he was mistaken to expose himself and other workers to a danger of falling down and getting seriously injured he is ready to conclude that he could do “with a breath of fresh air”⁴⁵. Therefore, after the foreman tastes his own medicine the workers’ worries about inhaling the intoxicated fumes inside the tank are borne out.

Perhaps the most disturbing example of Kelman’s commitment to showing the behind-the-scenes look at industrial employment is his one-paragraph short story “Acid” where a father witnesses his son’s tragic death caused by unsafe working conditions:

In this factory in the north of England acid was essential. It was contained in large vats. Gangways were laid above them. Before these gangways were made completely safe a young man fell into a vat feet first. His screams of agony were heard all over the

⁴¹ Kelman, *the Giro* 37.

⁴² Kelman, *the Giro* 37.

⁴³ Kelman, *the Giro* 39.

⁴⁴ Kelman, *the Giro* 43.

⁴⁵ Kelman, *the Giro* 43.

department. Except for one old fellow the large body of men was so horrified that for a time not one of them could move. In an instant this old fellow who was also the young man's father had clambered up and along the gangway carrying a big pole. Sorry Hughie, he said. And then ducked the young man below the surface. Obviously the old fellow had had to do this because only the head and shoulders – in fact, that which has been seen above the acid was all that remained of the young man.⁴⁶

Kelman's economical documentary style, as seen in this short story, resembles Hemingway's method of telegraphic narrative where only a few lines suffice to convey an idea worthy of a whole authoritative book. He takes great pains to emphasize that the place was unsafe though the workers were working there nonetheless. The tragedy is introduced in a matter-of-fact style as though it was not a big deal. One might even think that Kelman endeavours to show how insignificant such accidents are to those not concerned with it personally. The less descriptive and pathetic words he avails himself of the more repulsive and alarming the onlooker's negligence feels.

A similar situation though not resulting in the death of the worker occurs in **A Chancer** where Tammas is introduced to his risky job concerning manipulation of a hot copper rod. After his arrival Tammas is not warned by the foreman to wear safety gear in order to do his job safely. Consequently Peter, a man who is supposed to give Tammas his initial training, points out that "they shoes you're wearing, they're fucking no good. Surprised the gaffer didn't tell you."⁴⁷

Moreover, as soon as Tammas is to give the job his first go Peter and another co-worker are startled by Tammas' not being equipped by the proper outfit:

Where's your gloves?

Gloves?

Jesus Christ. You cant expect to work the fucking clamps without them – I do it but I'm fucking used to it I mean it takes a fucking while to get the heat. You'll no manage without a pair in the beginning.

He [the foreman] never mentioned it.

Peter shook his head. He went behind the roller and began to speak to the other guy. The two of them returned. Tell him, said Peter.

What?

Tell him, about the gloves and that.

Naw just, the gaffer, no mentioning them.

⁴⁶ Kelman, **the Giro** 121.

⁴⁷ Kelman, **A Chancer** 322.

Fuck me!

And the helmet, muttered Peter, tell him about the helmet.

Aye, he never mentioned it either. And the shoes, nothing about them.⁴⁸

As the reader learns later on, the lack of the foreman's interest results in Tammas' accident which involves dropping the hot copper rod and burning his shoe. The safety code of the workplace being overlooked in the beginning by the foreman, he reminds Tammas of the requirement to wear the proper gear when he eventually comes to see him after the accident took place. Kelman thus reveals the horrendous practice in industrial complexes where workers suffer on account either of the authority's indifference or the corporation's cutting down the costs of the safety gear.

Comparing to the less fortunate victims of unsafe manual labour in Kelman's fiction, Sammy in **How late** survives his own episode of the authority's malpractice when he is forced to break an enormous granite stone manually using only a chisel and a sledgehammer after the automatic air-hammer malfunctions. A chargehand is sent in by the management to announce the deal to Sammy and his associate. The chargehand has decided who will handle the chisel and vice versa. Sammy is mocking the chargehand's role as he attempts to choose who will fit handling the hammer: "What he done was he went up to the other guy and felt his wrists, then he done the same to Sammy, his thumb digging into the veins and tendons and wee bones, pressing and rubbing," which seemed as far as Sammy was concerned "very scientific"⁴⁹.

Sammy's sarcastic remark about the action of the chargehand's assessing the workers' ability to manipulate the hammer according to the strength of their wrists indicates his lack of respect for authorities who expose the workers to safety risk because "they needed this particular job finished ten minutes ago"⁵⁰.

Despite this, he manages to neither hit the chisel nor injure his workmate who is holding it. He sticks to his guns criticising the management which he considers a bunch of "cowardly bastards," who "were probably in the site-clerk's office waiting for the screams"⁵¹ because an accident is expected after they have been assigned a job they had not been qualified for. Sammy's opinion of his superiors suits Kelman's efforts to denounce authorities that keep on pulling the strings from behind the curtain while remaining untouchable via various means. They refuse to take responsibility in case an accident comes about and ensure their alibi through sending in a messenger with a lower subordination to inform the workers about the dirty job.

⁴⁸ Kelman, **A Chancer** 323–4.

⁴⁹ Kelman, **How late it was, how late** (London: Secker & Warburg Limited, 1994) 289–90.

⁵⁰ Kelman, **How late** 289.

⁵¹ Kelman, **How late** 290.

To sum up, work or rather its absence is an issue which Kelman thoroughly explores in most of his fiction. The fact that his characters are concerned with their economic security and endeavour to struggle by in a world that favours economically productive individuals is not much revolutionary in the genre of working-class fiction.

It is the way he presents the world of unemployment and its occupants that is insightful and challenging. The older writers like Sillitoe depicted an era of mass industrial employment when the individual was aware of the nature of wage labour but was enthusiastic about enjoying life with money earned by hard toil.

In contrast, Kelman does not discuss work in conventional terms of society's expectations. In his stories wage labour is not something we should be proud of. Conversely, capitalism and its manifestations is a bondage enslaving Kelman's protagonists but the 'poverty-stricken freedom' does not provide an alternative either since the characters are forced to cope with everyday routines stemming from the economic system they cannot escape.

Furthermore, Kelman's fiction implies that employment itself does not guarantee a happy and easy-going existence because economic inequality maintains the validity of the class conflict nurtured by the materialistic divide between haves and have-nots. Wage labour is seen as a modern **nemesis** relentlessly haunting the individual who suffers by unsafe working conditions and management's malevolence.

1. 2. Importance of Working-Class Community

While reading Kelman's stories, sooner or later one is likely to realize that the majority of his characters are males. However, all the narrators who appear in his stories do not have to necessarily be male. If narrators are female, there is always their male counterpart who is in an ambiguous relation with the female narrator, as we will see later on. Therefore, Kelman's prototypical protagonist is a male who comes from a working-class background and whose age is set between his twenties and late thirties. The following inquiry into the typology of Kelman's characters and their mutual interactions will lead us to an examination of the significance of the community they live in and the consequent relationships formed within it, including various conflicts so peculiar to Kelman's fiction.

As a matter of fact, Kelman exploits the traditional stereotype of the masculine manual labourer who fulfils the role of a family provider. He portrays the changing pattern of gender roles in society by investing his characters with responsibilities that are originally associated with their opposite sex. Consequently, Kelman examines how the protagonists he employs are capable of coping with their newly acquired characteristics.

As far as gender roles are concerned, some of Kelman's female characters defy the traditional established anti-feminist notions and arguments which assert, as Heywood sums up, "gender divisions in society are 'natural', that men and women merely fulfil the social roles which nature designed them for. A woman's physical and anatomical make-up is thought to suit her to a subordinate and domestic role in society; in short, 'biology is destiny'."⁵² In **A Chancer**, a typical

⁵² Andrew Heywood, **Political Ideologies: An Introduction** (London: MacMillan, 1993) 224.

example of fierce resistance against these gender stereotypes is represented by Vi, who is fed up with men taking command of her life. Tammias suggests Vi to leave Glasgow with her daughter and live with him in Peterhead, where he is planning to find a well-paid job. Listening to his suggestion, she immediately experiences a fit of anger, especially after Tammias mentions she would not have to work there at all:

And you wouldn't need to work.

But I like working.

Okay.

I hate being in the house all time.

Fine I mean... he shrugged.

God Tammias Wylie never liked me working either. He always thought men were looking at me. Even before we got married he was wanting me to stay at home in my mother's – imagine! All day – sitting in the bloody house!

Hh.

God.

I wouldn't mind you working at all.

O thanks, I'm very grateful.

He looked at her.

Naw really, I'm very very grateful.

Christ Vi sometimes you take the needle hell of a quick.

I take the needle!

Well so you do, Christ, sometimes, I can hardly get talking.

Aye well no bloody wonder. It's bad when men expect you to stop work just to suit them.⁵³

Vi happens to show her commitment to protect her individual independence particularly when it all gets down to addressing the traditional gender roles concerning work and leisure. She refuses to accept what Heywood calls 'subordinate and domestic role in society'. She mentions her husband Wylie, who is currently in prison, and whom she fears for coming back to her. He represents the classical archetype of masculinity and patriarchy.

Wylie is pictured as a prototype of a patriarch, controlling his wife whom he considers a subject. By confining her to her mother's household, he retained his position of an economically productive masculine individual who fits the traditional gender role pattern. He most probably

⁵³ Kelman, *A Chancer* 382.

does not deprive Vi of her public life, both as a woman and a worker, only because he is overly jealous, but also for the fact that Vi could challenge his role as the economically productive unit in their relationship. She could simply destroy the whole scheme which Wylie tried to preserve. Concerning these gender stereotypes Heywood explains what we should make of their nature:

Gender differences are manufactured by society, which conditions women to conform to a stereotype of 'feminine' behaviour, requiring them to be passive and submissive, suited to a life of domestic and family responsibilities. In precisely the same way, men are encouraged to be 'masculine', assertive, aggressive and competitive, prepared for a world of work, politics and public life. In a patriarchal society, women are moulded according to men's expectations and needs, they are encouraged to conform to one of a number of female stereotypes, all the creation of men: the mother, the housewife, the Madonna, the whore. In so doing, the personalities of both sexes are distorted.⁵⁴

Obviously Vi disapproves of female stereotypes devised to suit the man; she dislikes to be a housewife and she abhors playing the Madonna for her husband, who wants to exclude her from the public arena. Last but not least, Vi ridicules the role of the whore when she ridicules her husband's paranoid ideas that all men would be looking at her with lust if she went to work. She seems not to believe any man anymore and ironically expresses her gratitude to Tammias, who says he would not mind her working and earning money. We should keep in mind that he is twenty-two and therefore still open to new trends in social and sex matters. Vi is on the other hand an experienced woman, even though she is two years his senior.

In **A Disaffection**, Alison stands for a married and economically productive woman whom Patrick Doyle loves and detests at the same time. He does not object to the fact that she is a working woman at all. He rather concentrates on the fact that she is a naïve teacher who believes in the educational and civilizing mission of the teaching profession. She always mocks his pessimistic observations of the state educational system's indoctrination and its impact on children.

Women who appear in **A Disaffection** are strong independent characters who possess the capability of control. Doyle often comments on how Alison maintains control of anything she does, comparing to his lack of such disposition. He thinks that Alison can control men when he considers a possible sexual relationship between her and another male teacher in Patrick's school. He eventually admits that she "wasn't really succumbing at all but was remaining firmly in control

⁵⁴ Heywood 226.

viz. she would be in control, he would be in her power”⁵⁵ At others, Doyle adores her not as much for her beauty as for the fact that “Alison was fine. Much more in control of the world.”⁵⁶. Indeed, the Madonna gender role has nothing to do with Patrick’s fascination for Alison. What matters is her dominant character that captures Doyle’s attention because “She was so totally in control.”⁵⁷. Therefore, Alison stands for the model of control, which challenges the gender stereotypes mentioned above.

There is another woman though, that has a certain influence on Patrick. It is his brother’s wife Nicola, who makes him realize that his view of women is crooked and far from reality. She represents the type of a self-aware woman, who entertains a realistic perspective of gender roles in society and the way men treat women. Consequently, she drops some knowledge concerning Patrick’s romanticised view of females:

Women have to listen more than men, that’s why they’ve got a sense of peace as you call it; they’re used to listening – that’s what they have to do all the time, listen to men talking. Yet to hear them you’d think it was us did it. And not only listen to them, women have to watch them all the time as well, they’ve got to study their moods, they’ve got to see it’s alright to speak if this is the bloody time you can ask a question or no, is it the wrong time and you’ll have to wait, because half the time men just aren’t willing to listen to something if they don’t want to hear it, it gets ye down. I can’t be annoyed with it. I’m not criticising you Pat but I think you’ve got a glamourised view of women which is wrong, it really is wrong.⁵⁸

Nicola manages to show Patrick the brutal truth of patriarchal relationships which design women to be submissive, passive and domestic listeners. As far as Nicola is concerned, sex inequality renders woman’s role in communication with men inferior since it is her who must be attentive to her man’s needs. She points out that her gender capacity cannot aspire to anything beyond this model. Nicola thus criticises the established way how men manage women as though they were only their master’s pets. In her opinion, it seems that the woman merely fulfils the role of the master’s companion who must tend and guide him but whose position is next to being an obedient slave.

Although Nicola accuses Patrick of having a ‘glamourised view of women’, he is conscious of the gender stereotype entertained by the society he lives in. When discussing the education

⁵⁵ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 18.

⁵⁶ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 98.

⁵⁷ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 147.

⁵⁸ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 314–5.

differences between boys and girls at his brother's party, he describes how society moulds the individual with respect to the gender issue and how sex dispositions are reflected in one's intellectual capacity. When Davie, a friend of Patrick's brother's mentions that his daughter did not do well when she used to go to school, Patrick provides almost a scientific explanation for it. He argues that "it's to do with sexuality and the competitive nature of society; how males are aye supposed to win and lassies are aye supposed to come secondbest, and the way the education system colludes entirely"⁵⁹.

When it comes to sexuality, Patrick is a frustrated man who cannot manage to find a sexual partner. Hence, he happens to consider fetching a prostitute which is "nothing to be ashamed of; it is quite common-sensible – fairly rational, as a proposition, as propositions go for Christ sake, at least rational ones"⁶⁰. At length he dismisses the idea not for his remorse's sake but for his fear he could be infected by some STD. Patrick's decision has nothing to do with solidarity or compassion for the prostitute. All he can think of is merely his own merit and what possible harm it could do him. Kövesi explains that even though Patrick is apt to be protective of women, he "shows no signs of concern for female exploitation, for the female subject, only for the welfare of his own body, only for protecting himself from an infected object of desire"⁶¹.

Sammy in **How late** is an egoistic individual with respect to his girlfriend Helen. He constantly regrets that she is gone and is uncertain whether she left him because they had a row and will come back or if she is gone for good. Helen stands for a woman who enjoys a certain amount of control with comparison to Sammy, who looks up to her because "She wasnay a woman that jumped into things. Too fucking experienced"⁶². She is an icon of rational reasoning similar to Nicola's in **A Disaffection**, and helps Sammy to tame his impatient and hot-blooded temperament. Despite his respect for Helen, Sammy complains about her contemplative character which drives him round the bend. Helen is portrayed as a thinker and the fact does not suit Sammy, who is always head first into anything. He points out that "Helen was a worrier but that was the problem. Sometimes it was like she needed things to worry about. It could get on yer nerves. Nothing worse than cunts worrying about ye all the time. Sammy's granny was terrible for it..."⁶³. Nevertheless, Sammy admires the patience with which women get on with their men:

All people get ideas but women get them in particular. Ye don't know what to make of them, especially when ye're young. Ye wonder what they see in ye as well I mean being

⁵⁹ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 288.

⁶⁰ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 79.

⁶¹ Simon Kövesi, **James Kelman** (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2007) 97.

⁶² Kelman, **How late** 231.

⁶³ Kelman, **How late** 62.

honest; men – christ almighty, a bunch of dirty bastards, literally, know what I'm talking about, sweaty socks and all that, smelly underpants. Course they've got nay choice, no unless they're lesbian...⁶⁴

According to Sammy, women are intellectuals who are difficult to make out especially when one is young and inexperienced. That is one reason why he admires Helen, who is an experienced woman even though Sammy is not a youngster anymore. He deliberately describes men as a breed of good-for-nothings who are disgusting even to think of and whose hygiene is gruesome. Yet after mocking his own species, he concludes that women have no choice after all. In other words, he confirms Heywood's definition of the gender stereotype which argues that 'biology is destiny'. As far as Sammy's meditation goes, females can manage to con their biological nature if they become lesbians. Then they do not have to conform to their traditional gender roles of submissive and passive worriers. Sammy actually ties in with Nicola, who tells Patrick in **A Disaffection** that women have to listen to men; Sammy claims that "Women have to know; men have to tell them"⁶⁵. Eventually he mentions that "Helen was good at silence; the silent treatment man she was good at it."⁶⁶. The role of the woman as the silent listener is finally sealed and confirmed.

Furthermore, Sammy resembles Patrick Doyle in terms of his selfish character too. He cannot beat his ego and before long all his feelings towards Helen turn into a matter of pure economic rationalization. In fact, it has to do with the survival instinct since he lives in her flat; the primary concern after he realizes that she is not at home is to worry about him being evicted. If she would not come back "he was fuckt. That was that. He was fucking finished. (...) For a kick-off he would have to leave the house. It was in her name."⁶⁷. Both Doyle and Sammy are protective of women but first of all they want to protect their own existence – in Doyle's words "lassies are always secondbest" as far as men's interests are concerned.

If Kelman's masculine anti-heroes in **A Chancer**, **A Disaffection** and **How late** struggle with their understanding of women's liberation from the gender stereotype, it is peculiar how his very first novel **The Busconductor Hines**, that was published before all the three just mentioned, provides an example of inverted gender roles. Hines has a full-time job conducting on buses while he manages to do almost all the domestic chores prototypically associated with women's duties. Kövesi argues that "the novel as a whole fights against the gendered stereotype of exclusively

⁶⁴ Kelman, **How late** 64

⁶⁵ Kelman, **How late** 138.

⁶⁶ Kelman, **How late** 139.

⁶⁷ Kelman, **How late** 114.

female management of domestic and parental responsibilities”⁶⁸. For instance, Hines puts in lots of effort tidying up their flat while Sandra’s at work. He also takes his son Paul to the nursery and picks him up. One day, a nursery supervisor talks him into staying in and playing with the children, which is an activity parents are expected to do there. He must stand in for his wife Sandra who was supposed to do that. Hines explains why she cannot fulfil her role this time:

Yes, she [the supervisor] said, indicating a list of names. Your wife actually should be here this afternoon.

She’s working.

O.

She works part-time in an office.

Mm. The Supervisor nodded. She did say she would be able to arrange things if and when her turn arose. You see Mr Hines we really do require parents to play their part occasionally – even if it is only once in a while. We feel it’s important.

Like Vi in *A Chancer*, Sandra does not fit the pattern of the domestic mother who raises her child and cleans the house. Instead, she enjoys her job as she every once in a while tells Hines that she could go on full-time in the office where she works.

The female supervisor is likely to be astonished by the fact that Sandra prefers doing an office work to acting like a proper mother while the supervisor lives up to her gender role and does a job prescribed by her maternal talents. Thus Kelman illustrates the diachronic change concerning professions and job opportunities referred to in the previous chapter. White-collar jobs offer personal fulfilment for women who, due to their physiological predispositions and sociological motivations, used to be discouraged from doing jobs formerly designed for masculine individuals. Heywood gives evidence that “this simply reflects social factors: men have been encouraged to undertake physical and outdoor work, to participate in sport and to conform to a stereotypical ‘masculine’ physique”⁶⁹. He further clarifies how the information age has radically changed gender roles in society:

However, although physical strength is important in agricultural or early industrial societies, it has little value in developed societies where tools and machinery are far more efficient than human strength; the heavily muscled male may simply be redundant in a technological world of robots and micro-chips. In any case, physical hard work, for which

⁶⁸ Kövesi 52.

⁶⁹ Heywood 224–5.

the male body may be better suited, has traditionally been undertaken by people with low class and status positions, not by those in authority.⁷⁰

It is hardly imaginable how the male individual must be frustrated by the fact that his superiority as the patriarch in control of his family, work and other institutions is being gradually made secondary. Nevertheless, Hines does not act like a typical masculine tyrant who strives to deprive his female partner of her newly acquired prerogatives and identity. Instead, he agrees on staying in the nursery and accepts the exchange of gender roles caused by society's development. In addition, Hines offers to fetch a cup of tea for Sandra when she arrives home after an exhausting day at work and get his son undressed when she is too drained to do that. The image of the worn-out worker who comes home from a factory after a twelve-hour shift and collapses on bed is replaced by the female office employee who does the same, even though it is the man now who carries out the maternal duties formally associated with the woman's inferior servant status. Hines as well as Sammy and Patrick Doyle, wonders about the female's ability to plan and think over her actions comparing to the male's tendency to act impulsively. He ponders the fundamental difference between him and Sandra, especially "When it all comes down to it, the way she is, so set in her ways, determined, thinking things out. Not like him. Hines is a fucking idiot: but she isn't, she's fucking – the way she thinks things out."⁷¹ **The Busconductor Hines** reflects Kelman's own experience being an economically unsuccessful writer and working as a bus conductor at the same time in order to earn some money for his family, so that "the burden of looking after the children didn't fall solely on my partner's shoulders. I didn't expect her to have three economic burdens, the two children and myself."⁷²

Working-class community in Kelman's stories plays an essential role since the protagonists have to cope with the expectations and pressures of the background they all share. In the first place, it is the family that shapes the individual in the process of socialization. Kelman's characters usually resist the traditional family pattern that used to glue lower-class individuals together and protect them. He does not portray the worker's community as an ideal embodiment of strength and unity that protects its members. On the contrary, we can follow what could be labelled as a decline in working-class solidarity caused by the new wave of laissez-faire and free-market economy, that have further atomized already disintegrating communities and individuals. In **A Disaffection**, Patrick Doyle is relatively an affluent person who earns money by his middle-class profession of a teacher. He incessantly addresses his alienation from the working-class

⁷⁰ Heywood 225.

⁷¹ Kelman, **Hines** 166.

⁷² James Kelman, **And the Judges Said...: Essays** (2002; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008) 53.

family he comes from, and feels extremely hurt when his brother associates him indirectly with middle-class status:

All your teachers and all your fucking students and pupils and all your fucking headmasters and your cronies from the fucking staffroom. Fucking middle-class bunch of wankers ye cunt! (...)

What do you mean middle-class wankers? said pat.

Gavin shook his head. He replied, I didn't mean them all.

You fucking said it.

Well ye fucking must've meant something.

Aye, I meant something, I meant middle-class wankers; middle-class wankers, that's what I meant. Okay? Middle-class wankers.

Who exactly?

Whoever you fucking like brother.

Do you mean me? Are you fucking calling me a middle-class wanker?⁷³

A well-paid job and economic security does not make Patrick happy and he feels inferior to his brother, who remained uneducated but loyal to his own background and community. Patrick feels double-crossed because "It was them wanted him to go to uni and no him, his parents and his fucking big brother."⁷⁴ The very community that first encouraged him to get higher education and climb the social ladder is the same, which resents him now. Bewildered and betrayed, Patrick cannot make any sense of the world he lives in.

Furthermore, sexuality and the command of social skills are another means of exploring the working-class identity in Kelman's work. Patrick has neither a sexual partner nor any family of his own comparing to his brother Gavin, who has a wife and two children. Therefore he associates having no relationship with being middle-class and is afraid that his pupils may think of him being a homosexual because he is single⁷⁵. The sexually implicit meaning of working-class identity is evident when Patrick remembers that "Masturbation could never be a possibility here in the home of his parents."⁷⁶ His working-class parents would probably not digest such an act of "indecentness". Conversely, marrying a woman would perhaps please them as it fits the working-class ideal they embody. Therefore, even though Patrick does not like the sound of it, he ends up as a middle-class wanker literally because he enjoys a middle-class profession, while he regrets not

⁷³ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 281–2.

⁷⁴ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 53.

⁷⁵ see Kelman, *A Disaffection* 53.

⁷⁶ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 109.

having a wife to have sex with. If he had a wife and was unemployed, he might have earned his brother's recognition. Instead, Gavin tells him off as Patrick announces his decision to quit the teaching job, "He's got a job and he should look after it. We've no got a job. More than half of Scotland's no got a job. So you dont start treating it with impunity if you're lucky enough to have one."⁷⁷. Patrick finds himself in a dead-end while his brother ridicules him for both being a middle-class wanker and thinking of leaving his job at the same time. Patrick's community has become hostile towards him. Education and other opportunities that should improve people's conditions eventually caused his separation and frustration.

Tammas in **A Chancer** experiences similar situation like Patrick, when his sister's husband Robert is scolding him for his lack of will concerning finding and keeping a job. In response, Tammas brings up an example of a friend of his, who does not work and gets by:

I'm talking about auld Phil over the road in the betting shop. He doesnt have to work in there you know he just likes to do it, to keep in touch with the game.

O, I see.

Aye, he doesnt need to work.

Mm, just like you... Robert frowned and he shifted round on his seat to be facing away from him. Away and grow up son.

I might and I might not – have to watch it in case I turn out like you.

Tammas does not fit the ideal pattern of workerism and Kelman is far from celebrating the image of a masculine worker, who provides for his family and is proud of following the legacy of the biblical Samson's toil. Although Robert is obviously supposed to stand for such an image, Kelman ridicules him through Tammas, who does not belong to the typical working-class community where all males should be economically productive. Tammas' family is fragmented and shattered; his mother suffers separately in a hospital, while he lives in her sister's flat with her husband whom he detests. Consequently, there are no bonds based on working-class ethic that could unify them. Unlike Patrick, Tammas is not that much puzzled by the degree of his disaffection, because he has his world of gambling and betting. Therefore, he does not entertain any fidelity to his working-class background.

The most obvious example of the collapse of the proverbial working-class unity in Kelman's fiction is how the community fails to maintain solidarity and mutual aid. In "New Business," a worker's union branch meeting takes place and a worker called Tam suggests asking for bigger

⁷⁷ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 255.

salaries. Eventually, the chairman dismisses Tam's suggestion saying they should wait and see if their other branch manages to follow the suit:

'Brothers,' said the Chairman at last, 'this has been gone into very carefully. We are asking fifteen and that's that. Waste of time asking more. Let's wait and see what happens through at Kilmarnock first eh?'

A few of the members nodded their agreement.

'Think you should withdraw the motion,' stated the Chairman after a short pause.

'Aye,' agreed Tam's neighbour without hesitation.

Tam sat down shaking his head in disgust.⁷⁸

The union official refuses to support Tam's enthusiasm for a collective action, through which they could achieve rise in their wages. The union's community lets the chairman to tame the rebellious Tam and thus fails to act collectively. They resign to stand up for their rights themselves and let the officials bargain for them instead. Tam experiences a major disappointment and disillusionment, because worker's solidarity seems to cease to exist in a world where workers are represented by professionals and do not have a say on their own.

A similar situation is evident in **The Busconductor Hines**, when a union branch meeting is called because Hines is thought to be mistreated by the management of the public transport system where he is employed. Although a strike is voted unanimously to stick up for Hines' rights in the end, there are some who do not agree with this decision. One driver puts Hines in his place, saying "I wish you would [go away] and give us all peace, laughed a driver. Bloody strikes! Christmas coming and no wages! murder polis. **You** can go and explain it to the wife."⁷⁹. Obviously, there are some misgivings about the strike though. Instead of staying out and fighting for his rights, Hines unexpectedly decides to leave and not participate in the walkout, declaring "Aye, I'm away home; that's me resigned."⁸⁰. All of a sudden, he turns into a defeatist and leaves his workmates alone. Consequently, Hines turns down the opportunity to take collective action against workers' exploitation.

Tammas in **A Chancer** is along with his co-workers assigned a kind of labour they should not be doing, because they all have a proper qualification to perform the machineman's job. They are told to unload a wagon full of heavy batches while some of them complain against the malevolence of the management that tries to make up for the ominous underemployment by using skilled workers to do the labourer's job:

⁷⁸ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 91.

⁷⁹ Kelman, **Hines** 205.

⁸⁰ Kelman, **Hines** 211.

Away and fuck yourself son, muttered Ralphie. He walked away in the direction of the skip. Tammas and the other two followed. When they had caught up to him he spat before saying: We're fucking machinemen, we shouldn't have to be doing this.

The man with Murdie smiled: Aye, he said, it's a labourer's job! He smiled again.

Ralphie replied after a moment. Ah well you know what I fucking mean.

We're all labourers, said Murdie. That's the fucking point.

Aw thanks for telling me. Ralphie nodded. Thanks.

Well so we are – eh Tammas?

Tammas shrugged.

The quiet man eh!⁸¹

Ralphie is angry because of his illusion that his profession is somehow better than the menial labourer's job. His ego is badly hurt when Murdie delivers the brutal truth that they all are in fact workers of the same sort, for they are doing a low-quality job even though some of them are skilled and trained while others are not. When he turns to Tammas to confirm his statement, Tammas stays quiet instead of acknowledging that they are all in the same boat. The once glorious image of proletarian solidarity seems to fade away after Tammas fails to vow his loyalty to the underclass he belongs to.

The factory where Tammas works at the beginning of the novel is an example how British industrial workers suffered after the gradual advent of privatization and regulation, when the idea of the British welfare state did not come up to the expectations. The likes of these workplaces used to be the cores of working-class unity and solidarity but as Craig argues, such "traditional life has been decimated: founded on heavy industry and on a mass society whose masses could be brought into solidarity, it has been wiped out by the destruction of the traditional Scottish industries"⁸².

Sammy in **How late** is just another example of Kelman's typical characters whom Craig calls "the leftovers of the collapse of working class life"⁸³ because he is an unemployed manual labourer, who is **on the broo** and hence economically unproductive. When he recalls his experience as a young worker at a construction site in England, where he was exploited with his workmate to do a risky job they were not supposed to do, he describes how he did not manage to rise up against such injustice and oppression. He admits that "it was up to Sammy; it was him to speak.

⁸¹ Kelman, *A Chancer* 40.

⁸² Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* 100.

⁸³ Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* 100.

For some reason he couldn't. He waited and waited.”⁸⁴. Sammy falls short of speaking both on his workmate's behalf and his own. He eventually submits to the management's malevolence and keeps quiet like Tammas.

All in all, Kelman gives his best to capture the transformation of working-class communities and individuals, who are forced to cope with the changing world that inevitably affects the microcosms they live in. He strives to show how various stereotypes have begun to change with respect to men-women relations and their personal development. Kelman follows the evolution of women's status and consequently how they have dropped their exclusively maternal feminine roles, and taken up those of economically productive units in a society that used to favour their male counterparts.

Apart from the rather optimistic prospects entertained by women, he portrays masculine anti-heroes who once were powerful patriarchs in their families and institutions but now are considered secondary by the system that has undermined the role of the manual labourer, who is no longer needed in a world of fierce privatization and ruthless neoliberalism.

As a result, Kelman pictures a bleak image of a disintegration of the traditional working-class community which used to derive its strength and unity from mutual aid and communal life as experienced in factories. These worksites have become only a burden of modern states that rather encourage private sectors of economy. We should keep in mind that the period in which Kelman produced the major body of his literature “saw the traditional foundation of working class culture, heavy industry, gradually disappear from the very fabric of Scottish life”⁸⁵.

Correspondingly, the individuals, reproached by their working-class relatives for their lack of will to work or their newly won social and economic status, feel depressed and frustrated because they cannot identify with the background they used to share.

Finally, the collapse of the proletariat's solidarity depicted in Kelman's stories marks a watershed in working-class fiction since the atomized society has bid its farewell to the archetype of worker's struggle for the liberation from capitalist yoke.

⁸⁴ Kelman, *How late* 289.

⁸⁵ Matt McGuire, *Contemporary Scottish literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009) 97.

1. 3. Smallness of Event

All Kelman's stories share, to some extent, similar if not precisely the same features that are easily identifiable when examined thoroughly. His philosophy of depicting everyday life of ordinary people has urged him to invent a particular method concerning creating stories' plots, in order to convey a particular message to the reader. This chapter deals with the function and structure of the kind of setting and situations Kelman uses as the essential building blocks of his stories. Correspondingly, he has developed his own writing style with respect to the concept of realism, and thus we are going to examine how authentic his technique is and what influences are traceable in his work.

As a matter of fact, Kelman's characters usually live in slums and often have difficulties concerning their economic insecurity, as has been already pointed out. To a large degree, the environment they inhabit determines their worries and thoughts they entertain. Consequently, they are logically forced to ponder their housing situation and issues that are inextricably bound to their living conditions. In his first collection's short story "Nice to be Nice," an elderly man called Stan tries to protest against a housing corporation, which threatens his neighbour, a mother of four, to be evicted because she cannot afford paying all the bills. In the end he does not succeed and eventually experiences a heart stroke because of his confrontation with the corporation's clerk. The story concludes with Stan's worries about "Moirra [the mother] in the weans, is far is A know they've still nae wherr tae go. A mean – nice to be nice – know whit A mean?"⁸⁶. These everyday horrors of getting by are exactly what fascinate Kelman. He does his best to describe the tiny appalling details of everyday life in order to show the tragedy of it.

"Wee horrors" features a father who is looking for his children to get them their tee, while they are playing somewhere in the vicinity of the slums they all live in. Whilst the father is searching for his children, he ruminates on the poor conditions of their slum, where various kinds of rubbish and clatter lay around. He describes the omnipresent horror of health hazard and infections that could be spread by ubiquitous armies of parasites. The everyday reality they have to face is disturbing:

Fleas were the problem. It seemed like every night of the week we were having to root them out once the weans came in. Both breeds were catching, the big yins and the wee

⁸⁶ Kelman, *An Old Pub* 114.

yins, the dark and the rusty brown. The pest-control went round from door to door useless.⁸⁷

The very thought of such an infested place is extremely repulsive. This is exactly what Kelman does – he analyses these minute tragedies with the utmost care, in order to squeeze the juice of a rotten apple and present it to the reader. Housing policies have been, by all means, a controversial hot-button topic in Britain, and Kelman’s zeal to depict the housing situation in Scotland, or rather in Glasgow in particular, resonates through a great number of his stories.

In **The Busconductor Hines**, the issue concerning filthy and unhealthy environment of working-class residential districts is communicated via Rab Hines’ thoughts on his home and its surroundings, where garbage lies on the street. Living with his wife in a no-bedroomed tenement house that is almost falling apart, he contemplates the conditions of the city dustbins that are overflowing with trash and polluting the street. Hines is powerless to prevent his surroundings from getting polluted, and feels sour when it is up to him to clean the mess caused by the old and out-of-order inconvenient dustbins:

What a bastard. Lift a dustbin then aware of how light it feels and then to be finding all the rubbish lying in a heap on the fucking floor – having to rush out to the midden-motor and get your shovel and back again to swipe it all away before animals get a whiff and come out to get into it.⁸⁸

The presence of rats highlights the terrible living conditions enjoyed by Kelman’s characters. Hines is scared of them while they recklessly wander in their flat. Sammy in **How late** also complains about “wee bastards,” because he “didnay fancy them running ower the top of his face. (...) Maybe it was rats. The building was fucking riddled with them.”⁸⁹

Kelman’s raw portrayal of extremely poor housing conditions, characters’ employment issues and industrial accidents, where ordinary workers get seriously hurt, are the examples of what could be termed **wee horrors**. Generally, the connotation of the phrase implies the ordinary events we all experience every single day, although we are far too used to their existence so that we fail to notice their ominous significance. Kelman is obsessed with describing such “very routine horrors, the things that make up everyday reality for such an enormous proportion of population”⁹⁰. He further argues that “if you can put forward the fact, then you can put forward the hair-raisingness of the experience, you know, which is why I go after all those wee effects,

⁸⁷ Kelman, **the Giro** 188.

⁸⁸ Kelman, **Hines** 79.

⁸⁹ Kelman, **How late** 120.

⁹⁰ qtd. in Bernstein 52.

such as no abstractions – everything’s concrete. It’s only through the concrete that you actually get the terror. ... If you state those terrible things that go on in a factory, if you just put them down, then you’ll get the horror of it, you don’t have to say “This is horrible.”⁹¹

Horrible indeed, Kelman’s stories concern bare facts, through which he manages to get to the very bone, as in the case of “Acid,” where a father is pulling only half of his son’s body out of an acid vat where he had previously fallen. This one-paragraph short story produces more ‘hair-raisingness’ than any fabricated mainstream thriller. Kelman’s documentary style tries to avoid any judgment of the writer whatsoever. He gives the reader concrete situations with real-life characters that do not have much time for pondering any abstractions. Kelman is right in that it is far from necessary to call the situation in “Acid” horrible, because the gory image of a mutilated body and a devastated father elicits terror at the bottom the reader’s heart. By exposing these **wee horrors** reminding us of our daily routines, Kelman intends to show that they are dreadful enough and far more real and immediate than any fabulous stories made up by a professional storyteller:

You don’t need any beginning, middle and end at all. All you have to do is show this one day in maybe this person’s life and it’ll be horror. And it’s a case of artistic selection in the sense that – O.K. you’ve got know when to begin and when to stop. When to allow the camera to begin and when to cut the camera off. That will assume the artistic mind or perception behind it. But that’s all. There’s no need to be saying or thinking ‘When’s the murder or bank robbery going to happen?’. No such abnormal event will occur – the kind of event that seems to motivate almost all mainstream fiction whether in book or screen form. In reality these events are abnormal. The whole idea of the big dramatic event, of what constitutes ‘plot’, only assumes that economic security exists.⁹²

Kelman attacks the concept of feeding consumers with quantities of products that make them think they need a dramatic story, such as bank robberies and thrilling murders, in order to feel the excitement. With respect to this long established tradition of fabricating self-serving stories of any kind, he believes that people tend to forget about their everyday nightmares precisely because of being indoctrinated by the entertainment industry. In Kelman’s opinion, the artist’s role is not to invent new catchy stories, but rather to remind people of their everyday struggles. His message is quite simple, but veracious at the same time – the more we consume these made-up stories and media headlines about murders and bank robberies, the more we tend to forget that there are far more serious crimes committed by those who produce such propaganda to cover their dirty

⁹¹ qtd. in Bernstein 52–3.

⁹² qtd. in Kövesi 9.

politics. Kelman's commitment is to show, that instead of sticking up for our rights in our everyday struggle, we like to devour heroes and stories we never meet or experience. These fake dreams, installed in our heads by thorough brainwashing, are served in the form of what he calls 'abnormal events' – instead of letting our anger caused by unsatisfying work or life we do not enjoy be heard, we settle for the bait represented by these 'abnormal events'. To verify Kelman's point, we can simply compare how many times an ordinary individual experiences doing or witnessing a bank job or murdering someone in contrast to the daily routine of going to work or living in appalling conditions, while the producers of 'abnormal event' enjoy wealth. As we can see from Kelman's perspective, it all comes down to the matter of economic security and class anxieties. If one can afford to come up with 'abnormal events' and produce stories about fictive and spectacular crimes and criminals, the very same person does so because he or she has simply enough time and money to do that. Dropping out of school at the age of fifteen, Kelman has had to struggle all his life with no finished higher education, nor a fat pay-roll as a writer. Therefore, we can find none of these 'abnormal events' in his writing, because according to his statement above, he has not experienced economic security which triggers writers' concern for 'abnormal events'. Instead, his stories concern everyday **wee horrors**, like making the ends meet when one is **on the broo**, or suffering an injury on the job while no authority takes responsibility for it.

In his stories, Kelman tries to put the class back into politics by showing the great divide between haves and have-nots through characters, who experience economic insecurity compared to those who enjoy a well-off life. Therefore, the technique he employs refers to the ordinary and the concrete. The tragedy that emerges in the end shows hopelessness of our daily actions. Tammas' life in **A Chancer**, like that of many of Kelman's characters, consists of repetitive routines of flitting from pubs to betting shops and the horse track. His sister Margaret points out how pathetic his meaningless life is by saying "There's more to life than **Simpson's** pub you know."⁹³. Consequently, 'abnormal events' occur neither in Tammas' life nor in Patrick Doyle's. In **A Disaffection** Doyle also ponders his existence, but arrives at a sinister conclusion, that his current life "cannot be enough. There must be something more. Well there isn't."⁹⁴. Truly, there is hardly anything meaningful in his existence, which seems absolutely worthless. Doyle's **wee horrors** are identical with his grim thoughts that confine him to his home, when he should be out enjoying his life:

Escape from the head, that was the best policy. The weekend had begun a while ago. It was almost Saturday afternoon. Okay. A time of the week for enjoyment. Of course it

⁹³ Kelman, **A Chancer** 36.

⁹⁴ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 225.

was. A time people anticipate with great pleasure. Certainly not a time for thinking: what the fuck happens now!⁹⁵

These are the concrete facts Kelman refers to; alienation, loneliness and excessive brain activity. Doyle does not rob banks or murders people but is tortured by his everyday routine of sitting at home experiencing serious depressions and anxieties. Kelman shows how Patrick differs from others, who most probably enjoy 'abnormal events' and look forward to weekends with great pleasure. He simply cannot feel the same joy because he is aware of his meaningless life. Patrick agrees that his existence "could have been much better, much better indeed. But that's the way existence is, you can't fucking ask for this that and the next thing, you've just got to take whatever they fucking throw at you."⁹⁶ Even though Patrick is the most economically secure character of Kelman's stories, he does not entertain any 'abnormal events' but tries to come to grips with his tedious monotonous life, which stands for what Kelman calls **wee horrors**.

Kelman's method of revealing the absurdities and horrors of everyday life through the detailed image of an individual who experiences daily hideous routines, gives us an idea about Kelman's usage of realism. Speaking of realism in general, Davies argues that

The relation between realism, as a literary form, and the reality it represents appears (...) rather like that of Marxism, which is after all the healthy child of philosophical realism, and which aims, too, to strip away the superficial appearances of things in order to reveal the real relations of 'typical characters under typical circumstances'.⁹⁷

The 'superficial appearances of things' could match Kelman's concept of 'abnormal events' perfectly because these are exactly what he tries to get rid of in order to show the real issues constituting our lives. On the other hand, we should not think of Marxism and Kelman's work as interchangeable elements. Kelman does not intend to display 'typical characters under typical circumstances' because the majority of his characters do not fit the normal pattern of behaviour which is expected of them. For example, Tammas in **A Chancer** does not want to work even though his relatives urge him to do so. Therefore, he goes against the grain of his own class and challenges the stereotype of the masculine labourer. Correspondingly, Patrick Doyle in **A Disaffection** is far from fulfilling the role of a state-sponsored purveyor of education. Other characters in Kelman's repertoire are supposed to be economically productive too, but they choose to stay unemployed instead. In other words, Kelman's protagonists might appear to live

⁹⁵ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 91.

⁹⁶ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 35.

⁹⁷ Tony Davies, "Unfinished Business: Realism and Working-Class Writing," **The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century**, ed. Jeremy Hawthorn (London: Edward Arnold, 1984) 129.

under typical circumstances associated with their underclass status, but they are by no means typical characters.

With respect to his depiction of the smallness of event, Kelman remains tremendously critical of terms such as realism and its traditional modes. He firmly rejects the claim of genre fiction to realism because of its structure of pre-packed propaganda for the masses. He insists that reality and genre fiction are contradictory terms:

Ninety-nine per cent of traditional English literature concerns people who never have to worry about money at all. We always seem to be watching or reading of emotional crises among folk who live in a world of great fortune both in matters of luck and money; stories and fantasies about rock stars and film stars, sporting millionaires and models ... Or else we are given straight genre fiction; detectives and murderers and cops ... The unifying feature of all genre fiction is the way it denies reality. This is structural – in other words, if reality had a part to play in genre fiction then it would stop being called genre fiction.⁹⁸

Kelman's criticism of genre fiction reminds us of his condemnation of the so called **abnormal events** which occur only in writings of those who are economically secure. He believes that genre fiction would cease to exist once it abandons the concepts of 'abnormal events' and abnormal protagonists, neither of which has anything to do with the everyday reality of the majority of working people. In other words, economic security produces literature that disregards the essential small events and facts of our lives, and favours 'abnormal events' mirrored in genre fiction, which serves the interests of the rich. McGlynn argues that Kelman's conception of realism is more challenging since he "makes us aware that although we have come to accept certain modes as more realistic than others, any act of writing involves so many conventions that the claim of approximating reality may be misdirected"⁹⁹. This is exactly why he writes on the principle of the **smallness of event**, which questions the validity of the totalizing narrator who provides judgment on his characters, so that the reader does not have to think at all. Correspondingly McGlynn points out, that in Kelman's view not all literature labelled as realist must have necessary anything to do with reality.

Concerning the smallness of event and Kelman's obsession with minute details of the individual's life, which he labels 'facts', he fairly borrows from Kafka. We should note that

⁹⁸ Kelman, *Judges* 70–1.

⁹⁹ Mary McGlynn, "Middle-Class Wankers' and Working-Class Texts: The Critics and James Kelman," *Contemporary Literature* 43.1 (2002): 52. JSTORE. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.jstore.org>>.

Kelman's stories are short in terms of the length of the narrative itself. They usually take from a very few moments up to a couple of days. **A Disaffection** is an exception, because we follow Patrick Doyle's life for a few months. *The Metamorphosis* (1915) and **The Trial** (1925), two of Kafka's most influential works, also monitor relatively short period of the protagonists' absurd life situations. We should not marvel then at Kelman's excitement when he compares the unspoken horrors of everyday routine described in his work to Kafka, because "That's what Kafka does. ... [N]obody had done that before him"¹⁰⁰. Furthermore, he accounts for his affinities with Kafka's writing and existentialist literature in general, even though at first he "never thought about my writing as part of anything. If it was I hoped it might include Albert Camus, Franz Kafka and Fyodor Dostoevsky. I had read a great many of English-language writers but none had made such impact."¹⁰¹.

In conclusion, the smallness-of-event method allows Kelman to explore and describe with brutal frankness and immediacy the horrors of our everyday lives. Perhaps it is the simplicity of the daily routine with which we carry out our tasks and duties that make us forget about its directionless course and sinister terror. Therefore, we rather choose to be engulfed with what he calls 'abnormal events'.

The economic perspective is again a crucial factor, which according to Kelman, determines the commitment of the writer and the kind of realism he or she decides to follow. It is not that difficult to see why economic security plays such an important role in all Kelman's stories. He has learned that a person who does not have a fortune is forced to work and make the ends meet. Consequently there is not much space left to write about bank robberies and secret agents, when one comes home from a hard shift in a factory. Instead, the mind is full of lively terrors experienced in one's workplace; Kelman has managed to sort them out and write down with an awesome openness.

On the other hand, the concept of the smallness of event itself implies that there is not a great variety of images and actions worthy of describing. Kelman's stories are alike with respect to their repetitiveness, recurrence of prototypical down-and-out characters and the routine horrors which endlessly haunt them. Thus the **New York Times** critic Michiko Kakutani criticizes Kelman for "decidedly limited image bank – his inability to come up with more than half a dozen situations," and she briskly adds that most readers "will never want to hear about another person bumming a cigarette, placing a bet or drinking a beer. They will feel nearly as suffocated as Mr.

¹⁰⁰ qtd. in Bernstein 53.

¹⁰¹ Kelman, afterword, **An Old Pub** 126.

Kelman's characters do"¹⁰². However relevant Kakutani's comments are, they only confirm that Kelman's stories bear fruit, because Kakutani's feelings of anxiety are exactly the sensations he tries to elicit. Unfortunately, Kakutani is overtly patronizing in her opinion, perhaps because she belongs to those who are economically secure. Kelman's work is obviously too low for her distinguished taste which probably prefers 'abnormal events' that challenge imagination and concern a good deal of literary criticism.

Kelman does not strive to embellish everyday horrors we experience. On the contrary, he just wants to give the facts and believes that the reader will take care of him or herself. Fair enough, as more often than not, Kelman's stories do take place in pubs and slums. When asked why he re-employs these repetitive images and settings, in other words what Kakutani later labelled 'poor image bank', he simply replied "That's because I live in a slum and drink in pubs."¹⁰³.

¹⁰² qtd. in Bernstein 45–6.

¹⁰³ qtd. in Kelman, *An Old Pub* 120.

2. Formal Features: Language, Culture and Politics

Language and its varieties is perhaps the most controversial topic in Kelman's work. Every single story he has written is characterised by the language and communication skills of the characters. Differences between Standard English and its dialects stand for the crucial factors affecting one's social status and personal background. We are going to explore how Kelman equips his characters with specific linguistic devices and will explore what impact these have on their existence. Since language is the basic property of all human beings, Kelman's particular usage of it defines the entire body of his literature. An examination of characters' language predispositions and the practice of their mother tongue will merit a good deal of thought by all means. As a matter of fact, language is inextricably bound to one's own identity, and therefore it plays the prime role in Kelman's stories. So far we have been discussing how his characters struggle with shortcomings of wage labour and capitalism affecting their spirits, and what troubles they bring on their communities which had been already disintegrated. Now we need to look at the way the individuals communicate within their family and community, in order to account for their ostracization. Moreover, they get in touch with outsiders who represent slightly different language systems, and the problems it entails are worth exploring. Thus we will hopefully throw some light on the relation of the English language with its varieties, and the cultural implications concerned.

In addition, we are going to inquire into the way Kelman treats social and economic hierarchy with respect to one's personal liberties. In state-structured societies, both language and culture is always maintained and controlled, to a large extent, by artificial authorities that enhance institutions set up to govern the individual's life. We are to follow Kelman's portrayal of the state institutions we are all familiar with, and his assessment of the power they exercise over the individual. Last but not least, an in-depth analysis of the role of culture and education designed by ruling authorities should bear fruit, especially with regard to the process of socialization and exploitation of the individual by the state and its agents of law enforcement.

Not only Kelman's aesthetic but also distinctive narrative techniques define his literary achievement. Therefore, the following chapters concern the formal features of Kelman's work both in terms of linguistic innovations and their political connotations. Indeed, politics is behind all his efforts to produce literature. We are going to investigate Kelman's commitment as a writer as well as a political activist, and its embodiment in his writing, for almost every single story appeals to the reader in its own way. The history of English-Scottish relations and the antagonism incited by state authorities constitute the bottom line of Kelman's fiction. Therefore we must inspect his interpretation of these hot-button topics.

At the end we should be able to tackle Kelman's understanding of Scottish identity and his critical comments on it. It will be thrilling to learn about Kelman's attitude towards the idea of national identity within the historical context of post-colonialism. We are by no means going to avoid the exciting controversies over Kelman's fiction; looking back at the storm of general upheaval in British literary circles, aroused by his 1994 novel **How late it was, how late**, this paper will try to account for Kelman's label of the society's enfant terrible. At length, we will provoke the question whether Kelman truly defies the system he criticises or just artfully takes advantage of the anxieties he refers to.

2. 1. Language of the Gutter

The very first reading of any of Kelman's stories reveals the fact that they all are written in the Scots dialect or at least they exploit Scots in a particular way. We can easily spot his passion for the Scottish vernacular, which has a long-established tradition in Scottish literature. In terms of Scots, contemporary Scottish writers like Kelman draw on the heritage of Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978), the most famous activist of the so called Scottish Literary Renaissance, who promoted the beauty and innovativeness of the Scottish vernacular. As a matter of fact, the Scottish Renaissance of the early twentieth century introduced modernism into Scottish literature. Presently, MacDiarmid became a well-known literary figure, who endeavoured to follow Ezra Pound's concept of 'make it new'¹⁰⁴ in order to refresh the Scottish literary tradition, which had chiefly followed pastoral and peasant stereotypes expressed in the nineteenth-century 'Kailyard' (cabbage-patch) literary movement. Scots was an essential key to MacDiarmid, who assessed its importance in modern literature:

The Scots Vernacular is a vast storehouse of just the very peculiar and subtle effects which modern European literature in general is assiduously seeking ... The Vernacular is a vast unutilized mass of lapsed observation made by minds whose attitude to experience and whose speculative and imaginative tendencies were quite different from any possible to Englishman and Anglicised Scots to-day.¹⁰⁵

Kelman's usage of the Scottish vernacular justifies MacDiarmid's judgment on the Scots dialect, which has the power to let ordinary people speak for themselves without any restraints. Kelman's characters speak their own language variety that differs a great deal from Standard English. In his stories, we can discern particular linguistic and grammatical features that are characteristic for Scots. For example, Hines in **The Busconductor Hines** wonders why his little son Paul says 'yes'

¹⁰⁴ see Roderick Watson, **The Literature of Scotland: The Twentieth Century** (1984; Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) 35.

¹⁰⁵ Gerard Carruthers, **Scottish Literature** (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009) 59–60.

instead of the Scottish traditional affirmative variant ‘aye’, which is frequently used in English dialects¹⁰⁶:

Heh, listen, how come you say yes instead of aye all the time? Naw son, seriously.

Paul glanced at him, and then back to television. A child is a dwarfisf entity.¹⁰⁷

Hines is perplexed by his son’s different language inventory that should be identical with his father’s. Obviously, it is not, and Hines is therefore disturbed by the influence of English TV channels Paul watches. Referring to MacDiarmid’s statement above, we could exaggeratedly argue that while Hines belongs to those whose mind is supposed to possess the imaginative and speculative potential, his son ranks among the Anglicised Scots. Anyway, there is an obvious moment of tension caused by language nuances that can readily alienate members of the same family or community.

Lexicon’s inventory and the differences between its major body, which is prototypically Standard English, and its ‘deviations’ like Scots often create in Kelman’s stories an onset of misunderstanding or cultural friction. In “A Memory,” a Scotsman remembers an awkward situation when he was buying a slice of sausage in England:

O mirs! And a slice of square sausage please!

Beg pardon?

I squinted at her. A slice of square sausage – she didnt have any idea what I was rabbiting on about. A piece of absentmindedness, I had forgotten I was in fucking England. But too late now and impossible to pretend I only said ‘sausage’ and that maybe she had misheard the first bit, something to do with ‘air’ or ‘bare’ maybe, ‘scare’, ‘fare’ – sausages are excellent fare I could have said but structured as excellent fare sausages, although the strange syntax would probably have thrown her.

Square sausage? She was frowning, but not unkindly, not hostilely, not at all, this lass of not quite tender years.

It’s a delicacy of Scotland.

You what ...

(...)

The girl thinking I am mad or else kidding her on in some unfathomable but essentially snobby and elitist way. It’s fine, I said, give me one of your English efforts, these long fat things you stuff full of bread and water – gaolmeat we call them back where I come from.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ see **Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary**, ed. Sally Wehmeier, 7th ed, 1948; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005: 89.

¹⁰⁷ Kelman, **Hines** 214–15.

The colliding worlds of English and Scottish speakers bear out the language barrier between the user of Standard English and the exponent of its variety. The fact that the protagonist was in ‘fucking England’ implies his negative attitude towards the British rule. The cuisine terminology’s nuances create a gap that is hard to overcome. At the end he settles for the ‘English efforts’, which in the protagonist’s opinion obviously cannot compare to the Scottish standard. Moreover, we can trace another Scottish colloquialism frequently used by Kelman’s characters; ‘lass’ is a typical Scots term for a girl or a young woman¹⁰⁹.

Other than that, Kelman takes great pains in letting his characters speak the Glasgow slang. Therefore, we can spot not only lexical items that are pure inventions of Scots like ‘wean’, which stands for a child (a blend of **w**ee and **o**ne), but also various modifications of the English parts of speech. The Glasgow talk challenges the reader, because it varies from one book to another with respect to Kelman’s temporary whim. For instance, in **A Disaffection**, the protagonists say ‘shouldni’ which stands for the Glasgow variant of the negative verb form ‘should not’, but in **How late** it turns into ‘shouldnay’. Consequently, all the similar forms of verbs and other parts of speech follow suit depending on the particular book. As a result, the reader has a marvellous opportunity to experience the local colour of Glasgow and its inhabitants’ speech, provided one can get used to both the Scots vernacular and the slang rhythms which occur in Kelman’s work.

Colloquialisms do not incite conflicts exclusively between speakers of Standard English and Scots. Conversely, Kelman’s characters find it difficult to cope with their fellow Glaswegians too. The worst scenario arises when the Glasgow slang is confronted with the official language of the state authorities. Except a few exceptions, Kelman’s protagonists are troublemakers and nonconformists who easily fall out with any state officials. Sammy in **How late** visits a hospital, in order to report his recent sight loss and receive the appropriate treatment. When he is stating the circumstances under which he lost his sight, i.e. he was beaten by the police officers, the female hospital clerk asks him to redefine his statement, because of its language which is too colloquial:

She carried on talking: What’s entered here is the phrase ‘they gave me a doing’, and it’s entered expressly as a quotation. But it’s a colloquialism and not everyone who deals with yer claim will understand what it means. I felt that it was fair to use physical beating by way of an exposition but if you prefer something else...is there anything else ye can think of?¹¹⁰

Sammy is being told off and humiliated like a small child for saying something inappropriate. Implicitly the clerk asks him to give up part of his identity represented by his communication

¹⁰⁸ Kelman, **The Burn** 89.

¹⁰⁹ see **Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary** 832.

¹¹⁰ Kelman, **How late** 103.

habits. Sammy is a Glaswegian and talks the language he considers his community's standard. Nonetheless, his language has to be restricted with respect to some outsider, who might possibly read his statement later. The situation stands for the utmost humiliation, when he actually has to translate what he says for someone who speaks more or less same the language. In the end, he ends up saying submissively, "It was a fight."¹¹¹

Sammy is also put down by police officers whom he calls 'sodjers', when he is being interrogated at a police station. After giving an account of his regular routine in pubs, he is told to avoid saying four-letter words:

Ye meet guys and ye sit on blathering. That Glasgow scene man cunts buy ye drink and ye have to buy them one back.

Dont use the word 'cunts' again, it doesnay fit in the computer.¹¹²

He has to succumb to authorities and official procedures represented by the impersonal system of computer forms and norms, which he is supposed to fit in. Consequently, Sammy has to adjust his language and therefore part of his identity, because the system cannot cope with it. He becomes inferior to the culture and jargon of official state institutions. The only difference between his experience with the hospital clerk and the police one is that the latter does not give him any option – this time it is an order and Sammy cannot resist anymore.

Yet the Glasgow slang is a beautiful and playful matter to Sammy, who never gets tired of hearing it. He enjoys the spirit of the city and all the exhilarating sounds it produces:

So he liked going out, he liked the pub, no just for the bevy, he liked the crack as well, hearing the patter. (...)

I'm no kidding ye, he said, even just out walking first thing in the morning, ye forget where ye are, then that first Glasgow voice hits ye; it makes ye smile, know what I'm saying, cause it's a real surprise.

And ye feel good, ye know, ye feel good, cheery.¹¹³

Sammy has developed a particular fondness of the Glasgow talk, which he can identify with. He goes to pubs to hear the stream of Glasgow words and playful tones, engulfing him with a sweet and entertaining atmosphere. Even though he may forget his whereabouts every now and then, perchance due to his bad and irresponsible drinking habit, the sounds of the Glasgow slang guide

¹¹¹ Kelman, **How late** 103.

¹¹² Kelman, **How late** 160.

¹¹³ Kelman, **How late** 160.

him like a lighthouse. Apart from that, the Glasgow slang is not only a matter of personal identity one can stick to, but also an amusing rhythm of speech sounds that can lift one's spirits.

Speaking of enjoying the beauty of the Scottish accent, Derek in "events in yer life" expresses similar opinion to Sammy's, when he contemplates watching television:

He turned off the television. He never usually watched it, he had been out the habit for a long time. Watching it in the morning was especially awful; it was only the Scottish accents made interesting.¹¹⁴

Scots is portrayed as a language of joy and creativity that can dust off the boring Standard English accent. Its tone and melody enliven both the streets of Glasgow and TV channels.

Perhaps the most striking controversy about Kelman concerns what is formally referred to as the offensive language. Vulgar words that occur in his stories amount to thousands and therefore Kelman's tongue has been labelled a language of the gutter. He has encountered hostile comments on his work right from the very beginning of his writing career. While attending evening classes of creative writing, Kelman spotted a typical example of the reader's disgust over his language:

A letter came from a schoolteacher of English with an antipathy to 'the language of the gutter'. She found my stories disgusting and unreadable and did not see why they should have been forced upon her. She and her friend were among the small number who left the class never to return.¹¹⁵

Such censorious commentaries were to multiply soon. By all means, Kelman's characters swear tremendously. Actually, vulgar words like 'fuck' or 'cunt' seem to acquire the properties of plain expressive words without their offensive connotation. The reader gets used to them gradually, and if it was not for the conflicts these four-letter words cause, one would not notice anything extraordinary about them after reading a few pages. Like the colloquialisms mentioned above, these expletives bring about troubles too. For example, Hines is often admonished for his offensive and provocative way of speaking. Especially when he is conducting on the bus, he gets sick of passengers. His vulgar mannerism then causes minor misunderstandings every now and then, the most typical of which comes about when the bus is full and he refuses to take any more passengers:

Sorry mrs you'll have to get off.

Dont give that, I've been standing since half-past one waiting on you.

¹¹⁴ Kelman, **The Burn** 196.

¹¹⁵ Kelman, afterword, **An Old Pub** 125.

Come on, off the bloody bus.

The woman snorted.

Fuck sake.

I beg your pardon – dont you dare use that kind of language with me.¹¹⁶

The middle-aged woman is shocked by Hines' appalling manners. Therefore it is not only the higher authorities and institutions that disapprove of the language of the gutter, but also the ordinary people who appear in Kelman's stories. Unfortunately, we have no clues whether the woman is a blue or white-collar employee, so that we could carry out a classification based on one's class status.

Another conflict concerning Hines' swearing arises even between him and his wife Sandra, who does not like him cursing, especially in front of their little son Paul:

Naw, really I mean it's a piece of nonsense the way some doctors are okay and others – him we've got, baldy bastard, I'm beginning to think he's a C.I.A. plant or some fucking thing.

Paul was watching him; he grinned and Hines ruffled his hair and gave him back the painting. Sandra mouthed something. Eventually she said, It's your language Rab, that's why he's laughing. I'm always expecting to be told he's swearing at the women in the nursery.

Serve them right.¹¹⁷

While looking at Paul's painting, Hines criticizes the doctor who did not let him go on sick leave in his job. Mocking the doctor, he compares him to the agents of law enforcement or 'some fucking thing', both of which are identical in Hines' point of view. The raw Glasgow voice hits Paul and makes him chuckle, like in the case of Sammy in **How late** who relishes the voices of the city. Therefore, swearing does not stand exclusively for an offensive language which disturbs middle-aged women travelling by bus, but also an entertaining comic means of communication. Sad to say, such a kind of entertainment is excluded from the standard language, which labels these four-letter words inadmissible. Correspondingly, Sandra is worried about the fact that Paul could follow up his father's coarse temperament and rebel against the authorities in the nursery. In contrast, Hines thinks they would merely get what they deserve because Paul's potential future swearing would 'serve them right'.

Speaking of using four-letter words in presence of children, Patrick Doyle in **A Disaffection** considers swearing almost a healthy therapy, because he does not tie in with the state educational system. Conversely, he strives to be totally honest with his pupils, which he achieves by cursing

¹¹⁶ Kelman, **Hines** 27.

¹¹⁷ Kelman, **Hines** 23.

right in the class while letting them do the same along other liberties, like smoking during the classes:

Now weans, he said, today is Friday and tomorrow is Saturday. I am demanding a bit of order, a bit of order, otherwise I'm closing the pub early. Okay! Right: open your fucking jotters and get scribbling.

(...)

The smiling faces. Pat smiled back at them. (...) I'm a man who is fucking sorely bemused, sorely bemused. And I'm standing here in front of you, right out in the bloody open.¹¹⁸

Swearing obviously eases the situation and produces a moment of amusement. It makes the pupils cheer, which corresponds to Sammy's statement concerning hearing the Glasgow voices, thanks to which 'ye feel good, ye know, ye feel good, cheery'. Therefore, colloquialisms and four-letter words help to do away with the formal authoritative distance between the educator and the educated. Metaphorically it might represent a mediator of equality.

Even though Patrick "seems to have an okay relationship with them [the first-year students],"¹¹⁹ he falls through with his own peers when it comes to communication. Patrick is a nonconformist who speaks the **language of the gutter** even when he performs a conversation with Alison, whom he fancies and fears at the same time. She represents the prototypical role model of a young teacher, who takes her civilising mission extremely seriously. Therefore, she dislikes Patrick's language, which offends her although his four-letter words are not meant to insult her:

It was the word of course, arse, she didnt like it and hadni been able to cope when he had said it. It was an odd word right enough. Arse. There arent many odder words. Arse. I have an arse. I kicked you on the arse. This is a load of arse. Are-s. It was an odd word. But in this life there are many odd things, an infinite multitude of them.¹²⁰

Alison makes Patrick reconsider his language and in the end he apologises for his vulgar vocabulary. He voluntarily accepts her having it her own way at the end of the day, but still believes in his right to use the vulgar word. He is marvelling at the nature of the word 'arse' itself, and arrives at a promising conclusion; 'arse' is definitely a disturbing expression, but there is a great number of other disturbing and hideous matters in our lives so why should he be bothered by this one in particular – after all, it is part of his culture and identity.

¹¹⁸ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 23–4.

¹¹⁹ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 24.

¹²⁰ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 146.

In contrast, Sammy in **How late** does not ponder his offensive language at all. In most cases, the moment he opens his mouth a cadence of expletives ensues with the word ‘fuck’ and its modifications in the first place. First humiliated by the clerk’s suggestion to turn his colloquial expression into a clearer and more intelligible phrase, then ordered by the police clerk not to use ‘cunt’ because it does not fit in the computer, Sammy’s experience during seeing his general practitioner is the last straw. He cannot stay calm and respect the authority anymore, when his doctor quibbles about Sammy’s inarticulate questions concerning his medical condition; i.e. blindness:

So ye’re no saying I’m blind?
It isn’t for me to say.
Aye but you’re a doctor.
Yes.
So ye can give an opinion.
Anyone can give an opinion.
Aye but to do with medical things.
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! Sammy crumpled the prescription and flung it at him: Stick that up yer fucking arse!
Yes good morning.
Ye fucking eedjit! Sammy stood there. He started smiling, then stopped it. Fucking bastard!
Yes, thank you.
Fucking thank you ya bastard.¹²¹

As we can see from the extract, there is a blatant language and social divide between the educated and articulated doctor and Sammy, whose language turns out to be an endless sequence of expletives. The doctor is an Anglicised Scot, who uses the standard ‘yes’ affirmation comparing to Sammy’s marked ‘aye’. The doctor controls his temper while humiliating Sammy by giving him vague and ridiculous answers, which consequently enrage Sammy. Furthermore, it is the doctor who happens to be offended, even though Sammy is the one who is being manipulated. The lack of control and language refinement cost Sammy his nerves. All in all, the proper standard

¹²¹ Kelman, **How late** 225–6.

language becomes a means of control and manipulation, whereas a minor underclass accent ends up as secondary. Despite the fact that Sammy retains his cultural identity anchored in spitting slang words like ‘eedjit’, which is a Scots term for an idiot, he can resist but not overcome the dominant English language culture. Expletives are therefore Sammy’s only defence system, which enables him to hold ground and stand fast as he remains smiling after insulting the doctor. Four-letter words keep Sammy’s integrity safe and they supply him with self-confidence. Sammy’s struggle with superior authorities which patronize him for his language corresponds to Kelman’s idea of the direct relation between one’s language and culture. He argues, that

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, and you’re divorced from it. That’s what happens with all these stupid fucking books by bad average writers because they’ve lost their culture, they’ve given it away. Not only that, what they’re saying is it’s inferior, because they make anybody who comes from that culture speak in a hybrid language, whereas they speak standard English. And their language is the superior one. So what they’re doing, in effect, is castrating their parents, and their whole culture, and saying ‘Right, that’s fucking rubbish, because it’s not the language of books. I speak the language of books, so does everyone I meet at, so do the lecturers and so does my new girlfriend, and they all speak the real way.’¹²²

Kelman’s outrage against elitists who intend to make minor English dialects inferior mirrors in Sammy’s experiences with various authorities, that admonish him because of his expletive Glasgow slang. Kelman stays dead loyal to his community’s talk, and his stories bear out the fact that no academic authority or literary conventions can tame him. He invests Sammy with his own rebellious spirit, which endures the temptation to give up his culture for the sake of getting across. When Sammy meets Ally, a professional ‘rep’ that represents and speaks on behalf of those who need it, Ally suggests him to watch his “inappropriate” language, because exceedingly vulgar expressions make communication with authorities unfeasible:

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 ye’ll see I try to keep an eye on the auld words.

(...)

I’m no meaning nothing; it’s just it’s a good habit to get info for official purposes.¹²³

¹²² qtd. in Kövesi 52.

¹²³ Kelman, *How late* 238.

Nevertheless, Sammy stands firm and does not fall prey to Ally, who has obviously given up his language and culture for his career's sake. Metaphorically speaking, Ally fails in his attempt to seduce Sammy to relinquish his language and identity. Kelman believes, that "my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right"¹²⁴. Therefore, Sammy retains his expletive language and triumphs over all the authorities, including Ally, who already compromised himself, which have been relentlessly trying to deprive him of it.

The fact that **How late** won Kelman the literary Booker Prize in 1994 aroused a great storm of dissent and hostility, especially because of the demotic 'language of the gutter' reflected in the appearances of almost four thousand variants of 'fuck'¹²⁵ in the novel. In protest against Kelman's success, Rabbi Julia Neuberger, one of the prize-committee judges, resigned so as to show her dissenting opinion on the novel's baseness. She was immensely revolted by the novel in "broad Glaswegian dialect, littered with F-words ...," which "was too much, too inaccessible, and simply too dull"; "the novel does not appeal to me, I do not find it amusing – and it never changes in tone"¹²⁶. Furthermore, she branded the book "disgraceful", "unreadably bad", and "crap," which cannot aspire to anything but "a drunken Scotsman railing against bureaucracy"¹²⁷. Obviously, Kelman's occupation with regionalism, local patois and language and stylistic experimentation did not appeal to elitist literary circles. In the wake of Kelman's winning the Man Booker Prize, Gerald Wagner countered Kelman's interpretation of the socio-linguistic issue and interconnection of personal culture and identity:

That the novels which are the main contenders for the [Booker] prize should be characterized respectively by expletives and anal sex speaks volumes about the values of 'serious' literature today. Kelman has defended the monotonously foul-mouthed vocabulary of his books: If the language is taboo, the people are taboo. A culture can't exist without the language of the culture.'

He fails to recognize that, in reality, what he is describing is not properly a 'culture', but the primeval vortex of undevelopment that precedes culture. If the literary gurus who consider his work 'daring' had any real instinct for adventure, they would unfashionably

¹²⁴ qtd. in Bernstein 47.

¹²⁵ Nicola Pitchford, "How Late It Was for England: James Kelman's Scottish Booker Prize," **Contemporary Literature** 41.4 (2000): 701. **JSTORE**. Knihovna Univerzity Palackého, Olomouc, CZ. 21 Mar. 2010 <<http://www.jstore.org>>.

¹²⁶ qtd. in MacGlynn 50.

¹²⁷ qtd. in Bernstein 47.

proclaim that there is a good cultural case to be made for Kelman's people remaining taboo.¹²⁸

Wagner refutes Kelman's claim to call what he depicts in his books a culture, because in Wagner's opinion it does not possess the articulate and refined features that define culture. What makes Wagner distinguished is hierarchy that separates the likes of him from people with low-class status. He compares Kelman's fiction to an uncivilized entity that has no right to be termed culture. Wagner's elitist and arrogant stand actually represents the historical attitude of imperialist powers that have colonised minor and inferior peoples all around the world. The process of conquest has always been misinterpreted as a civilising mission bringing enlightenment to the lesser beings. The logic of the white man's burden disregards the right of the minor culture to exist. Even though ordinary people use expletives and demotic gutter languages a great deal, from Wagner's perspective Kelman's portrayal of his local culture and patois is secondary and ridiculous.

Kelman's reaction to such criticism was far from yielding to his adversaries. On the contrary, instead of faltering he launched a full-scale offensive against the elitist authoritative view of culture and the fusty set of values defining the "proper" and "civilised" culture. In his winner's speech, which he unsuccessfully attempted to deliver and was cut off before long, he tore Wagner's comment and the likes of it into pieces:

A couple of weeks ago a feature writer for a quality newspaper suggested that the use of the term 'culture' was inappropriate in relation to my work, that the characters peopling my pages were 'preculture' or was it 'primeval'? This was explicit, generally it isn't. But, as Tom Leonard pointed out more than 20 years ago, the gist of the argument amounts to the following, that vernaculars, patois, slangs, dialects, gutter languages might well have a place in the realms of comedy (and the frequent reference to Billy Connolly or Rab C Nesbitt substantiate this) but they are inferior linguistic forms and have no place in literature. And a priori any writer who engages in literature of such so-called language is not really engaged in literature at all. It's common to find well meaning critics suffering the same burden, while they strive to be kind they still cannot bring themselves to operate within a literary perspective; not only do they approach the work as though it were an oral text, they somehow assume it to be a literal transcription of recorded speech.

This sort of prejudice, in one guise or another, has been around for a very long time and for the sake of clarity we are better employing the contemporary label, which is racism. A fine

¹²⁸ qtd. in Kövesi 158.

line can exist between elitism and racism and on matters concerning language and culture the distinction can sometimes cease to exist altogether.¹²⁹

Comparing the kind of critique voiced by Wagner to racism, Kelman challenges the whole literary establishment that usurps the prerogative to tell good from bad literature. Consequently, such elitist and authoritarian manners result in frowning upon the individual's identity and discouragement from participating in the public arena. Kelman resents surrendering his peculiar writing style, which stems from his community's culture, for the sake of recognition by literary authorities. Speaking of this type of self-censorship involved in the process of becoming an accepted and widely recognized writer, he points out, "I'm only allowed to be a writer if I'm willing to give up my culture, give up my wee voice, give up the songs of my grandparents because it's all inferior – it's supposedly all childish nonsense and now I'm expected to talk like the fucking king"¹³⁰.

To sum up, language is the most characteristic feature of Kelman's fiction whatsoever. His tenacious advocacy of the right to use local dialects with their profanity, in order to depict the immediate experience of his characters, has been the central point in his entire writing. Consequently, he has had to battle against the waves of the established literary authorities who have been struggling to put him down since he won the Man Booker Prize in 1994.

Kelman's political perspective of the inextricable connection of language, culture and identity has questioned the major English literary traditions which he finds to be prototypically Anglican-centred. His sympathy for gutter languages and minor language systems, like Scots and its regional variants, has exposed the elitist superior status of Standard English in terms of culture and literature as expressed by the few hostile comments mentioned above.

Even though Kelman's linguistic experiments seem bizarre and incomprehensible at first glance, they mirror his political commitment to stand by his community and culture, which have been made, in his opinion, secondary by the English influence. He is not that much radical after all because the majority of his stories are an amalgam of the English and Scots language. What is strikingly radical however, is the extent of four-letter words and their significance in his work.

2. 2. Maintaining Control

One of the main recurring topics in Kelman's work is how the corruption of authority and abuse of power mistreats the individual, who is at the mercy of state institutions and their wicked

¹²⁹ qtd. in Kövesi 159.

¹³⁰ qtd. in Bernstein 47.

hegemony. Consequently, Kelman's characters frequently encounter and defy authorities on various levels. Therefore, it is vital to examine Kelman's portrayal of elitism and the devices ensuring social and political control in society. We are going to tackle the nature of authoritarian tendencies with respect to their impact on the individual's rights and freedoms while enquiring into Kelman's narrative techniques to add another perspective concerning the issue of totalizing control and its implementation.

Kelman's sympathy for the underdog facing institutionalized corruption and violence is palpable from his early stories onwards. In "Nice to be Nice," Stan strives to bargain for his neighbour Moira, who is to be evicted together with her children from a tenement flat owned by a housing corporation. He succeeds in talking to one of their officials, but it turns out to be useless. Stan is appalled by the way he is put off by the official:

A done ma best tae see ixplain bit he wisny botherin much in afore A'd finished he butts in sayin that in the furst place he'd ixplained evry thin tae Mrs Donnelly (Moira) in the department hid sent her two letters – in the second place it wis nane I ma bisusiness in the he shouted:

Nix please!

Will A loast ma rag it that in the nix thin A know A'm lyin here in that wis yesterday – Thursday – A'd been oot the gemm since A grabbed the snidey wee clerk by the throat. Lucky A didny strangil him tae afore A collapsed.¹³¹

Stan ends up losing his temper after witnessing the corporation's indifference and conduct. He finds out that one cannot reason with a powerful authority because it does not operate on any humane principle – its purpose is to make money, not acting like a charity. Stan is sincerely interested in Moira's situation and makes great effort to try to help her. Therefore, he cannot cope with the clerk, who says that it is none of Stan's business.

Apparently, Kelman's protagonists seem to have serious problems with officials, whose privileged jobs provide certain amounts of decision-making power. We have already seen how Sammy in **How late** is infuriated by the doctor's wordplays and jesting at Sammy's expense. Similar situations occur in "In with the doctor," where a patient comes to see a doctor to check his aching back. From the very beginning when he addresses the doctor 'sir,' his negative attitude towards authorities becomes clear as a glass. He cannot comprehend why he accosted the doctor in that way, because "It was really incredible I could have said such a thing; I dont think I've

¹³¹ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 114.

called anybody sir in years”¹³². The antagonism between him and the doctor, stemming from their hierarchy divergence, deepens especially after he makes out the doctor’s elitist nature. Before long, the doctor voices his indignation over ordinary people, who are ignorant of his profession’s importance and its intellectual strain. The patient is suffocated by the doctor’s arrogant talk, because “there was a certain amount of elitism showing in his talk and I didnt appreciate it, not one bit. And no just the thing itself but the way he was lumping me in the same boat as him. I felt like saying: What about them ben there man they’re fucking sitting suffering!”¹³³. The protagonist refers to other patients sitting in the waiting room, while the doctor is ridiculing them. He cannot tie in with the doctor’s bizarre and ruthless putting them down. At the end of the story, the patient is not able to hide his anger any longer and bursts in a fit of criticism. He protests against the doctor’s disregard for his patients, arguing that “when people’re waiting to see you man you dont even fucking bother acknowledging them hardly, their existence, you dont even bother, you’re quite happy just sitting here fucking complaining to me.”¹³⁴.

Kelman’s characters also suffer from authorities who supervise their work. For example, in “Street-sweeper,” the protagonist called Peter hardly puts up with the management’s spying on him while he is at work. He tries to evade company’s supervisors, whose monitoring of the employees gets on his nerves. The very idea of spying on others seems childish and demeaning to him as he declares that he “was sick of getting watched. He was. He was fucking sick of it. The council have a store of detectives. They get sent out spying on the employees, the workers lad the workers, they get sent out spying on them. (...) Naw but he’s fucking sick of it, he really is. High time he was an adult.”¹³⁵. All of a sudden, Peter, who is currently off his job, sees a man lying on a pavement and is therefore somewhat forced to make a decision; whether to go and check him if he is hurt or continue evading the open street because a potential detective could spot and report him. At length, Peter follows up his altruistic instinct and examines the man on the pavement, when a company’s supervisor shows up and has it in for Peter. A clash of authority ensues:

The two of them stared at each other. Here we have a straightforward hierarchy. Joe Robertson the gaffer and Peter the sweeper.

Fuck you and your services, muttered Peter and thereby lost the war. This was the job gone. Or was it, maybe it was just bloody going, I’ve no even got there.

You were just bloody going!

Aye.

¹³² James Kelman, *Greyhound for Breakfast* (1987; Edinburgh: Polygon, 2008) 128.

¹³³ Kelman, *Greyhound* 133.

¹³⁴ Kelman, *Greyhound* 141.

¹³⁵ Kelman, *The Burn* 80.

You've been off the job an hour.
An hour? Who fucking telt ye that?
Never you mind.
There's a guy lying ower there man he's out the game.
So what?
I just bloody saved his life!
Robertson grinned and shook his head: Is that a fact!
That means I've just to leave him there?
Your job's taking care of the streets, he's on the pavement.¹³⁶

The gaffer shows no signs of sympathy neither for Peter nor the man lying on the pavement. Robertson represents the uncompromising mechanism of the inhumane authority, which favours regulations and bureaucracy to fellow-man feelings.

Rab Hines and his workmates in **The Busconductor Hines** also feel the strain of managerial oppression when they are both at work. There are inspectors employed by the company to check its employees whether they carry out their duties properly. The drivers and conductors are helpless because the inspectors are their superiors and possess prerogatives that are authoritarian in nature. One day, Hines is admonished by one of the inspectors for not wearing his uniform hat. He owns up that his son Paul spilled some sauce on it, and therefore he could not put it on since it is being washed. The inspector, however, does not care about any explanation. His purpose is to check, spy and report so that "wrongdoers" can be disciplined accordingly:

Name and number? The Inspector turned a page in his notebook.
Hines Robert 4729. Am I being booked?
Incomplete uniform. What was your name again?
Hines Robert.¹³⁷

The inspectors stand for cold-hearted individuals, whose calculated machine-like operating behaviour approximates detached automatic robots. They are the most despised link in the company's hierarchy because once they were drivers and bus conductors who decided to climb the social ladder. As a matter of analogy, the presence of inspectors in the novel resembles the inspector in Kafka's **The Trial**. First of all, as Kövesi points out, the inspectors in both novels start with the capital 'I' comparing to the lower case 'd' in **drivers** and 'b' in **busconductors**¹³⁸. The difference between the initial and capital letters most probably illustrates class and hierarchy

¹³⁶ Kelman, **The Burn** 85.

¹³⁷ Kelman, **Hines** 64.

¹³⁸ see Kövesi 42.

distinctions. The **Inspectors** are superior authorities to the ordinary employees of the garage, so their status is indicated by capitals. The second reason has to do with the nature of repressive authority entertained by these agents of enforcement. The Inspector who confronts Hines does not show any sympathy or understanding. His purpose is simply to carry out his superior's orders without questioning. Correspondingly, the Inspector and his associates who arrest Joseph K. in **The Trial** have no interest in K.'s situation, as the Inspector informs K., "'These gentlemen here and myself have no standing whatever in this affair of yours, indeed we know hardly anything about it. We might wear the most official uniforms and your case would not be a penny the worse. I can't even confirm that you are charged with an offence, or rather I don't know whether you are. You are under arrest, certainly, more than that I do not know.'"¹³⁹. Like the Inspector in **The Trial**, inspectors in **The Busconductor Hines** and the gaffer in "Street-sweeper" are detached phantoms exercising certain amount of corrupting power.

Nonetheless, the capacity to punish is enjoyed by the company's management. At the end of the novel poor Hines has to report himself, and he is told to accept a special shift as a punishment for being a latecomer. He refuses to talk to the management because it is his day off and therefore he is not wearing his uniform. As far as his logic goes, if he would take on his uniform he would have to be paid for it:

Away and tell Campbell I'm willing to go and meet them in a fucking pub if we're all wearing civvies and it's after working hours! (...) I'm just no willing to put on my uniform and go on my own time to do something connected to garage business. Nobody else does. I dont see why we should – do you?¹⁴⁰

Hines fights tooth and nail the company's management and finally he finds himself encircled by authorities, which resemble the magistrates who surround K. in **The Trial** when he is brought before the court. When the shop steward asks Hines for the last time "You're refusing to take the line?"¹⁴¹, he decidedly asserts "I'm no willing to go up to Head Office in my own time, aye."¹⁴². Hines is fed up with authorities restraining his life and spying on his work productivity. Hines' uniform is a metaphor of his subjugation by authorities. He emphasises the itchiness and coarseness of the uniform, "somehow making you think of the fleecy coat of a wee sheep, the straggly bits left on the barbed wire fence you can picture as hell of an itchy if dangled against the

¹³⁹ Franz Kafka, **The Trial**, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (London: David Campbell Publishers, 1992) 13.

¹⁴⁰ Kelman, **Hines** 191.

¹⁴¹ Kelman, **Hines** 195.

¹⁴² Kelman, **Hines** 195.

skin”¹⁴³. The disturbing image of the barbed wire implies his bondage and imprisonment. Therefore, he is relieved when he does not have to wear the uniform, the purpose of which is to make people look alike and suppress their selfhood. Consequently, he finds out that “It was good being without the uniform.”¹⁴⁴.

Uniformity is a crucial instrument of control because it induces cohesion and discipline. It may be maintained by wearing a standardized piece of cloth like in Hines’ case, but it can be also ensured by a ceaseless coercion of state institutions and authorities. Therefore, the doctor in **How late** does not put off Sammy merely in terms of his articulate language game, but he prevails on him, saying “No one is unique.”¹⁴⁵. Consequently, Sammy is striped off his newly acquired identity based on his recent medical condition. The doctor explicitly assures Sammy of his dull existence because he is nothing special. Sammy’s identity has to succumb to higher authority so that uniformity and control can stay in equilibrium.

Such authority is represented by the police, which stand for a sinister symbol of oppression and total control of the individual in Kelman’s stories. **How late** is not only about Sammy’s coming to terms with his blindness, but it also portrays the futile struggle of one man against a hostile system of hierarchy and bureaucracy. From the early beginning, he decides to defy police authority and ‘lets them have it’¹⁴⁶. After physically assaulting a couple of ‘sodjers’ (policemen), he is severely beaten at a police station and loses his sight. While being in his cell, Sammy recalls how the police once killed a black man in a neighbouring cell¹⁴⁷; as a matter of fact, the police can do whatever they want, even terminate one’s life if it is suitable because they possess absolute power. Sammy constantly gives evidence on the abuse of power in hands of governmental agencies like the police. The interrogator at the police station tells Sammy that “we can hold ye here forever if we want. And if we hold ye here we know nothing’ll happen, whereas if we let ye go... who knows? we dont. I mean basically it’s best we do hold ye.”¹⁴⁸. The ominous authoritarian methods of the police, who can imprison and mistreat a person for an unspecified period of time, are repulsive but plausible nevertheless. Thanks to the colossal body of bureaucratic procedures and privileges, they do not have to answer to anyone because they can easily conceal their transgressions. Ward argues, that after all the police merely “fulfil certain **social** functions, but everyone will agree that their primary purpose is to fulfil **governmental** functions”¹⁴⁹.

¹⁴³ Kelman, **Hines** 93.

¹⁴⁴ Kelman, **Hines** 182.

¹⁴⁵ Kelman, **How late** 222.

¹⁴⁶ see Kelman, **How late** 5.

¹⁴⁷ see Kelman, **How late** 31.

¹⁴⁸ Kelman, **How late** 202.

¹⁴⁹ Ward 153.

Sammy is suffocated by “these bastards,” who “could pick out anything they wanted” because “he had nay right, nay right at all; they could charge him with that man illegal entry, if they wanted. Any fucking thing.”¹⁵⁰

Kelman puts in his best to account for the fact that the sole purpose of state institutions is to deprive individuals who form the public of their rights, in order to exercise total control. Concerning the anatomy of institutions, he explains that

Big business and those who represent it now manage this country as never before in recent years. Overtly this happens by means of the political and legal systems; by the forces of law and order, the police and the penal system, the military; by state immigration controls, the DSS, the education system and so on. These institutions and structures are designed to control the vast majority of people who constitute society, the public. It is the public who represent the central threat to those in authority and are perceived by them as the ‘real enemy’.¹⁵¹

Sammy is well aware of the institutions’ power over the individual as he ponders his personal liberties. He concludes that “it was always them, these bastards, always at their convenience, every single last bit of time, it was always them that chose it; ye never had any fucking choices. Everything ye fucking did in life it was always them, fucking them, them them them”¹⁵². Sammy’s view of the grim totalitarian nature of state institutions, which mould the individual and direct one’s decisions from the crib, perfectly holds with Kelman’s assessment of their omnipresence in the life of an individual, who “is confronted by authority from birth”¹⁵³. Sammy sums up his experiences with the agents of law enforcement and his overall appraisal of the police:

(...) ye’ve got to survive. Cause these cunts’ll fucking do ye. They like fucking doing ye. That’s what they’re here for. Know what I mean? Ye get done right? Well that’s now ye get done, they fucking do ye. And when they’ve fucking done ye they’ve done ye, that’s what I’m talking about. Either ye let them or ye dont. Personally I fucking dont, right, I dont fucking let them. Know how? cause I fucking hate the bastards. I hate them; that’s how I survive. Know what I’m saying?

Aye.

¹⁵⁰ Kelman, *How late* 175.

¹⁵¹ James Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural & Political* (Stirling: AK Press, 1992) 43.

¹⁵² Kelman, *How late* 32–33.

¹⁵³ Kelman, *Judges* 272.

And the way I hate them; total fucking fuck all. Win lose or draw. There's nay such thing as a good fucking uniform.¹⁵⁴

The police authority and malevolence described and experienced by Sammy corresponds to Orwell's dystopian novel **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949), which offers a concise glimpse into a futuristic totalitarian society. In the novel, one of the governmental secret service agents foresees to what degree state authority will expand in the future. He argues that "If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – for ever," and continues saying, "remember that it is for ever. The face will always be there to be stamped upon."¹⁵⁵ Sammy is actually the one, whose face is stamped on all the time. The dreary vision of the totalitarian state in **Nineteen Eighty-Four** comes true in **How late**, where Sammy becomes the victim of the state's disregard for an individual.

In **A Chancer**, Tammas and his friends on their way from a pub also suffer a minor conflict with two policemen. They are planning to throw a little drinking party at one of Tammas' friend's place but while they are jovially faking a fight in a friendly manner, a couple of officers intervene and inspect them. The group of youngsters is trying to explain that they are waiting for their friend who is buying some snacks, but the policemen are not interested. Instead they search their bags full of beer cans and food, while intimidating them at the same time. At length, the officers order the guys to move on and get out of their sight, but Tammas' pal insists they must wait for their friend:

But the mate'll be here in a minute, replied Tammas.

On your way I said, move!

He's just round the corner in the bloody chip shop! cried Rab.

What... what was that? The first policeman frowned and he stepped closer to Rab. What was that? What d'you say there? I never really heard you right son what was it?

Rab looked away.

Naw I thought you might've swore there son but I'm no sure. Did you I mean? Did you swear?

(...)

I'll tell you something, said the policeman, it's time you were all moving; and if you are no out in five minutes flat I'll do the lot of you. Ye listening now? D'you understand?

After a brief silence the other policeman gestured with his thumb: On your way.

¹⁵⁴ Kelman, **How late** 195.

¹⁵⁵ George Orwell, **Nineteen Eighty-Four** (1949; London: Penguin Group, 1989) 280.

Move! Said the first one.¹⁵⁶

The policemen enjoy intimidating Tammas and his friends a great deal just for the sake of their authority, but when ordinary individuals like Rab tells them off, the police authority can take extreme measures. The idea that the police have the power to order someone to go elsewhere whenever they wish is shocking, yet true. The individual's freedom to move can be easily restrained if the authorities say so. In his stories, Kelman maintains the Orwellian atmosphere of constant surveillance to remind the reader of curtailing human rights in modern 'democratic' states, which nonetheless possess armies of governmental agencies and policemen to ensure and preserve the status quo. He warns of the fundamentally totalitarian nature of surveillance of any kind, especially when it comes to video cameras installed on the streets and criminalisation of young people, who enjoy drinking and staying out until early morning hours¹⁵⁷ like Tammas and his friends.

Such agenda of control serves the state in instilling fear and paranoia in the public. Some of Kelman's protagonists suffer from paranoid fears of being watched and controlled by various social and technological means. For instance, Sammy feels uncomfortable using a lift in a hospital because even though he is there all alone, he reasons there is a camera watching him¹⁵⁸. Correspondingly, Kelman's characters are prudent with electric appliances that can control the consumer. Namely, it is the television set which frightens them. Patrick Doyle in **A Disaffection** does not watch or possess a television, because he believes it is a means of mind control. As far as his conspiracy theory is concerned, "ye aye think it's you that's doing the bloody watching but it's no, it's you that's actually being watched – the government's got the fucking security forces all taking notes!"¹⁵⁹. Doyle obviously refers to the **telescreen** which is an electronic devise in **Nineteen Eighty-Four**, similar to a television but one can never turn it off or down completely. It is a means to watch and control individuals at their homes. Moreover, Patrick is haunted by a fixed idea that he is under surveillance by a state intelligence service¹⁶⁰, and every now and then he feels surrounded by policemen¹⁶¹ who seem to mushroom everywhere.

Concerning spying and surveillance, Hines in **the Busconductor Hines** ridicules his wife's habit of drawing the curtains to prevail a potential Peeping Tom when she is having a bath. He genially

¹⁵⁶ Kelman, **A Chancer** 26–7.

¹⁵⁷ see Kelman, **Judges** 346.

¹⁵⁸ Kelman, **How late** 91.

¹⁵⁹ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 239.

¹⁶⁰ see Kelman, **A Disaffection** 101–3.

¹⁶¹ see Kelman, **A Disaffection** 209.

comments on her paranoid notion of being watched, explaining that she is probably afraid of some “Passing helicopters eh!”¹⁶².

The most bizarre example of how the state controls an individual occurs in “Naval History,” where the protagonist called Jimmy browses through some books in his favourite second-hand bookshop, when out of the blue a couple of his former friends turn up. The couple starts piling books concerning naval history on Jimmy’s hands and the whole situation turns into an absurd nightmare because he cannot make any sense of it at all. When he threatens them to call the police, they all of a sudden declare themselves to be policemen and even the owner of the bookshop turns out to be a disguised policeman. Jimmy cannot comprehend why they are harassing him, but at the end he is arrested by them and taken away¹⁶³. The entire story resembles Kafka’s **The Trial** in the way the governmental agents appear and arrest the individual without any obvious charges, and Becket’s **Waiting for Godot** with respect to the absurd manner of their actions and communication. “Naval History” as well as the previous examples portrays the consequences of a system which entertains total control over the individual. Korman’s characters are mere products of the state’s totalitarian measures, because they end up being paranoid and sceptical in terms of their right to privacy and freedom that are both violated by the Big Brother’s repressive apparatus.

Other than that, control and artificial authority are also maintained and preserved by a well-directed system of indoctrination of the individual. Education is an essential part of the process of socialization and Korman’s characters refer to their education or the book culture in a particular way. **A Disaffection** is a novel concerning state education and its shortcomings. As we have already seen, Patrick Doyle is a benevolent high school teacher who allows his students to swear and smoke in his classes. Moreover, he constantly undermines his role as a teacher and authority right in front of his students in order to make them realize they are being indoctrinated and brainwashed. For example, he forces his first-yearers, that is pupils between eleven and thirteen years of age, to overtly repeat his statement concerning their inferior status:

You are here being fenced by us the teachers at the behest of the government in explicit simulation of your parents viz. the suppressed poor. Repeat after me: We are being fenced in in by the teachers

We are being fenced in in by the teachers
at the behest of a dictatorship government
at the behest of a dictatorship government

¹⁶² Korman, **Hines** 9.

¹⁶³ Korman, **The Burn** 112.

in explicit simulation of our fucking parents the silly bastards
in explicit simulation of our fucking parents the silly bastards
Laughter.¹⁶⁴

Patrick goes against the grain of the traditional rigid model of the state educational discipline and obedience. His railing against educational institutions and all forms of authority makes him an extraordinary example of an anti-authoritarian teacher, who is respected and cheered by his students. In addition, he criticises the way how parents entrust their children to teachers, who are supposed to mould and indoctrinate them so that they will become obedient slaves to the state. Patrick is aware of the fact that it all comes down to education because it equips children with their future habits and set of values. Thus he declares that “It’s us that keep the things from falling apart. It’s us. Who else? We’re responsible for it, the present polity,”¹⁶⁵ because if teachers challenged their students to think critically and defy authorities, the whole authoritarian society with its government would collapse sooner or later.

In his attempts to awaken his students and make them rebel against the state and its institutions, he warns them against himself because he is just another governmental authority and hence not to be trusted¹⁶⁶. He even encourages them to blow up governmental buildings that represent the state’s authority and oppression, like the Department of Social Security¹⁶⁷. In Patrick’s opinion, the only way to change the status quo is to arouse the outrage that slumbers deep within all of us. Therefore, his credo is amounts to “just make the weans angry. And other folk as well; I try and make them angry.”¹⁶⁸. Patrick Doyle wages his personal war against the state-designed and controlled education, which produces law-abiding and state-manufactured individuals. Doyle’s efforts obviously draw on the thoughts of William Godwin, who criticises the project of a national education because “Government will not fail to employ it to strengthen its hand and perpetuate its institutions,” and “Their view as instigator of a system of education will not fail to be analogous to their views in their political capacity”¹⁶⁹. Kelman’s view of education has remained sceptical since his early assertion “I don’t think anyone should go to university before at least 25,” because “They don’t know enough. It’s training them to be officers before they’ve learned to be men.”¹⁷⁰ Even though Kelman entered the University of Strathclyde

¹⁶⁴ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 25.

¹⁶⁵ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 149.

¹⁶⁶ see Kelman, *A Disaffection* 186.

¹⁶⁷ see Kelman, *A Disaffection* 186.

¹⁶⁸ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 320.

¹⁶⁹ qtd. in Ward 102.

¹⁷⁰ Anne Stevenson 117.

at the age of twenty-nine, which he considers “a good age for attending such an institution,”¹⁷¹ and co-held a course of creative writing at the University of Glasgow from 2001 to 2003, he has nonetheless maintained a critical perspective of the current educational system, which is “a crucial instrument of the State”¹⁷².

Apart from criticising authority and its maintenance of totalizing control through his characters, Kelman employs particular textual and stylistic techniques that are supposed to challenge the traditional novelistic modes, which he considers authoritarian. First of all, we can discern that he does not differentiate dialogues and direct speech from the actual narration by means of apostrophes like other novelists. Although he uses them in a few stories in his first collection **An Old Pub Near the Angel**, he then drops apostrophes used prototypically to signal an onset and coda of direct speech. For example, in “This Morning,” the division between the dialogue of the characters and the narrator’s descriptive information is clear thanks to the usage of apostrophes:

Sam closed the door and set off up Purdon Street and along Dumbarton Road. He turned into the Kelvin Way making for Gibson Street where the newsagent he worked for had her shop. He just arrived just as she opened.

‘Morning Mrs Johnstone! How are you?’ he asked.

‘Freezing Samuel,’ she smiled bravely. ‘Put on the kettle and we’ll have a quick cuppa.’¹⁷³

Such differentiation is soon to be done away with because according to Kelman apostrophes are an authoritarian method to control the characters artificially. Conversely, his purpose is to let them speak their mother tongue without any restrictions. Kelman describes the traditional way of confining the local character’s accent into a standardized space limited by apostrophes:

What larks! Every time they opened their mouth out came a stream of gobbledygook. Beautiful! their language a cross between semaphore and morse code; apostrophes here and apostrophes there; a strange 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.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, Kelman has abandoned using apostrophes because they represent social and economic hierarchy which then mirror in the text. His aim has been to make his characters equal,

¹⁷¹ Kelman, **Judges** 137.

¹⁷² Kelman, **Judges** 47.

¹⁷³ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 97.

¹⁷⁴ Kelman, **Some Recent Attacks** 82.

neither separating their local dialect from any other English accent nor distinguishing between the flow of the dialogue and the narrators' efforts. Finally he came up with dialogues incorporated in the text without any restraining diacritics triggering the beginning or the end, as in "The hitchhiker":

The girl had just about disappeared into the mist. She crossed over the bridge and I could no longer distinguish her. And a moment later the older man was saying: Right then I'm off.

Chas agreed, Might as well.

The pair of them continued on. I strode after them. Heh Sammy, can the lassie stay the night with us?¹⁷⁵

Kelman's struggle against the textual authority and control does not end with mere omission of apostrophes though. His innovations concerning the narrative voice tie in with his anti-authoritarian commitment as he suppresses the omniscient narrator. He explains why he has chosen to emphasize the characters' inner thoughts:

Whenever I did find somebody from my own sort 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.¹⁷⁶

Therefore, Kelman has decided to combine the dialogue with the character's inner monologue without any narrator's comments in order to provide a genuine insight into the character's world. Consequently, he makes use of the stream-of-consciousness method that, as Humphrey argues, "rests on its potentialities for representing character more accurately and more realistically"¹⁷⁷. Kelman shifts between first and third person narrative voice to make the reader think who is currently talking, rather than obediently consuming what the omniscient narrator deploys. In *A Disaffection*, Kelman mixes the third-person narrative with Patrick Doyle's inner thoughts:

He gestured at the peeling paintwork as they ascended. He began whistling a tune, not pausing on any of the landings although he was aware she might be interested to see out into the backcourt – if only so she could gain time before having to enter his flat. In case he fucking grabbed her like one of these stupid Rome and Juliet affairs of the silent screen. My darling, how I've longed for this moment! Smack smack smack. The sound of the kissing.

¹⁷⁵ Kelman, *the Giro* 175–6.

¹⁷⁶ Kelman, *Judges* 63.

¹⁷⁷ Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (1954; Berkeley: California UP, 1955) 7.

And then too her somewhat sly wee insinuation of a comment to do with the state of the roof guttering which he was best to ignore – as if he was dutybound to start agitating over the probably build-up of rainwater or something.¹⁷⁸

We can see how the third-person narrative, which describes Patrick's moves, shifts to Doyle's mind represented by the first-person thoughts when it comes to dreaming about Doyle's lover. It is not 'his' or 'Patrick's' darling but the first-person possessive pronoun 'my' which signals the major shift in the narrative voice. Moreover, the expletive 'fucking' is not marked by inverted commas, which would show the omniscient narrator's censorship; that is exactly the technique Kelman rejects as totalizing and authoritarian. In addition, the repetition of 'smack' also represents Patrick's contemplative inner thoughts. Kelman uses such shifts of the narrative voice because the reader is "left with a thought process; the central character had an inner life that seemed authentic," and Kelman has been always "finding ways to embed the thought processes"¹⁷⁹.

Another one of Kelman's innovative efforts has been to get rid of the standard first-person 'I' narrative, because it implies the character's preoccupation with self and therefore it is prone to egoism. Kelman wants to avoid both the totalizing third-party omniscient narrator who almost resembles a dictator ruling the characters, and the egoist first-person pronoun which stresses the beauty of the standard narrative. According to Frye, the pursuit of beauty is dangerous because it "affords a stronger temptation to the ego ... and the deliberate attempt to beautify can, in itself, only weaken the creative energy"¹⁸⁰. Both aspects of control, state institutions and the omnipotent narrator, are seductive with respect to the intoxicating feeling of power and therefore Kelman strives to prevent them in his stories because it is the creative energy which he endeavours to preserve. Patrick Doyle in **A Disaffection** voices Kelman's obsession with getting rid of the egoist 'I':

Naw but the I's were the worst. Everywhere you looked always this fucking I. I I I. I got really fucking sick of it I mean it was depressing, horrible. I mean that's exactly what you're trying to get rid of in the first damn bloody fucking place I mean Christ sake, you know what I'm talking about.¹⁸¹

Kelman has solved this tricky issue in **How late**, which immediately starts with the second-person pronoun 'ye':

¹⁷⁸ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 137.

¹⁷⁹ Kelman, afterword, **An Old Pub** 183.

¹⁸⁰ Northrop Frye, **Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays** (1971; New Jersey: Princeton UP, 2000) 114.

¹⁸¹ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 145.

Ye wake in a corner and stay there hoping yer body will disappear, the thoughts smothering ye; these thoughts; but ye want to remember and face up to things, just something keeps ye from doing it, why can ye no do it; the words filling yer head: then the other words; there's something far far wrong; ye're no a good man, ye're just no a good man.¹⁸²

Kövesi argues, that the protagonist's perpetual addressing everything 'ye' signifies "the collective possibility of any reader," and hence includes both plural and singular reference¹⁸³. The variety of the referent of 'ye' is liberating because Sammy is speaking about himself, and at the same time the second-person pronoun still includes a possible experience of the reader. 'Ye' also occurs in dialogues with as few tags that could specify the speaker as possible. Therefore, it is difficult for the reader to identify the speaker every now and then, especially when Sammy is being interrogated by a group of nameless policemen:

After a time Sammy said, Her family's in Dumfries. I dont know whereabouts but somewhere down there.

Nay idea?

It was a different voice; the young yin by the sound of it. Sammy shifted in his chair as if surprised by where the voice was coming from. The address is in the house somewhere, he said, but I canny look cause I canny see.

Has she done this before?

...

Eh?

Aye.

Did ye tell them?

Who?

The guys that were asking ye the questions?

I think so.

Where d'ye meet her first?¹⁸⁴

The fact that Sammy is blind is demonstrated by his focused sound perception, which is the only way to identify the speaker. Kelman actually makes the reader blind as well because there are no tags like 'first policeman said' or 'second policeman asked'. Therefore, the reader has a unique opportunity to experience Sammy's perplexing world of darkness. McGlynn points out that

¹⁸² Kelman, *How late* 1.

¹⁸³ see Kövesi 52.

¹⁸⁴ Kelman, *How late* 184.

Kelman “regularly eliminates all speech tags in extended dialogues, making it extraordinarily challenging to keep track of who is speaking. Together, these practices leave the reader unmoored, far removed from a comfortable position of narrative knowingness.”¹⁸⁵.

All in all, Kelman resists the traditional narrative patterns for the sake of readers’ capacity to think on their own. He believes that the omniscient third-party-narrator mode is as totalizing as any governmental authority he criticises in his work, because it mothers the reader and considers him an incompetent fool. Kelman refutes the narrative dogma of omniscience for its lack of room to enter the inner world of the characters because the third-party narrator infallibly provides all necessary judgments. As a matter of fact, Kelman’s stylistic experiments, including the narrative voice and the graphical representation of the character’s direct speech, aim to challenge the reader who had been wrapped up in cotton wool and nurtured by authoritarian works of fiction.

Kelman focuses on the class conflict on a textual level as he criticises the way working-class characters are imprisoned in a storm of apostrophes which signify their inferior status comparing to their English superiors, whose standard speech does not need to be differentiated graphically.

Furthermore, his particular usage of the stream-of-consciousness method introduces his working-class protagonists as real-life persons rather than cardboard characters employed as a mere typified backdrop. He takes great pains to show how authoritarian institutions and institutionalized narrative modes maintain control over individuals.

2. 3. Scottish Identity

As a Glasgow-based writer, Kelman frequently refers to his hometown on the River Clyde and Scotland in general. Nevertheless, his observations of English-Scottish relations differ from the conventional paradigm a great deal. Kelman’s specific political and cultural views, which question authority on any level, do not depart from the rule either, while exploring such concepts as national identity and collective consciousness.

The infamous English-Scottish antagonism is already present in his first collection of short stories. In “An old pub near the Angel,” a Scot called Charles visits an old-fashioned empty pub in London, after he receives his unemployment compensation. When the talk between him and the barman turns to football, the bartender identifies Scots with violence and disorder:

‘Yeah poor old Chelsea,’ he [the bartender] said and finished the drink.

‘What about the old Jags though? Even worse than Fulham.’

¹⁸⁵ McGlynn 64.

‘What’s that?’

‘The Thistle man, the old Patrick Thistle were relegated last season.’

‘Ah. Scotch team eh?’ he asked. ‘Don’t pay much heed.’

‘Yeah, you’re right. Not much good up there,’ said Charles.

‘Bloody Celtic and Rangers,’ the old fellow shook his head in disgust. ‘Get them in here sometimes and the bloody Irish. Mostly go up the Angel they do. Bloody trouble they cause, eh?’¹⁸⁶

Charles ignores the barman’s condemning remarks on Scottish and Irish football fans, who are supposed to be violent by definition. While Charles is bringing up the subject of the football qualities of Patrick Thistle Football Club from Glasgow, which is known to their supporters as the Jags, the barman briskly dismisses the topic as soon as he notices that it is a Scottish team. Apparently, the bartender is willing to discuss news concerning a London-based team, but he rejects to talk about a Scottish team because he is biased. Without a shadow of a doubt, football violence is an endemic phenomenon which is not restricted exclusively to a certain number of teams and territories. Thus we can trace a sign of prejudice in the opinion of the English bartender who does not take into consideration English hooligans.

Concerning English-Scottish football rivalry, Jake in “Gardens go on forever” advocates violence when it comes to a clash between the English and Scots:

We aye beat the English? I said.

Aye back then we did, I’m talking about the days we used to play them. Funny thing but we were a crabbit bunch of bastards at the same time. Nowadays every cunt gubs us and we’re fucking cheery about it. Maybe if we stopped being so fucking cheery we’d start winning again. The tartan army and aw the crap, we used to be the worst hooligans of the fucking lot. See this stuff about good-natures fans? it’s a load of shite.¹⁸⁷

Recounting his experiences, Jake also remembers how they damaged the fountain at Trafalgar Square in London as an act of their defiance. Although he is speaking about football in the first place, he arrives at a generalisation that Scots are not treated with respect and, what is even worse, they are ‘fucking cheery about it’. In his opinion, moderation should be done away with because the English show respect only when confronted by physical force; otherwise, they consider others secondary and inferior.

In **A Disaffection**, Patrick’s father criticises England’s economic exploitation of Scotland, when he relates how English classy restaurants in the south reap the fruits of the English monopoly on

¹⁸⁶ Kelman, **An Old Pub** 61–2.

¹⁸⁷ Kelman, **The Good Times** 15.

Scottish fishing industry. From his perspective, the English restaurants buy up all the best products, while Scots are supplied with low-quality leftovers and therefore left with mere scraps from their own table.¹⁸⁸ He tells off Patrick for his generation's negligence and lack of commitment to rail against such an injustice, "Yous dont complain about things, that's what I mean."¹⁸⁹ With respect to England's hegemony and exploitative view of its subjects, Patrick admits Scots inferior status. He communicates his attitude towards the English superior:

Aye, but I'm biased as ye know; I hate Greatbritain. It was fine before all these selfish and greedy aristocratic capitalists mankindhating landowners started dividing things up between them and saying where ye could walk and where ye couldni walk – it was fine up till then, before these effing boundaries roped you in, when it was just a big chunk of stuff you could just set out and do what you liked on.

Patrick's sentiments concerning England's exploitative nature in contrast to Scotland's history of a subjugated and mistreated people correspond to Böhnke's particular reading of Kelman. Speaking of Kelman's portrayal of the English-Scottish antagonism, he believes that "by having a closer look at his work and attitudes and how Scottish national identity and nationalism express themselves there," it will inevitably "emerge that he can be seen as a 'chronicler of the nation' rather than a theoretical nationalist"¹⁹⁰. Indeed, Kelman's characters happen to express their attachment to Scotland every now and then. In **A Chancer**, Tammias is offering Vodka to his friend's father but he turns down his offer, saying "Vodka? Naw no me Tammias – Scotland's own, Scotland's own," and urging Tammias "Come on, you have one with me instead of that Russian stuff."¹⁹¹ The old man's determination to drink alcohol which was made exclusively in Scotland may well correlate with Böhnke's idea of national identity expressed by Kelman's characters. In this case though, the old man is a minor character. Moreover, Tammias refuses to drink 'Scotland's own' at length, because he does not want to mix whiskey and Vodka¹⁹². Keeping in mind that Tammias is the central character of the novel, Böhnke's theory does not apply here because Tammias does not stay loyal to Scotland's traditional alcoholic beverage and chooses the Russian variant instead.

A similar situation occurs in **A Disaffection**, when Patrick, his brother Gavin and two friends of his are discussing music. One of them, Davie, is fond of Highland music and folklore in particular:

¹⁸⁸ see Kelman, **A Disaffection** 110.

¹⁸⁹ Kelman, **A Disaffection** 110.

¹⁹⁰ qtd. in McGuire 113.

¹⁹¹ Kelman, **A Chancer** 151.

¹⁹² see Kelman, **AChancer** 151.

Arthur winked at Pat; Davie's a Highland & Islands man, whereas your brother, he likes the Shetlanders. Me ... he tapped himself on the chest: I prefer Rock & Roll! (...) It's all ye get in this house with these two cunts, he said, the fiddle and the fucking whatever – the bagpipes!

Davie glared at him. Dont denigrate the national instrument!¹⁹³

Davie stands for a person proud of his national identity represented by the traditional musical instrument, i.e. the bagpipes, which are supposed to be a typical sign of Scottishness. Conversely, Arthur does not share Davie's nostalgia concerning the spirit of Scotland, including the bagpipes and the famous kilt. He favours modern trends that have next to nothing to do with Scottish national symbols, because Rock & Roll originated in America. Therefore, Arthur suggests changing the music they are all listening to:

A wee change of mood eh? Arthur winked at Patrick: Just trying to get this pair away from fiddles and bagpipes.

It's your national heritage, replied Davie. Dont tell me you're wanting to stick on rock music!¹⁹⁴

Reading Kelman as a nationalist would work if it was not for his sarcastic humour. An enthusiastic reader of history and philosophy as Kelman is, he must be aware of the fact that the so called 'national heritage' of Scotland was artificially fabricated by the English. As far as the Scottish cultural stereotypes are concerned, "the association of the material aspects of Highland life – heather and thistles, bagpipes and tartan – with the symbols of being Scottish was created in London during the 18th-century romantic revival," and, as Houston expounds, "cemented in the 1810s and 1820s by a brilliant public relations exercise by the great Tory and monarchist, the novelist Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), and institutionalized by Queen Victoria (1837-1901)"¹⁹⁵. The revealing and brutal irony of Davie's statement concerning 'national heritage' shows how Kelman twists cultural stereotypes, and use them as a weapon against the misleading concept of national identity.

Nevertheless, the issue of nationalism occurs in "events in yer life," where Derek meets Fin, his former friend, and discusses his emigration from Scotland to England. Before long, Fin points out how Derek always uses the term 'Britain' when he actually means Scotland. Consequently, Fin patronises Derek because in his opinion, "there's nay separation up here. It's

¹⁹³ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 252–3.

¹⁹⁴ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 262.

¹⁹⁵ Houston 93.

always Scotland. No just one minute and Britain the next.”¹⁹⁶. Thanks to his living in England, Derek is perplexed by Fin’s observation, for he forgot the clear distinction between his former home country and the English superior. Fin continues redressing him, emphasising Derek’s mistake in assuming Scotland and England “was one country. See, naybody does that here. Naybody.”¹⁹⁷. Finally, Derek uneasily asks his friend Fin, “Ye talking about Nationalism? Ye a Nationalist?”¹⁹⁸. In cold blood, Fin replies that it is “hardly even a question nowadays I mean it’s to what extent”¹⁹⁹. According to Fin, nationalism is a must in Scotland but Derek, who is the protagonist of the short story, is rather sceptical about the distinction based upon nationality, and therefore he is not one of its exponents. Even though Kelman holds that Scotland is politically, culturally and economically oppressed by the ruling elite of Great Britain, he dismisses nationalism and national identity as meaningless artificial fabrications:

Entities like ‘Scotsman’, ‘German’, ‘Indian’ or ‘American’; ‘Scottish culture’, ‘Jamaican culture’, ‘African culture’ or ‘Asian culture’ are material absurdities. They aren’t particular things in the world. There are no material bodies that correspond to them. We only used those terms in the way we use other terms such as ‘tree’, ‘bird’, ‘vehicle’ or ‘red’. They define abstract concepts; ‘things’ that don’t exist other than for loose classification. We use these terms for the general purpose of making sense of the world, and for communicating sensibly with other individuals. Especially those individuals within our own groups and cultures. When we meet with people from different groups and cultures we try to tighten up on these loose, unparticularised definitions and descriptions.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, Kelman does not criticise solely the English. He rails against authorities no matter of their nationality. For example, in “Nice to be Nice” Stan protests against a housing corporation which is run by Scots. Moreover, Patrick in **A Disaffection** denounces state education, which is an instrument of control in hands of the ruling class that does not have to be necessarily English. In addition, Kelman took great pains to object to the 1990 campaign promoting Glasgow as the European City of Culture because it deliberately overlooked certain unwanted aspects of Glasgow. At that time, a tremendous amount of money was invested into turning the gloomy industrial atmosphere of Glasgow into a shining veneer of capitalism. Unfortunately, all that glitters is not gold, because the alleged cultural awakening of Glasgow was a calculated propaganda designed and upheld by the city’s council, politicians and businessmen, whose

¹⁹⁶ Kelman, **The Burn** 224.

¹⁹⁷ Kelman, **The Burn** 224.

¹⁹⁸ Kelman, **The Burn** 224.

¹⁹⁹ Kelman, **The Burn** 224.

²⁰⁰ Kelman, **Some Recent Attacks** 72.

primary motivation was to ensure the cash flow²⁰¹. Their only concern was to lure more tourists and international capital, while ignoring those who constitute the backbone of Glasgow, the most important centre of the Scottish industrial belt – the workers. Kelman saw through the pompous and pseudo-cultural upheaval, and co-organised a collective called ‘Workers City’ to counter the demagogic ‘City of Culture’ campaign²⁰². The point is that he did not wantonly identify the architects of the ‘City of Culture’ idea with English authorities. On the contrary, he attacked Scottish officials and entrepreneurs who were responsible for it, instead of making up a self-serving story where the English would play the role of a scapegoat.

Last but not least, regarding Kelman’s stories, he can be hardly associated with nationalism because his characters prototypically join the ranks of the Scottish Diaspora and leave Scotland for good, because there is no future awaiting them. For instance, Sammy in **How late it was** “didnay really like Scotland. It was his country, okay, but that didnay mean ye had to like it. (...) Sammy had never been lucky here. Never.”²⁰³. At the end, Sammy is decided to leave Scotland as well as Tammas in **A Chancer**, and there are other characters who dream about emigration. Therefore, these characters do not ponder their national identity which would urge them to stay in Scotland, exalt its land and government, and be proud of their origin. As a matter of fact, the very idea the Scottish national identity is extremely disputable, because even from the genealogical point of view Scotsmen share no common descent. Moreover, Scotland lacks a single ethnic background²⁰⁴ that is, by definition, the foundation of nationalism in general. Thus Kelman more likely fits the model of Scottish literature, which is liberated from the nationalist pathos, as suggested by Schoene:

The aim of contemporary Scottish literature is to emphasise individuality and intracommunal difference rather than to construct dubious all-in-one myths of a nationalist quality. While retaining its own characteristic timbre and twist it has become truly cosmopolitan. After looking first at its navel, then at its underbelly, it has now set out to explore the whole of its anatomy, fetching skeletal national stereotypes from the closet to bring them under close scrutiny.²⁰⁵

Admittedly, Kelman explores and challenges national stereotypes as we have just seen. Speaking of anxieties between England and Scotland, Patrick Doyle in **A Disaffection** identifies the former with imperialist ambitions, rather than emphasising the nationalistic perspective:

²⁰¹ see Kelman, **Some Recent Attacks** 33.

²⁰² see Kövesi 126.

²⁰³ Kelman, **How late** 256.

²⁰⁴ see Houston 95.

²⁰⁵ qtd. in McGuire 128.

Probably the whole of Scotland is huffy. This is why their history is so shitey. The English are not huffy, just fucking imperialist bastards. Which ones? Quite right. And that applies to the Northamericans as well. Imperialists cannot be huffy: it would be a contradiction.²⁰⁶

Patrick's view of Scotland's history is rather pessimistic and far from glorifying the idea of national identity. On the contrary, he criticises how Scots have been passive in comparison to the English, who managed to subjugate a great number of territories thanks to their enthusiastic fervour and prudence. Therefore, by putting his country's history down, Patrick does not identify himself with nationalism. He simply points out the role and framework of the two world superpowers that were to have the final say in the 'new world order'. If he was biased solely against the English, he would not bring up the imperialist aspirations of the United States and compare them to those of England's. Consequently, rather than associating Kelman with nationalism, which would lead to a straight-forward and simplifying conclusion, we are better off questioning his writing efforts with respect to imperialism and postcolonial theory.

As far as postcolonial theory goes, "colonialism was not only a military, economic and political form of subordination; it was also a cultural one. In the past native populations were actively encouraged to adopt the language and culture of the incumbent colonial power in place of their indigenous customs and speech. Part of the process of colonisation lay in denying native people a sense of meaningful cultural identity and persuading them," McGuire argues, "often with force, to imitate and aspire toward the culture of the coloniser"²⁰⁷.

By all means, Scotland has repeatedly experienced the pressure of English expansionism. First of all, it was the infamous Highland clearances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that resulted in abrupt enforced displacements of indigenous population because of the landlord's redistribution of the land²⁰⁸, which radically affected and changed the character of Scotland's rural and urban infrastructure. Moreover, Scotland's inferior status was reinforced after the Act of Union in 1709, when Scotland and England formed the United Kingdom of Great Britain. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the English language was encouraged at the expense of Scots, and gradual Anglicisation favoured by post-Victorian educational patterns further eroded Scotisms, which were upheld only by enthusiasts like Robert Burns²⁰⁹.

When the promising crude oil reserves in the North Sea were discovered in the 1960s, many American and British entrepreneurs launched oil extraction from the rich offshore reservoirs east of Scotland. Scottish population and infrastructure experienced another sudden restructuring and

²⁰⁶ Kelman, *A Disaffection* 117.

²⁰⁷ McGuire 118.

²⁰⁸ see Houston 86–89.

²⁰⁹ see Houston 127–8.

the people became victims of both the international multinationals and the Scottish National Party that exploited the dispute over the extraction equally for their own merits²¹⁰. Last but not least, we have already noted how the privatization and the subsequent erosion of traditional Scottish industries in the era of Thatcherism caused Scotland's further economic decline.

Therefore, reading Kelman as a writer of postcolonial literature seems correct, if we take into consideration his advocacy of the Scots dialect and Scottish culture in general. At the Booker Prize ceremony, he was startled when asked why he hates the English²¹¹. In an interview years later, he accounts for the reason why the English think he hates them, and explains that "When a colony attempts to break free, you know, the question that the imperial power always asks is, 'Why do you not like us?' To me, whether we like them or not is irrelevant. It's the master-slave thing, you know, the slave says, 'I wish to be free,' and the master goes, 'Why? I treat you well.' The concept of freedom somehow doesn't apply to a subjected people."²¹². These aspects fit into the criteria of postcolonial theory, as explained by McGuire above. In "not not while the giro," the protagonist resigns from participating in the socio-economic system dominated by English market, because he thinks he is "incompatible with this Great British Society,"²¹³ which, as any other capitalist society, favours individuals who are economically productive. Unfortunately, Scotland's postcolonial status of a country formally exploited by the British Empire is extremely arguable.

Comparing to India and other territories formally controlled and dominated by England, Scotland experienced tremendously prosperous times during the colonial period. Reid explains, that "In the building of the Empire, Scotsmen took a large and distinguished part," and, in the nineteenth century, "Scotland had its full share in the British Empire and in British Royalty."²¹⁴. Furthermore, he gives evidence about Scots' physical presence in the East India Company's services and the huge rate of Scottish emigration to the colonies. As far as Scotland's prosperity in the Empire is concerned, Scotsmen voluntarily participated in subjugating India and populated the Empire's colonies; from Canada and Nova Scotia to Africa, Australia and New Zealand.²¹⁵ Consequently, the issue of Scottish unequivocal position of a society colonised by the Empire is highly questionable, at least during the nineteenth century when the colonising efforts were peaking. In **The Empire Writes Back** (1989), a book concerning the process of decolonisation and

²¹⁰ see Christopher Harvie, **Scotland & Nationalism: Scottish Society and Politics 1707–1994** (1977; London: Routledge, 1994) 183–187.

²¹¹ see Toremans 581.

²¹² Toremans 581.

²¹³ Kelman, **the Giro** 213.

²¹⁴ J. M. Reid, **Scotland: Past and Present** (London: Oxford UP, 1959) 134 and 135.

²¹⁵ see Reid 134.

literary liberation of the colonies, the authors are sceptical about white European countries like Scotland, which aspire to be included in the framework of ‘decolonised’ territories, exactly because of their active participation in the colonisation:

While it is possible to argue that these societies [Ireland, Scotland and Wales] were the first victims of English expansion, their subsequent complicity in the British imperial enterprise makes it difficult for colonized peoples outside Britain to accept their identity as post-colonial.²¹⁶

Nonetheless, even if we accept the critical perspective about Scotland’s post-colonial identity, Kelman’s writing criticises English elitism and its influence on Scottish culture in terms of language and literary canon. Moreover, Thatcher’s economic crusade aiming to establish a ‘classless society’ helped to destroy Scottish heavy industry, and introduced a new underclass of marginalized people, who overflow Kelman’s stories.

To sum up, Kelman does not write stories concerning the concept of national identity, because it is a meaningless ‘material absurdity’ as he puts it. He is far from being a ‘chronicler of a nation’, for he does not seek to give an account encompassing experience and history of some six billion people. This estimated figure of Scotland’s population involves both individuals at the bottom of the socio-economic pyramid and those at the top. Kelman criticises the ruling class and authorities regardless their ethnicity. The idea of nationalism aims at blurring class differences between the haves and the have-nots, and urges them to join together for the sake of allegedly identical origin, even though they share no common ground in terms of material wealth and privileges. Consequently, capitalism and its merciless economic determination and marginalization of individuals are omnipresent in his stories.

In addition, he attacks the concept of postmodernism which, according to him, “attempts to tie in with the political agenda, the whole idea of the classless society, the argument that somehow we’ve moved along from the possibility of structural political change. In a way, it sets the route for globalization. There are no more politics now – we’re all in the same boat.”²¹⁷. Instead of following such suit, he endeavours to show the everyday struggle of people he is familiar with, because he has always wanted to write stories which “would derive from my own background, my own socio-cultural experience. I wanted to write as one of my own people, I wanted to write and remain a member of my own community”²¹⁸. Thus he depicts individual

²¹⁶ qtd. in McGuire 118.

²¹⁷ Toremans 574.

²¹⁸ Kelman, *Some Recent Attacks* 81.

working-class characters and their background in contrast to the all-including concept of grand narrative, which is frequently associated with postmodernism.

Kelman's commitment to write stories concerning **wee horrors** in the lives of economically, culturally and socially depressed people defy the simplifying and generalising idea of Scottishness. The identity he portrays is that of a misfortunate but self-aware individual, facing the totalizing control of the state and its institutions whose only concern is their obsession with power. If postmodernism is "the pretence that there is no need for class conflict now,"²¹⁹ as Alasdair Gray critically points out, then Kelman's writing stands for a raging class war between those in control and those controlled.

Conclusion

²¹⁹ Toremans 574.

The traditional working-class narratives prototypically comprise issues concerning the struggle of the have-nots against economic and social injustice following the pattern of the endeavour for their betterment by means of collective action. Moreover, it includes the motifs of community's solidarity and heroism of its individual members. The previous chapters show how James Kelman's work differs from such conventional paradigms of working-class fiction with respect to a few crucial aspects, which prove his uniqueness and novelty in the literature concerning class antagonism, existential issues and language anxieties.

First and foremost, the socio-economic aspects in Kelman's stories do not follow the stereotypes concerning the working-class individual who fulfils the role of an economically productive unit in a community which enforces its materialistic expectations upon its members. Consequently, Kelman portrays how the lack of economic security alienates individuals, who are being double marginalized by both the hostile capitalist system and their own communities which have faltered and accepted the dogma holding that an individual is given credit and labelled as 'matured', only when he or she keeps a regular job. Comparing to the traditional protagonists of working-class fiction who work on a regular basis and entertain certain liberties provided by their salaries, Kelman's characters seem to prefer 'poverty-stricken freedom' which leaves them at the mercy of the unemployment compensation provided by the state. Instead of sharing the implications of a lost potential mirrored in characters' attempts to escape from their working-class background and follow their ambitious plans, which according to Craig dominate the traditional working-class fiction²²⁰, Kelman's protagonists remain disaffected in an environment that wears them out.

Therefore, Kelman's presentation of the working class does not match the traditional notions of proletariat's solidarity and mutual aid. Conversely, he portrays individuals who either refuse or are denied to participate in any collective class-based action against their exploitation. Furthermore, the already disintegrating working-class communities do not possess their former unity and hence offer no protection to their members who are left on their own. As a matter of fact, Kelman focuses on the individual characters rather than portraying the existence of fading communities. Therefore, the typology of his characters corresponds to the overall image of the collapse of working-class solidarity and unity because in contrast with the traditional working-class fiction, they are not held up as workerist heroes struggling for self-improvement²²¹. Moreover, Kelman plays with gender stereotypes and documents how the changing historical context has encouraged women to take up roles formerly associated with men exclusively; i.e. the

²²⁰ see Craig, *Resisting Arrest* 100.

²²¹ see Craig, *Resisting Arrest* 101.

status of the family's provider. Thanks to the destruction of the Scottish traditional industries caused by privatization and economy restructuring, Kelman's male protagonists come up against the rise of white-collar jobs, which provide their female counterparts with new liberties. More often than not, women portrayed in Kelman's stories defy the stereotype of a silent, domestic and passive character whose duty is to carry out household chores and look after children. Surprisingly, Kelman's male protagonists happen to adopt responsibilities originally associated with women. Moreover, they cannot help marvel at women's potential and their superiority demonstrated in their self-control and decisiveness, while they loathe themselves for being inferior to the other sex.

Speaking of the structure of Kelman's stories, he literally picks up where Kafka and Dostoyevsky had left off and develops his own concept of the 'smallness of event,' which strives to avoid what he calls 'abnormal events'. According to Kelman, these represent artificially fabricated dramatic events, like the adventures of James Bond, which do not occur in everyday life. Instead, he constructs his stories on the principle of the 'smallness of event' which depicts daily routines performed by ordinary people. In his view, when these very routines are examined thoroughly, one is bound to find out that they are unbearable horrors in nature. Consequently, one does not need to read nor watch horror stories that are made up by the entertaining industry in order to experience the sensation of dread and terror. Therefore, Kelman takes great pains to depict the minute details of our everyday tragedies concerning repetitive actions, work accidents and tedious oppression of the managerial class.

In addition, the issue of oppressive authorities is reflected in Kelman's portrayal of the local patois which defies the formal language form of Standard English. Kelman's protagonists speak demotic versions of English that range from the Scottish vernacular to a mixture of Scots and English. Therefore, they often run up against problems triggered by their language skills. In case of Kelman's most controversial novel **How late it was, how late**, the occurrence of the word 'fuck' and its modifications, which account to thousands, caused a major upheaval in the wake of its winning the Man Booker Prize in 1994. Even though Kelman's endless advocacy of the so called gutter languages and local dialects have ostracized him in terms of elitist literary circles, he has stuck to his guns defending the right of his "gutter" culture to exist.

Consequently, Kelman's protagonists confront official authorities, which urge them to conform to the standardized uniformity regarding language and behaviour. He rails against the State and its authoritarian methods to control, check off and redress the individual who is bereft of his or her liberties by the almighty institutions, which possess the power to deceive and manipulate. Kelman's characters are haunted by agents of law enforcement who enhance the

totalizing Orwellian surveillance of the individual, whose right to privacy ceases to exist in the modern age of information and technological advancement.

Concerning the tendency to control and patronise, Kelman resists the traditional narrative modes of the omnipresent narrator in order to awaken and encourage the reader to think about the text critically. His aesthetic innovations encompassing orthographic representation of colloquialisms and local dialects, which he does not differentiate by means of apostrophes from Standard English, liberate and enliven his working-class characters whose thoughts and speech had been imprisoned in a system of diacritics, which had showed their inferior status with respect to the proper language of the narrator. Furthermore, Kelman's experiments with the stream-of-consciousness method and the narrative voice have enhanced the authenticity of his stories. By shifting from the first-person to the third-person narrator, Kelman has achieved almost a complete withdrawal of the narrator whom he considers to be authoritarian by definition, since the narrator entertains the prerogative to intervene and manipulate the characters. Therefore, Kelman has been relentlessly striving to do away with any means of control in terms of literature, culture and politics.

As far as identity is concerned, Kelman rejects the concept of nationalism whose aim is to differentiate people according to their ethnic origins. Such differentiation proves often indistinct and misleading, since hardly any 'nation' shares a common ethnic background or descent. To Kelman, the concept of national identity is rather a matter of sectarianism and thus he dismisses it as a 'material absurdity'. The identity he portrays is that of an individual mistreated and exploited by the State's uncompromising machinery, which transforms a unique person into a replaceable, dehumanised item. Consequently, Kelman resents postmodernism which "attempts to tie in with the political agenda, the whole idea of the classless society, the argument that somehow we've moved along from the possibility of structural political change"²²². Conversely, Kelman endeavours to maintain an identity that stems from class rather than ethnic distinctions. Therefore, he focuses on what Craig labels a counter-history; "the inevitable product of a history that, by claiming to be the only inevitability in human life, leaves so much out of history"²²³. In other words, Kelman emphasizes a history of people whose existence is omitted in the mainstream culture and politics.

²²² Toremans 574.

²²³ qtd. in Bernstein 48.

Shrnutí

Tradiční britská próza čerpající náměty z dělnického prostředí a života na okraji společnosti vůbec, je poměrně homogenní celek, jehož jednotlivé prvky jsou snadno identifikovatelné a tudíž lehce zařaditelné do škatulky proletářské literatury, která však nemá nic společného se socialistickým realismem. Mezi tyto prvky, které se neustále opakují, patří například zobrazování ekonomické determinace jednotlivce a jeho role ve společnosti, specifická typologie postav, charakteristika děje, jazyková stránka nebo aspekty ryze stylistické a estetické. Toto paradigma tradičně chápané literatury popisující život neprivilegovaných tříd se zpravidla zakládá na životních situacích postav, které jsou díky svému nízkému společenskému a ekonomickému postavení odsouzeny k podhodnocené práci a nemohou tak naplnit svůj potenciál²²⁴. Přesto zastupují prototyp hrdiny, nebo popřípadě antihrdiny, který navzdory osudu bojuje, úspěšně či neúspěšně, proti ekonomickému a sociálnímu vykořisťování společností, která se řídí zákonem poptávky a nabídky, hodnotí podle zisku a výkonu a kterou žene vpřed nelítostná konkurence a rivalita.

Právě tento ustálený kánon narušuje James Kelman, jehož díla sice rámcově a tématicky spadají do stejné žánrové kategorie, ale na rozdíl od jejího tradičního paradigmatu se vyznačují velkým množstvím inovativních rysů, které naprosto mění její charakter.

Především se jedná o způsob jakým Kelman zobrazuje své protagonisty z hlediska jejich ekonomických a sociálních jistot. Ve srovnání se staršími britskými autory, jako například Alan Sillitoe a jeho nejznámějším románem **V sobotu večer, v neděli ráno**, se Kelmanovi antihrdinové potýkají s existenčními problémy vycházející z jejich chronické nezaměstnanosti. Zatímco je hlavní protagonist v díle **V sobotu večer, v neděli ráno** spokojen se svojí monotónní prací u soustruhu, při které může na vše zapomenout a přemýšlet o tom, jak propije svůj slušný plat, Kelmanovy postavy dennodenně prožívají noční můru nezaměstnanosti a z toho pramenící ekonomické a sociální nejistoty. Kelman ve svých příbězích dokládá historicko-ekonomický vývoj Velké Británie, který se samozřejmě odráží v literatuře. V porovnání s autory jako Sillitoe, kteří tvořili převážně v období po druhé světové válce, kdy se britský stát optimisticky zavázal k velkorysému financování veřejného sektoru a sociálními dávkami navodil bezstarostnou budovatelskou atmosféru, se Kelman věnuje nepříjemnému procitnutí z tohoto idealistického snu. Tím vystrážlivěním byla restrukturalizace britského hospodářství a příchod nové vlny volného obchodu už během 60. let 20. století. Kelmanovy romány a povídky bezesporu reagují na nekompromisní éru 80. let 20. století, kdy Británii řídila vláda železné lady, Margaret Thatcher,

²²⁴ see Craig, *Resisting Arrest* 100-5.

kteřá mimo jiné zintenzivnila privatizaci původně státních průmyslových podniků. Tím ztratilo ve Skotsku – které bylo do velké míry poháněno těžkým průmyslem – neuvěřitelně velké množství lidí práci po tom, co se zavřely továrny, kde původně pracovali. Kelmanovy postavy jsou přesně tímto typem člověka, se kterým stát a kapitalismus nakládá jako s nahraditelným lidským zdrojem, pouhou položkou ve statistikách, prokazujících ekonomický růst.

Postavy objevující se v Kelmanových příbězích z duše nesnášení dehumanizovanou a oddištěnou práci v systému, který hodnotí člověka na základě jeho ekonomické produktivity. Kelman analyzuje vliv kapitalismu a námezdní práce na člověka, jehož míra štěstí je určována tím, jestli je zaměstnán, či nikoli. Pokud nemá dostatek finančních prostředků, tak je logicky marginalizován. Překvapivě se nejedná o sentimentální moralizování, spíše naopak; Kelman poukazuje na pouhá fakta a věří, že si s nimi čtenář poradí.

Kromě toho poukazuje také na neutěšené pracovní podmínky, které měl možnost sám zažít když pracoval v různých továrnách napříč Velkou Británií. Jeho kritika pracovních poměrů, které jsou diktovány zaměstnavateli, je všudypřítomná. Svévůli managementu, který rozhoduje o svých zaměstnancích a zneužívá je, Kelman popisuje často až s brutální syrovostí, aby upozornil na každodenní tragédie odehrávající se na pracovištích. Mimo jiné se věnuje šokujícím následkům bezpečnostních rizik, která končí různými nehodami, při nichž jsou zraněni nebo zabití pracující. Tato rizika jsou zpravidla způsobena zanedbáním a přehlížením nevyhovujících pracovních podmínek vedením, které se svými zaměstnanci zachází až nelidsky.

Dalším z aspektů, které jsou pro Kelmana specifické a kterými se odlišuje od tradičního schématu proletářské literatury, je způsob, jakým nakládá se svými postavami a jejich prostředím. Zkoumání typologie Kelmanových postav odhaluje, jak si Kelman pohrává s tradičními stereotypy, které se týkají sociálních rolí muže a ženy a změny jejich postavení. Drtivá většina Kelmanových protagonistů jsou muži, kteří se ale zdaleka nevyznačují vlastnostmi, které jim diktují stereotypně určené role. Nezastupují ideál maskulinního živitele rodiny, který je schopný dělat důležitá rozhodnutí a bojovat proti svým utlačovatelům. Naopak můžeme často sledovat, jak jsou muži v Kelmanových příbězích spíše podřízeni ženám, které přebírají role původně spojené s jejich mužskými protějšky. Stereotypní představa o ženě jako domestikované a tiché družce, jejíž úkolem je starat se o děti a zastávat domácí práce, je Kelmanem podrobena nelitostné kritice. Místo toho se jeho ženské postavy odhodlaně hlásí o svá práva a v několika případech i otevřeně kritizují své neprávem podřízené postavení domácí otrokyně. Kelman přehazuje výhybku tradičně vnímané mužské a ženské role tak, že ilustruje historický nástup povolání v sektoru služeb, která poskytují ženám nové uplatnění, zatímco jejich mužské protějšky sledují, jak se hrouť starý svět preferující maskulinní a manuální práci, pro kterou jsou fyzicky

adaptovanější než ženy. Ve výsledku je čtenář svědkem, jak se muž, zaměstnaný na plný úvazek stará o domácnost a své dítě, zatímco jeho žena je ekonomicky produktivní a nezávislá jednotka pracující v kanceláři, jako v případě Kelmanova románu **The Busconductor Hines**.

Kelman však sleduje nejen vztah mezi pohlavími, která si zvykají na své nové role, ale také konflikt jedinců s jejich vlastními komunitami, ve kterých žijí a které by jim měli poskytovat bezpečí a pocit jistoty. Místo klasického modelu dělnické komunity, která stmeluje své jedince a rodiny sdílející stejný osud, se Kelmanovi protagonisté nacházejí v začarovaném kruhu odcizení a nepochopení, a to dokonce i od svých blízkých. Kelman tak dokumentuje odklon od zobrazování tradičního vzoru hnutí pracujících, které je jednotné a společně bojuje za zlepšení svých ekonomických a sociálních podmínek. Jeho antihrdinové žijí, nebo spíše přežívají, na pokraji dezintegrovaných a rozkládajících se komunit, jejichž potenciál a jednotící síla vycházela z tradičních center dělnické solidarity – rozsáhlých průmyslových komplexů – která nastupující privatizace a neoliberalismus smetly ze scény. Kelmanovi protagonisté jsou spíše rezignovaní jedinci, skeptičtí organizovat se a podniknout jakoukoli společnou akci proti svému vykořisťování. Přestože v nich dřímá odpor ke svému podřadnému postavení a brojí proti autoritám, které je zneužívají, ani v nejmenším se neztotožňují s ideály workerismu. Kelman v žádném případě nevelebí maskulinní manuální práci a utrpení pracujících, kteří bojují pod záštitou vůdce či strany, aby se jimi nechali slepě zneužít. Místo toho klade důraz na jednotlivce spíše než na masu, jejíž činitelé si jsou navzájem odcizeni a neschopní cokoli podniknout. Mimo jiné jde o zachycení obecného úpadku solidarity pracujících v systému, který atomizuje a odcizuje člověka a jeho okolí.

Kelmanovy příběhy demonstrují jeho osobité představy o struktuře děje, kterou považuje za jeden z hlavních nástrojů realismu. Místo toho, aby popisoval například životy generací dělnických rodin nebo hrdinů, které by vydaly na desetiletí, Kelman preferuje dějový minimalismus. Podle něj jsou příběhy o velkých bankovních loupežích, vraždách a tajných agentech uměle vykonstruovaná propaganda zábavního průmyslu, jehož cílem je odvést pozornost člověka od jeho skutečných problémů, které zažívá každý den. Kelman proto zdůrazňuje detaily a rutinu každodenních lidských životů, které při bližším prozkoumání vydají za několik hororových příběhů. Příběhy o vraždách a loupežích považuje za „abnormální události,“ které se běžným lidem v jejich každodenních životech nestávají a jsou vytvářeny spisovateli, kteří na to mají dostatek peněz a tím pádem i času; nemusí řešit existenční otázky.²²⁵ Místo těchto uměle dramatických událostí se zaměřuje na bezvýhodnost a odcizení lidí, jejichž rutinní a stále

²²⁵ see Kövesi 9.

se opakující životy jsou výmluvnou tragédií i bez toho, aby to vyzdvihoval. Navazuje tak na existenciální literaturu Kafky, Dostojevského, ale i Samuela Becketta.

Snad nejkontroverznějším a zároveň nejcharakterističtějším prvkem Kelmanovy tvorby je užití jazyka a jeho variací. Vzhledem k tomu, že se narodil a vyrůstal v glaskowské dělnické komunitě, jeho protagonisté mluví slangem, který je pro Glasgow typický. Kelmanova díla jsou mimo to psaná buď směsí angličtiny s její skotskou variantou a nebo v menším množství případů přímo ortografickým přepisem skotštiny. Čtenář je tak seznámen s velkým počtem slov, která se v běžných výkladových slovnících angličtiny nenacházejí, avšak nejsou nezjistitelná. Rozhodující je ale využití a rozsah vulgarismů, který je ohromující. Slova, která jsou v běžně psaném a oficiálním jazyce tabu, Kelman uplatňuje s maximální možnou frekvencí. V případě jeho snad nejznámějšího románu **How late it was, how late**, který mu v roce 1994 vynesl prestižní britskou spisovatelskou cenu the Man Booker Prize, došlo dokonce k odstoupení jednoho z členů poroty, který rezignoval na svoji funkci jako protest proti udělení ceny autorovi, jehož kniha obsahuje několik tisíc variant slova **fuck**.

Zatímco se ke Kelmanovu svéráznému spisovatelskému stylu staví většina oficiálních literárních kruhů velice kriticky, on odhodlaně trvá na svém a brání právo své kultury na existenci. Kultury, která se vyznačuje nespočtem hovorových výrazů, sprostých slov, místních dialektů a lingvistických anomálií. Svůj boj proti literárnímu establishmentu dává do kontextu se snahou jedné nadřazené, v tomto případě anglické, kultury marginalizovat místní druhořadé kultury v zájmu rozšíření své hegemonie. Kelmanova obrana jazyka „kanálníků,“ jak se vulgárním variantám nespisovné řeči oficiálně říká, je důsledná a konflikty, které vyvolává, jsou synonymem pro jeho literární tvorbu.

Velké množství jeho protagonistů se dostává do sporů s oficiálními autoritami, které nejsou schopny strávit hovorovou skotštinu okořeněnou vulgárními výrazy, nacházejícími se téměř za každou druhou větou. Tato problematika má však další rozměr, který souvisí s jeho pohledem na právo minoritních kultur, odporujících převládající ideologii. Kelmanovy postavy jsou často nabádány a osočovány různými autoritami a institucemi, aby svůj ústní projev předefinovali a upravili podle předepsané normy. Jinými slovy se jedná o indoktrinaci a převýchovu jedince, jehož identita nevyhovuje oficiálním požadavkům. Proto Kelman bojuje proti snahám státu a jeho institucí, včetně těch jazykových, ovládat a přizpůsobovat si jednotlivce, jehož jedinečnou identitu tak nabourává.

Kelmanův všudypřítomný protest proti autoritám platí i mimo jazykovou oblast. Jeho protagonisté narážejí na snahy státu a jeho orgánů omezovat jejich jednání, čímž se ocitají v pozici nekonformních oponentů statu quo. Kelman poukazuje na fakt, že moc korumpuje, což

ukazuje ve své tvorbě, kde má policie téměř absolutní moc nakládat s kýmkoli jak se jí jen zlíbí. V tomto ohledu připomíná román **1984**, který napsal George Orwell jako memento totalitní moci a její absolutní dohled nad jednotlivci i masami.

Kromě policie dochází ke konfliktům s různými institucemi, jejichž mašinérie nejeví nejmenší soucit s existenčními problémy Kelmanových postav, které se nemají jak bránit proti autoritářským rozhodnutím, konaných shora bez jejich vědomí. Tak například v povídce „Nice to be Nice“ je samotná matka s dětmi nucena vystěhovat se z bytu, protože nemůže zaplatit nájem. Bytové družstvo neprojeví nejmenší soucit, protože jeho cílem není altruistická pomoc, ale maximalizace zisku. Stejně tak Kelman popisuje, jak jsou kvalifikovaní pracující zneužíváni pro nekvalifikovanou práci z důvodu podzaměstnanosti.

Kelman navíc přenáší boj proti autoritám i na úroveň samotného textu. Zatímco ještě ve své první povídkové sbírce **An Old Pub Near the Angel** používá v několika povídkách k uvedení přímé řeči uvozovky, v následujících sbírkách a románech už nic takového nenajdeme. Důvod je velmi prozaický – Kelman se snaží zbavit formálního rozlišení mluvčího a vypravěče, které je diktováno ortografickými konvencemi rozlišujícími přímou řeč od ostatního textu. Činí tak proto, že podle něj tyto prostředky jasně vymezují a kontrolují prostor pro samostatné přemýšlení postav a privilegují vypravěče, který tak může jejich řeč svévolně omezovat. K tomu je třeba přičíst fakt, že v běžné anglické beletrii jsou hovorové výrazy a dialekty odlišeny od standardní angličtiny směsí uvozovek, které značí deviaci od normy. Pro Kelmana je takový přístup nepřijatelný, protože je výrazem jazykové a kulturní nadvlády, z pravidla anglického vypravěče, nad postavami, kterým tak přiděluje podřízené postavení.

Za podobným účelem tak Kelman kombinuje užití první a třetí osoby, čímž se snaží zabránit autoritářské pozici vševědouceho vypravěče, který manipuluje s postavami a rozhoduje, kolik informací čtenáři poskytne. Kelman se snaží zbavit se jakýchkoli autoritářských tendencí, ať už skrze jednání svých protagonistů nebo stylistické metody vyprávění. Místo, aby čtenáře uchlácholil poskytnutím všech informací formou vševědouceho vypravěče a tím ho ochudil o možnost sám nad textem kriticky uvažovat, vrhá ho do víru přímé i nepřímé řeči slučováním metody proudu vědomí a běžného vyprávění, z nichž žádný prvek není graficky oddělen, kromě jednotlivých odstavců. Přestože se to může zdát neuvěřitelné, Kelmanův styl je více méně bez problémů čitelný a dodává jeho lokálním postavám a ději autentický ráz, který v tomto žánru chyběl.

V neposlední řadě je zajímavé, jak Kelman přistupuje k problematice identity jednotlivce a společenské třídy. Z množství případů, kdy v jeho příbězích dochází k tření mezi anglickou a skotskou kulturou by bylo možné soudit, že se Kelman přiklání k národně chápané identitě

jednotlivce, který trpí pod nadvládou anglického hegemonu. Není tomu tak, protože sám Kelman odmítá chápání identity založené na národním, respektive etnickém kritériu. Stejně jako v případě otázky rolí muže a ženy, i zde si pohrává se stereotypy, které mají tentokrát ryze nacionalistický charakter. Kelman dokládá nesmyslnost rozlišování lidí na základě jejich národní příslušnosti, která je spíše rozděluje, než spojuje. Pro Kelmana je určující identita založená na postavení utlačovaného jednotlivce v rámci neprivilegované vrstvy. Do kontrastu staví vládnoucí třídu, a to jak anglickou tak i skotskou, která má moc manipulovat a utlačovat ty, kterým vládne.

Třídní konflikt – nikoli však chápaný ve striktně marxistických termínech – mezi těmi, kteří moc mají a těmi, kteří ji nemají, je pro Kelmana rozhodujícím hlediskem. Při tom je třeba mít na paměti, že mezi ty, kteří jsou utlačováni nespadá výlučně jen klasicky chápaná dělnická třída, ale všichni lidé, kteří jsou pod neustálým tlakem zaměstnavatelů, státních institucí a nebo pobírající podporu v nezaměstnanosti. James Kelman se rozhodně staví na stranu těch, které považuje za utlačované a o nich také píše ve své tvorbě, která díky jeho inovacím a experimentům vybočuje z tradičního paradigmatu prózy s tematikou každodenního života neprivilegovaných tříd.

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Anotace

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Název práce: James Kelman: Rethinking Some Major Aspects of Working-Class Fiction

Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Ema Jelínková, Ph.D.

Katedra: Katedra anglistiky a amerikanistiky

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Anglická beletrie zabývající se dělnickou tematikou zahrnuje široké spektrum spisovatelů, jejichž díla je snadné zaškatulkovat vzhledem k tomu, jak stereotypně zobrazují problematiku života na společenském dnu a jaké metody k tomu používají. Přesto se nedávno přihnal nový vítr ze Skotska, který zpochybňuje tradičně chápané paradigma proletářské beletrie. Tímto větrem, nebo spíše vichřicí, je kontroverzní spisovatel ze skotského Glasgow, James Kelman. Přestože jeho díla dokázala vyprovokovat neskutečnou vlnu kritiky, stejně tak nasměrovala moderní proletářskou literaturu k novým obzorům. Cílem této práce je analyzovat Kelmanovy romány a povídky vydané do roku 2000 a přiblížit, jakým způsobem se vztahují k tradičnímu modelu anglické literatury, kultury a politiky. Kelmanova tvorba je nahlížena a zkoumána ze dvou hlavních hledisek; to první se týká socioekonomických otázek, jež jsou v proletářské literatuře všudypřítomné. Druhé se věnuje nejdůležitějším formálním rysům, kterými se Kelman vymyká vžitým představám o literatuře a kultuře obecně. Tato kritéria se skládají z několika aspektů jako například vliv kapitalismu a autority státu na život jednotlivce, typologie postav nebo jazyková stránka. Tato komplexní studie tudíž poskytuje jednak náhled na Kelmanův literární a politický vývoj, ale také nastavuje zrcadlo tradičnímu paradigmatu beletrie, která se zabývá třídou lidí s nízkým sociálním a ekonomickým postavením.

Klíčová slova

James Kelman, Glasgow, Scotland, Working-Class, Literature, Fiction, Culture, Politics

Resumé

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Title of Thesis: James Kelman: Rethinking Some Major Aspects of Working-Class Fiction

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Abstract:

English fiction concerning the working class encompasses a wide range of authors whose works can be easily pigeonholed with respect to their reappearing stereotypical depiction of issues they entertain and the techniques they employ to do so. Yet, the traditional paradigm of working-class fiction in English literature has recently been challenged by a new wind blowing from Scotland. This wind, or rather a furious windstorm, stands for James Kelman, a prolific Glasgow-based writer who has managed to incite a tremendous upheaval of controversy over his stories while steering the wheel of modern working-class fiction towards new horizons. The aim of this study is to analyse Kelman's influential novels and short stories published until 2000, and relate how he questions the traditional pattern of English literature, culture and politics. Kelman's works are being explored from two major perspectives. These include socio-economic issues recurring in working-class fiction, and some of the formal features which defy the established notions concerning literature and culture in general. These criteria comprise of several aspects such as the impact of capitalism and the state's authority on the individual, and typology of characters or language issues. Therefore, such a complex study provides an insight into Kelman's development as a writer and political activist, and also draws a line between his literary contribution and the traditional paradigm of working-class fiction.

Key Words:

James Kelman, Glasgow, Scotland, Working-Class, Literature, Fiction, Culture, Politics