

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON JAMES KELMAN

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Dr Scott Hames  
[scott.hames@stir.ac.uk](mailto:scott.hames@stir.ac.uk)

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## **James Kelman**

### **Introduction**

James Kelman (b. 1946) is the leading Scottish writer of the post-1960s period and widely known for championing the artistic validity of working-class language. With his fellow Glasgow writers Alasdair Gray, Tom Leonard, and Liz Lochhead, he is credited with inspiring a “new renaissance” in Scottish literature in the 1980s and 1990s. Kelman’s influence is strongest and clearest near to home, but his significance is not confined to the Scottish context. His innovative treatment of voice and subjectivity marks a new paradigm in literary realism, an approach driven by his powerful critique of social and linguistic prejudice. Usually viewed as a Scottish, working-class, and neo-modernist writer, Kelman himself locates his work in “two literary traditions, the European Existential and the American Realist.” Whatever disparate labels and comparisons we might attach to this writing—such as “Kafka on the Clyde” or reviewers declaring him “both angrier and funnier than Beckett”—Kelman’s work is strongly grounded in a personal and independent ethical vision. His political ideals and commitments (socialist, anarchist, anticolonial) are inseparable from the fiction, which is frequently centered on the everyday dramas of marginal and isolated characters. Better known than much of his published fiction is Kelman’s lucid and forthright critique of elitist and “colonising” value systems baked into the conventions of standard English literary form. These enforce the (often patronizing or sensationalist) treatment of working-class language and experience from a detached, superior perspective: as “other” to a normative bourgeois viewpoint identified with standard English. Kelman’s distinctive narrative style evades and reverses this effect, granting normative authority to working-class language and experience, and has been followed by a long list of younger Scottish writers including Irvine Welsh, Janice Galloway, and Alan Warner. (His influence is such that postwar Scottish fiction divides itself neatly into pre- and post-Kelman periods; his radicalism has now become a highly respected literary and critical orthodoxy, though without attracting mainstream commercial success.) He was born in Glasgow in 1946 and left school at the earliest opportunity, training as an apprentice compositor (typesetter) aged fifteen, before his family briefly emigrated to California in 1963–1964. On returning to Britain, he worked in a variety of factory and laboring jobs and began writing at age twenty-two. The everyday struggles and mental adventures of working-class men are central to Kelman’s award-winning fiction, which is much funnier than his hard-bitten media image would suggest (an image cemented by the extraordinarily hostile response to Kelman winning the 1994 Booker Prize). His political writing and activism include campaigns against racial injustice and the cruel treatment of victims of industrial disease. For Kelman, “genuine creativity is by its nature subversive; good art can scarcely be anything other than dissident.” Dates and details of individual novels and story collections are listed separately in the first few sections of this article.

## Introductions and Overviews

Kelman's fiction can be challenging on first contact, but there are a number of helpful guides to assist the reader. Concise and reliable introductions to Kelman's writing can be found in Carruthers 1997, Klaus 1994 and (at greater length) Bernstein 2000. Milne 1992 is the best single essay on Kelman's modernist realism, and Craig 1993 remains the most influential account of Kelman's place in Scottish writing. The commissioned essays of Hames 2010 aim to introduce and contextualize Kelman's work, as well as the critical debates it has stimulated. These debates were sharpened and developed by various essays in the Jackson and Maley 2002 collection, published as a part issue of *Edinburgh Review*. The accessible book-length studies of Klaus 2004 and Kövesi 2007 enrich and sometimes challenge Kelman's initial scholarly reception; together they consolidated the critical field.

Bernstein, Stephen. "James Kelman." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 20.3 (2000): 42–80.

Comprehensive and detailed introduction to Kelman's fiction and publishing career, closer to a short book in its scope and depth. Includes sustained readings of the novels and a wide range of stories.

Carruthers, Gerard. "James Kelman." *Post-War Literatures in English* 18 (March 1997): 1–14.

Full and rounded survey, with valuable insights on Kelman's drama of the mundane and partial affinities with Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter. Still relevant and useful.

Craig, Cairns. "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman." In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*. Edited by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, 99–114. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993. [ISBN: 9780748604159]

Incisive presentation of Kelman's vocal innovations, existentialism, and treatment of working-class life. Highlights a clash between Kelman's revolutionary politics and the apparent absence of socialist hope in his fiction: the "ideal of community" sought by his alienated characters "is unenvisagable ahead of them: it is already lost and defeated in the past."

Hames, Scott, ed. *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Collection of eleven commissioned essays aimed at students and teachers, ranging across Kelman's fiction and drama and exploring critical debates on Kelman and language, politics, narrative, masculinity, existentialism, and the Booker Prize controversy. Each of the individual chapters are cited in other sections of this bibliography.

Jackson, Ellen-Raïssa, and Willy Maley, eds. "Kelman and Commitment." *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 21–122.

Special issue collecting eight essays on Kelman, noting that almost three decades into his publishing career (and after the award of a Booker Prize), he "has yet to receive the sustained

and demanding critical attention that his achievements deserve.” Each of the individual essays are cited in other sections of this bibliography.

Klaus, H. Gustav. “Kelman for Beginners.” *Journal of the Short Story in English* 22 (1994): 127–135.

Proposes Kelman as a major artist of the short story, noting his American and European models, the technique of the “speaker-narrator,” and the place of “the enigmatic and the strange” in his tales of the unspectacular. Partly based on Klaus 1989.

Klaus, H. Gustav. *James Kelman*. Tavistock, UK: Northcote House, 2004. [ISBN: 9780746309766]

Concise and accessible guide to Kelman’s writing (including dramatic works), keeping close to the literary texts, which are handled with economy and insight. Usefully situates Kelman in broad literary contexts and debates and includes an annotated bibliography of Kelman criticism.

Kövesi, Simon. *James Kelman*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9780719070969]

Engaging book-length study of Kelman’s novels, which productively questions various claims and assumptions in earlier scholarship (and indeed the “colonising” relation between critic and text, as Kelman sees it). Enriches close readings with archival research and literary comparison (Albert Camus, George Orwell), treating Kelman’s writing as a site of debate and contested power.

Milne, Drew. “James Kelman: Dialectics of Urbanity.” *Swansea Review* 13 (1992): 393–407.

Compelling survey of Kelman’s affinities with Franz Kafka, James Joyce, Roland Barthes, and T.W. Adorno, arguing that “Kelman’s distinctive prose style and politics indicate a critical distance from Scottish nationalisms” and that his writing participates in a “modernist poetics of realism.” Along with Craig 1993, this is one of the richest single essays on Kelman’s writing and politics.

### **Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction**

Kelman’s essays and interviews are central to his critical reception: key statements explain his aims, outlook, and development with forceful clarity (and occasional humor). Kelman 1992 and Kelman 2008 anthologize a wide range of topical, scholarly, and personal essays, as well as campaigning statements and speeches. Kelman 1995 includes key detail on his political development, and Kelman 2006 illustrates the local activist’s profound awareness of Scottish radical history. The McLean 1985 and McNeill 1989 interviews are truly essential, explaining

the moral impetus and artistic aims of Kelman's project with compelling urgency. These interviews have had a greater impact on Kelman's reception and influence than most of his novels, and have canonical status in the field. Clark 2001 highlights the ambivalent nature of Kelman's post-Booker Prize success, and continuing dissatisfactions with Scottish arts administration. In Toremans 2003, Kelman and Alasdair Gray showcase their wide reading, natural scepticism, and mutual respect. Kelman 2007 and No Author 2018 find Kelman at his most relaxed, personal, and memoiristic, quite different to the embattled tone of the campaigning essays. Many other interviews and newspaper profiles are available online. The tremendous range of Kelman's reading and knowledge—evident in the interviews selected here—is not matched by his highly repetitive journalistic reception, in which he is asked the same questions (e.g., invited to re-justify his use of “bad language”) decade after decade.

Clark, William. “\*A Conversation with James

Kelman[[http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue12/variant\\_issue12.pdf](http://www.variant.org.uk/pdfs/issue12/variant_issue12.pdf)]\*.” *Variant* 2.12 (2001): 3–7.

A colorful, combative interview prompted by Kelman's struggles to stage a new play. Kelman and Clark vent their anger against Scottish cultural gatekeepers, the overprizing of “pseudo left-wing” theater, and the class assumptions underpinning state subsidy of literature.

Kelman, James. *Some Recent Attacks: Essays Cultural and Political*. Stirling, UK: AK Press, 1992. [ISBN: 9781873176801]

Includes key essays explaining Kelman's ethical and political outlook (“Artists and Value” “The Importance of Glasgow In My Work”) and various writings and speeches arising directly from his political activism: support for victims of racism and industrial disease, and humorous attacks on local elites (e.g., Glasgow's program for the 1990 European City of Culture, and the cross-party campaign for a Scottish Parliament).

Kelman, James. “K is for Culture.” *Scottish Trade Union Review* 68 (January–February 1995): 24–29.

Includes useful detail on Kelman's work history and experience of trade-union bureaucracy, his carefully qualified support for a Scottish Parliament (established in 1999), and general hostility to political parties and machines.

Kelman, James. “Introduction.” In *Born Up a Close: Memoirs of a Brighton Boy*. Edited by Hugh Savage, 9–65. Glendaruel, UK: Argyll, 2006. [ISBN: 9781902831466]

Long, studious essay on Clydeside radical history as background to the memoirs of Hugh Savage (b. 1918–d. 1996), a Communist activist and Kelman comrade. A valuable historical study in its own right, demonstrating a less recognized, historical facet of Kelman's political commitment.

Kelman, James. "Afterword." In *An Old Pub Near the Angel and Other Stories*. By James Kelman, 121–184. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007. [ISBN: 9781846970375]

Extensive personal essay reflecting on Kelman's formative experiences, influences, and artistic inspirations, including his family's emigration to California in 1963–1964. His most substantive autobiographical writing to date. The same edition of *An Old Pub* includes a 1973 interview with Anne Stevenson (*Scotsman*, 14 July 1973), touching on his family history and favorite writers ("mostly American women writers").

Kelman, James. "*And the Judges Said. . .*": *Essays*. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2008. [ISBN: 9781846970528]

Compendium of talks and essays akin to Kelman 1992, with extended studies of Noam Chomsky and Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, the Caribbean Artists Movement, and a lengthy analysis of Kafka's novels. Includes numerous topical speeches and interventions (on racist policing in Scotland, the destruction of the Scottish steel industry, a biting critique of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe). "When I Was That Age Did Art Exist?" outlines Kelman's early interests in literature, painting, and music for a high school audience.

McLean, Duncan. "James Kelman Interviewed." *Edinburgh Review* 71 (1985): 64–80.

Clear and bracing statement of Kelman's approach to language, class, and narrative authority. His critics are half-correct to view "the way I use language [as] a kind of attack on the values of the people who own literature—or the people who think they own literature." Essential reading, and highly quotable.

McNeill, Kirsty. "Interview with James Kelman." *Chapman* 57 (1989): 1–9.

Comparing *The Busconductor Hines* with *A Disaffection*, Kelman explains his narrative politics ("getting rid of that standard third party narrative voice is getting rid of a whole value system") and sense of embattlement within "English Literature" ("in the Anglo-American literary tradition there's almost no concrete reality, no economic detail"). Essential reading and ubiquitous in Kelman's later critical reception.

No Author. "Interview with James Kelman." *Thi Wurd* 3 (2018): 1–23.

Warm and wide-ranging conversation exploring Kelman's early interests, difficult relationship with critics and publishers, and related enthusiasms and antagonisms (Charlie Parker, Vincent Van Gogh, Flannery O'Connor, Kenneth White, Keri Hulme, Frank Sargeson). The same issue includes an extract from a forthcoming novel described by Kelman as "an elderly writer letting off steam."

Toremans, Tom. "An Interview with Alasdair Gray and James Kelman." *Contemporary Literature* 44.4 (2003): 565–586.

A wide-ranging interview that finds Gray and Kelman somewhat sceptical about the “Scottish renaissance” they are credited with leading, and voicing related dissatisfaction with postmodern and postcolonial critical movements (with warmer words for the re-interpretation of Marx). Includes many reminders of the profound historical awareness that colors both writers’ work. Available \*online [<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3250586>]\* by subscription.

## **By Period and Form**

Kelman tends to resist neat periodization, preferring to see his artistic process akin to a painter’s studio full of numerous pictures in various states of completion: a jumble of simultaneous “variations on themes” rather than a linear sequence of distinct projects (No Author 2018, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction\*). Nonetheless we can only read his fiction in the order it appears. The subsections below trace the development of his critical reception to date—a plotline of delayed reaction and considerable repetition—with special attention to his recognition as a major short-story writer. Though these sections are pegged to Kelman’s publishing chronology, it should be noted that critics and artist have often been out of sync. It took literary criticism a decade to “catch up” with Kelman’s highly accomplished 1980s work, and some of the most insightful writing on his breakthrough novels and stories is strongly shaped by critical debates and vocabularies established later in his career.

### **Earlier Fiction (to 1994)**

From his earliest stories Kelman was determined to “remain a member of my own community” rather than writing from the assumed vantage point of the middle class. His debut story collection *An Old Pub Near The Angel* was published in Maine in 1973; *Short Tales From the Night Shift* appeared in 1978. His first major story collection, *Not Not While the Giro*, was published in Edinburgh in 1983, followed by the Glasgow-set novels *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) and *A Chancer* (1985), two stories of male alienation employing very different narrative styles. (*A Chancer* was Kelman’s first completed novel but beaten into print by *Hines*.) All were well received by critics, but it was not until the late 1980s that Kelman became widely known outside Scotland. The story collection *Greyhound for Breakfast* won the 1987 Cheltenham Prize, and *A Disaffection* (1989), a novel about a Glasgow schoolteacher torn between his socialist principles and the function of education in capitalist society, won the 1989 James Tait Black Memorial Prize. The strength and promise of his writing were recognized earliest and most frequently in Scotland: Douglas Gifford’s insightful reviews for *Books in Scotland* date from 1983. More often, Kelman scholars have “discovered” his work from the mid-1990s (notably via the 1994 Booker Prize controversy surrounding *How Late It Was, How Late*) and then worked

backward through the early novels and stories. This carries the temptation to view the 1980s material as a prelude or stepping stone to what came later, but there is no apprentice work in Kelman's published fiction after 1978. By the mid-1980s he had a clear sense of his goals, pedigree, *métier*, and agenda (see McLean 1985, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction\*), and was in full command of his talent. Bell 1990 and Dixon 1990 capture the excitement of recognizing the power of Kelman's writing and its potential importance in a charged Scottish context. Murphy 2007 and Shanks 2010 chart the emergence of his distinctive agenda and narrative style, and its various Marxist, Scottish, and modernist alignments. By the time of Knights 1999 and Engledow 2002, a rich critical vocabulary and set of debates has been established, through which their essays view (and effectively reconsider) Kelman's first two novels. Miller 1989 is a more "innocent" critical response to *A Disaffection*, registering its broad literary affinities rather than drawing the novel into involved debates about Kelman's style and agenda. Kelly 2009 is an erudite and somewhat meta-critical reading of the same novel, developing an innovative and revisionist framework for Kelman's political aesthetic.

Bell, Ian A. "James Kelman." *New Welsh Review* 10 (1990): 18–22.

Clear and penetrating survey of Kelman's fiction up to *A Disaffection*, noting echoes of Raymond Carver and Milan Kundera. Kelman's difficulty is thoughtfully oriented to the Scottish context: he "has produced fiction more urgent and pertinent than any other contemporary British author. If the state of Scotland imposes specific and rather daunting responsibilities on its writers, then Kelman at least is living up to them."

Dixon, Keith. "Punters and Smoky Breath: The Writings of James Kelman." *Écosse: Littérature et Civilisation* 9 (1990): 65–77.

Shrewd reading of Kelman's uneasy place in traditions of socialist realism and Scottish literature (highlighting his rejection of Alan Sillitoe, John Braine, and William McIlvanney as models). Strong, insightful reading of *Hines* (noting Beckettian echoes) and notable for its sustained attention to *A Chancer*, in which "Kelman is attempting to peel off the layers of habit, acceptance or indifference, and to get at the horror beneath the surface."

Engledow, Sarah. "Studying Form: The Off-The-Page Politics of *A Chancer*." *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 69–84.

Strongly historicized reading of *A Chancer* that directs critical attention away from questions of form (i.e., viewing this text as Kelman's flirtation with the *nouveau roman*) and toward content: this is a gambling novel in which the casino and racetrack offer "a certain site of liberation from capitalism and other ideologies."

Kelly, Aaron. "'\*I Just Tell the Bloody Truth, as I See It': James Kelman's *A Disaffection*, the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Melancholy



Knowledge[<https://journals.openedition.org/etudeseccossaises/193>]\*.” *Études écossaises* 12 (2009): 79–99.

Rich and difficult philosophical reading of *A Disaffection*, drawing on Adorno and Horkheimer. Contrary to earlier readings (Craig 1993, cited under \*Introduction and Overview\*, and Pitchford 2000, cited under \*How Late It Was, How Late and the Booker Prize Controversy\*), Kelman’s “unfree direct discourse” involves no “easy flow from narrator into character . . . but rather the collision of a narrative and a character that are not only heterogeneous and unreconciled to one another but also to themselves.” Further developed in Kelly 2013 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Class, Realism, and Representation\*).

Knights, Ben. “‘The Wean and That’: Paternity and Domesticity.” In *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth-Century Fiction*. By Ben Knights, 180–194. London: Palgrave, 1999.

Engaging critique of the infantile and self-destructive qualities of the novel’s protagonist, viewed as a man-child whose incompetence “at managing his own life constitutes both an appeal to sympathy, and even a perverse kind of claim to centrality.”

Miller, Karl. “Glasgow Hamlet.” In *Authors*. By Karl Miller, 156–162. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Short but suggestive reading of *A Disaffection*, centered on the archetypal qualities of Patrick Doyle’s rage, weakness, and self-entrapment.

Murphy, Terence Patrick. “\*From Alignment to Commitment: The Early Work of James Kelman[[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Terence\\_Murphy4/publication/240641815\\_From\\_Alignment\\_to\\_Commitment\\_The\\_Early\\_Work\\_of\\_James\\_Kelman/links/55125d120cf20bfda5125a9/From-Alignment-to-Commitment-The-Early-Work-of-James-Kelman.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Terence_Murphy4/publication/240641815_From_Alignment_to_Commitment_The_Early_Work_of_James_Kelman/links/55125d120cf20bfda5125a9/From-Alignment-to-Commitment-The-Early-Work-of-James-Kelman.pdf)]\*.” *Cultural Logic* 10 (Summer 2007).

Detailed overview of Kelman’s literary, linguistic, and political project, focused on the emergence of an “independent working-class worldview” in his early narrative experiments. Strong on the 1970s stories and Kelman’s evolving approach to orthography and perspective.

Shanks, Paul. “Early Kelman.” In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 9–19. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632] Traces stylistic and thematic developments in Kelman’s early novels *The Busconductor Hines* and *A Chancer*, the influence of Tom Leonard’s phonetic poetry, and Kelman’s early mastery of “ambiguity and indeterminacy via narrative idiom.” Early itinerant stories from an abandoned novel (collected in *Lean Tales* and subsequently *A Lean Third*) bear “uncanny similarities with Samuel Beckett’s post-war fiction.” See also Shanks 2008 and Shanks 2008a (both cited under \*Critical Contexts: Modernist and Existential Contexts\*).

### How Late It Was, How Late and the Booker Prize Controversy

Kelman is the only Scottish winner of the Booker Prize, which marks (in 1994) the height of his critical recognition outside Scotland. *How Late It Was, How Late* is the story of Sammy, a Glaswegian down-and-out type who is blinded after a fight with police he has deliberately incited. The novel's immersive, modernistic psychology and sophisticated critique of state power were overshadowed by an extensive (and intensely bigoted) newspaper controversy over its "savage" use of profanity. Kelman's defiant acceptance speech compared class prejudice to racism and insisted that "my culture and my language have the right to exist, and no one has the authority to dismiss that right." This major accolade has been profoundly double-edged; in 2009 Kelman told a *Sunday Times* journalist: "I don't think it [the Booker] has proved to be that good for me. . . . The hostility, the attacks interfered with my work such in a way that I don't think ever really recovered." While clearly a major episode in his career, dramatically boosting both the literary prestige and oppositional image of his writing, the Booker controversy has dominated Kelman's subsequent reception to an unhelpful degree. As the first topic usually attached to his name, it draws public and journalistic attention away from the power and precision of Kelman's writing and toward trivial debates around "bad language." *How Late* is so heavily barnacled by the Booker saga, it seems almost impossible to discuss the novel on its own terms. Several of the sources below respond critically and productively to this problem, exploring what the Booker controversy can tell us about language, cultural value, and elitism in 1990s Britain, while noting resonances and anticipations of the journalistic furor in the plot and themes of Kelman's novel. Bell 1994 and Wood 1994 offer the clearest sense of why *How Late* merited the prize, and how the novel extends and deepens earlier patterns in Kelman's writing. Gilbert 1999, Pitchford 2000, and McGlynn 2010 read *How Late* and its formal innovations in the context of the Booker controversy, with McGlynn 2002 situating the novel's realism in a wider critical rubric of working-class literature. McNeill 2008 seeks to recover a hopeful socialist vision in a novel both praised and criticized for its powerful sense of entrapment, echoing Gilbert 1999 and its emphasis on modes of aesthetic autonomy and resistance in the protagonist's language. By contrast, Travis 2019 finds a stark presentation of unfreedom in *How Late*'s rendering of subjectivity. Hames 2009 and Gearhart 2010 highlight literary and symbolic resonances in the novel obscured by the Booker controversy but also charged with an extra significance by their non-recognition by supposed experts and guardians of high culture.

Bell, Ian A. "Empty Intensifiers: Kelman Wins 'The Booker' (At Last)." *New Welsh Review* 27 (1994): 12–14.

Views *How Late* as a "further development and even greater intensification" of themes and techniques in Kelman's earlier fiction. Argues that "the hostility to Kelman's book is by no means innocent of the desire to turn at least one blind eye to the obvious and glaring facts of social injustice."

Gearhart, Stephannie. S. "'The More There Is To See': Another Look at James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late*." *Scottish Literary Review* 2.1 (2010): 77–94.

Explores tropes of vision and surveillance in *How Late*, including the willful blindness of its critical reception. In the regime of visibility and objectification Sammy struggles against, "power records alien voices with the aim to discipline and correct"; a pattern clearly visible in the Booker reaction.

Gilbert, Geoff. "Can Fiction Swear? James Kelman and the Booker Prize." In *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English Since 1970*. Edited by Rod Mengham, 219–234. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1999. [ISBN: 9780745619576]

Engaging "story of how Kelman's novel managed to swear at the Booker and the model of cultural production it embodies," exploring why *How Late* sold only a quarter as many copies as other winners of the prize between 1987 and 1995. Shows how Kelman's novel stimulated a media response that "interfered with the closed circuits of consecration and commodification" the Booker represents.

Hames, Scott. "Eyeless in Glasgow: James Kelman's Existential Milton." *Contemporary Literature* 50.3 (2009): 496–527. [doi:10.1353/cli.0.0073]

Examines the novel's moral, thematic, and structural echoes of John Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, including an "existential" conception of truth, action, and uncertainty. Like Milton's Samson, Sammy refuses a mediated or bureaucratic struggle with power, and "defines himself through free but somewhat irrational action." Available by subscription.

McGlynn, Mary. "'Middle-Class Wankers' and Working-Class Texts: The Critics and James Kelman." *Contemporary Literature* 43.1 (2002): 50–84. [doi:10.2307/1209016]

Explores Kelman's departure from "working-class literature" (exemplified by Alan Sillitoe) in which "middle-class consciousness and status remain norms and even goals" and the evaluative difficulties this creates for literary critics. Views the realism of *How Late* in this light, including as a context for the Booker controversy. Available by subscription.

McGlynn, Mary. "*How Late it Was, How Late* and Literary Value." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 20–30. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Revisits the contestation of cultural prestige in the 1994 Booker controversy, focusing on the circulation of money and obligation in the plot of *How Late*. The novel's "devalued" characters are shown to reject "a merit-based social system determined by class-based criteria."

McNeill, Dougal. "'\*Edging Back Into Awareness:' *How Late It Was, How Late*, Form and the Utopian Demand[[11](http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/wp-content/arts-</a></p></div><div data-bbox=)

files/colloquy/colloquy\_issue\_fifteen/mcneill.pdf]\*.” *COLLOQUY Text Theory Critique* 15 (2008).

Seeks a utopian impulse in Kelman’s realism, turning “the very negativity” of *How Late* “towards politically emancipatory and positive ends.” Drawing on Fredric Jameson and the wider Marxist tradition, McNeill challenges earlier readings of atomism and defeat in Kelman’s depiction of class (Craig 1993, cited under \*Introduction and Overview\*), and the mistaken alignment of Kelman’s writing with “a de-classed Scottish nationalism” (Böhnke 1999, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Scottish Contexts\*).

Pitchford, Nicola. “How Late It Was for England: James Kelman’s Scottish Booker Prize.” *Contemporary Literature* 41.1 (2000): 693–725.

Reads the narrative style of *How Late* as a critique of realism (“part and parcel of the system of social oppression”), and the Booker outcry as manifesting a deep Anglo-centrism whereby “any cultural product judged to be distinctive in non-English ways must be shown not to be culture.” Over-reads Kelman’s “support for the Scottish nationalist movement” in pursuing this view (see Kelman 1995, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, Nonfiction\*) and Nicoll 2000, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Kelman’s Activism and Polemics\*). Available \*online [<https://www.jstor.org/stable/1209008>]\* by subscription.

Travis, Anna. “\*Interior Monologue as Social Critique in James Kelman’s *How Late It Was, How Late*[<https://journals.openedition.org/ebc/6857>]\*.” *Études britanniques contemporaines* 56 (2019).

Incisive reading of freedom, determination, and modernist/existential subjectivity in *How Late*. Sammy’s interior monologue highlights a contradiction between the individual’s “ideology of themselves as having free agency and the reality of their subjection” (Althusser).

Wood, James. “In Defence of Kelman.” *Guardian* 25 October 1994, T9.

A vindication of Kelman’s Booker Prize—Wood served on the judging panel—and response to the media fracas treating him as an “illiterate savage.” In fact, Kelman is “a self-conscious literary artist of great shaping power” whose “prison literature” bears comparison with Céline, Camus, and Solzhenitsyn. The empathetic core of his realism belongs with “the socialism of Dickens; and in our own time of Raymond Carver.”

### **Later Fiction (1995–)**

The long gap between Kelman’s fourth and fifth novels (1994–2001), and the acute stylistic differences between them, encouraged many critics to view his novels after *How Late it Was, How Late* as a distinct phase and departure. This apparent shift is marked by a deepening avant-garde “difficulty” in his treatment of language, violence, and state power (*Translated Accounts*

[2001]), and a move away from Scottish settings and masculine interiority. Though both are narrated by Glaswegian characters, *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* (2004) and *Mo Said She Was Quirky* (2012) are set in the United States and London, respectively, and both novels take a strong thematic interest in questions of race, migration, and assimilation. (*Mo Said* is Kelman's only novel with a female protagonist.) This later-than-*How Late* periodization has, however, become difficult to sustain: *Kieron Smith, Boy* (2008) returns to the terrain of Kelman's own upbringing in postwar Glasgow and represents his most sustained and stylized work in interior monologue (charting the micro-development of boyhood conscience and consciousness). *Dirt Road* (2016)—first drafted as a screenplay for a film released in 2018 (*Dirt Road to Lafayette*)—seems to resonate with Kelman's own teenage migration from Scotland to the United States, exploring grief, race, and family in a story of musical discovery and liberation. Indeed, now that “later” Kelman has swelled to the majority of his published novels, this descriptor should be treated solely as a mark of publishing chronology. We should also note the hazard of viewing Kelman's novels (rather than collections of short stories) as the major milestones. In the same post-*How Late* period Kelman published his funniest and most surreal story collection *The Good Times* (1998), and the more tense and experimental collections *If It Is Your Life* (2010) and *That Was a Shiver* (2018). Of the later fiction, the arduous and moving *Translated Accounts* has proven the most challenging and controversial; quite different and conflicting readings can be found in Milne 2001 and Schoene 2009, while Hagemann 2005 and Vericat 2011 link the novel's un-making of bureaucratic English with postcolonial resistance. Kelly 2007 highlights the mismatch between Kelman's post-1999 novels and notions of a “resolved,” post-political cultural identity achieved through the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. Boxall 2010, Manfredi 2015, and Hames 2016 examine formal and political aspects of Kelman's project, which seem to have deepened and intensified in his more recent work, while Wood 2014 revisits Kelman's full oeuvre as a masterful short-story writer.

Boxall, Peter. “Kelman's Later Novels.” In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 31–41. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632] Views *Translated Accounts*, *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free*, and *Kieron Smith, Boy* as shaping “a new kind of political fiction,” whose task is “not to write back to a centre from a specific margin, or to find a language for a particular kind of social experience, but rather to suggest or articulate a collapse of the forms of sovereignty and subjecthood” assumed by (modernist) interior narration.

Hagemann, Suzanne. “Postcolonial Translation Studies and James Kelman's *Translated Accounts*.” *Scottish Studies Review* 6.1 (2005): 74–83.

Reads *Translated Accounts* via postcolonial translation theory. In this novel the “megalanguage” of English is made foreign to itself, countering “the claim to power inherent in the native-speaker principle, i.e. against the assumption that a certain privileged group has the right to determine what the English language is.”

Hames, Scott. “‘Maybe Singing Into Yourself’: James Kelman, Inner Speech and Vocal Communion.” In *Community in Modern Scottish Literature*. Edited by Scott Lyall, 196–213. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2016. [ISBN: 9789004317444]

Reconsiders Kelman’s association with vocal rootedness and collective expression to explore the swallowed, internalized, or suppressed utterance in *Kieron Smith, Boy*; *Mo Said She Was Quirky* and stories from *If It Is Your Life*. Rather than language “displaying” signs of pre-given community, the “inner speech” (Vološinov’s term) of Kelman’s detached narrators is the medium of their tense and unsettled sociality, where “belonging” is always a partly subjected condition.

Jones, Carole. “James Kelman’s Melancholic Politics.” *Scottish Literary Review* 7.1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 89–112.

Reads *Mo Said She Was Quirky* “as concluding a trajectory of masculine loss” in Kelman’s novels, viewing his male protagonists (via Judith Butler and Angela McRobbie) as “melancholically constituted by their ungrievable loss of radical working-class masculine identity”. Available \*online [<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/582221>]\* by subscription.

Kelly, Aaron. “James Kelman and the Deterritorialisation of Power.” In *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature*. Edited by Berthold Schoene, 175–183. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9780748623952]

Critical response to post-devolution commentary (and Böhnke 1999, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Scottish Contexts\*), which views the establishment of a Scottish Parliament as reconciling national culture and its political representation, resulting in “the re-issuing of the ‘individual’ untainted by a now resolved Scottishness.” Reads Kelman’s post-devolution novels *Translated Accounts* and *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* against this complacent “postnational” view, which entails a “final repression of class in its discourse of cultural difference.”

Manfredi, Camille. “Tales from the Pigeon Hole: James Kelman’s Migrant Voices.” *Études anglaises* 68.2 (2015): 210–223.

Explores “dynamics of displacement, dislocation and relocation” in *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free*, *Kieron Smith, Boy*, and *Mo Said She Was Quirky*, viewing these novels as departures from earlier patterns in Kelman’s work centered on the “lives, private crises and mental journeys of foul-mouthed, working-class Glasgow males.”

Milne, Drew. “Broken English: James Kelman’s *Translated Accounts*.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2001): 106–115.

Constructs a modernist genealogy for the linguistic challenges of *Translated Accounts*, arguing that the novel’s innovation lies in its emphasis on “the dystopian specificity of translation

itself.” Suggests the novel “relies too much on a rhetoric of state oppression which is already historical.” Disputed in Hagemann 2005 and Schoene 2009.

Schoene, Berthold. “James Kelman’s Cosmopolitan Jeremiads.” In *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. By Berthold Schoene, 66–94. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. [ISBN: 9780748640836]

Reads *Translated Accounts* and *You Have to Be Careful in the Land of the Free* as “urgent cosmopolitan appeals to look and listen beyond our immediate domestic comfort zones.” The unmappable English of *Translated Accounts* represents an ethical refusal of any “polarity between the local/vernacular and the global”; sharply critiques earlier responses to the novel that read it as bleak and disinvolving (see Milne 2001, Kövesi 2007, cited under \*Introductions and Overviews\*).

Vericat, Fabio. “Letting the Writing Do the Talking: Denationalising English and James Kelman’s *Translated Accounts*.” *Scottish Literary Review* 3.1 (Spring/Summer 2011): 129–151.

Reads *Translated Accounts* as an act of “postcolonial resistance,” countering the “assimilative transcription” of human experience into administered language in state bureaucracies. The novel recovers living voices and semantic loss by “inverting the flow of translation, no longer linguistically *into* English but culturally *out* of it.”

Wood, James. “\*Away Thinking About Things [https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/08/25/away-thinking-things]\*.” *New Yorker*, 25 August 2014.

Review-article on *If It Is Your Life*, presenting Kelman as “a funny, sour, expansive writer, whose strange, new sentences are brilliant adventures in thought.” Explores a tension between Kelman’s “absolute materialism” in subject and theme, running alongside his emphasis “on the play and the liberty (more often glimpsed than found) of the mind.”

### **Short Story and Drama Criticism**

As J. D. Macarthur notes in the only book-length study of Kelman’s short fiction, “a compelling case could be made that his short stories are Kelman’s finest work. Certainly it is the short story form which is most international and demotic in aspect, thereby most truly reflecting the fundamental nature of Kelman’s writing.” In Kelman’s view, “everything is in the short stories. If people looked at the short stories they wouldn’t ask me the questions they do about the novels” (quoted in Macarthur 2004). Beyond his general debts to Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett, Kelman has noted Jack London, Sherwood Anderson, Gertrude Stein, Tillie Olsen, Damon Runyon, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Katherine Anne Porter as influences on his short fiction. In

turn, critics have compared Kelman's stories to figures including Anton Chekhov, Ernest Hemingway, John Cheever, Raymond Carver, and Alice Munro. However we locate Kelman in this strikingly American domain, it is clear that some of his most powerful, unsettling, experimental, and comic writing can be found in the shorter form. Macarthur 2004 and Hunter 2010 are helpful guides to Kelman's techniques and predecessors in the short story, while Macarthur 1996, Murphy 2003, and Lansdown 2014 focus on individual collections (Kelman's fifth, first, and third books of stories, respectively). Of these sources, Murphy 2003 has the most exact and penetrating account of Kelman's story mechanics and experimentalism (see also Murphy's articles under \*Stylistic and Narratological Approaches\*). Macarthur 2007 is a valuable book-length study of the short fiction emphasizing Kelman's range and flexibility. Kelman is also an experienced dramatic writer, though his work for stage and screen has received very little critical attention (just as many of these projects remain un-staged and un-produced). Archibald 2010 is thus far the only scholarly article focused on his dramatic writing.

Archibald, David. "Kelman's Drama." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 65–71. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632] A survey of Kelman's long but under-recognized career as a writer for stage, radio, and screen, ranging from avant-garde works (*In the Night*, *Herbal Remedies*) to musical theater (*One, Two – Hey!* and *Redemption*, inspired by the Blues Poets) and his historical play *Hardie and Baird: The Last Days* (published in *Hardie and Baird and Other Plays* in 1991). Also discusses a range of un-produced and unperformed works.

Hunter, Adrian. "Kelman and the Short Story." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 42–52. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632] Concise overview of Kelman's artistry as a short story writer, viewed in the tradition of Ezra Pound, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein. Emphasizes the beguiling "double life" of Kelman's "oblique, elliptical realist narratives that function as vectors of a greater social condition."

Lansdown, Richard. "Politics and Art: James Kelman's *Not Not While the Giro*." *Scottish Literary Review* 6.2 (Autumn/Winter 2014): 67–92. Argues that Kelman's breakout collection "is the most distinguished set of short stories issued in the United Kingdom since World War Two," partly for the historical importance of the socioeconomic change which is their backdrop (deindustrialization). Available \*online [<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/562529/pdf>]\* by subscription.

Macarthur, J. D. "The Narrative Voice in James Kelman's *The Burn*." *Studies in English Literature*. English Literary Society of Japan 72.2 (1996): 181–195.



Explores Kelman's narrative technique with close attention to register and point of view. Close analyses of individual stories capture the motion and multiplicity of voice in *The Burn*, including Kelman's humor and elements of pastiche.

Macarthur, J. D. "A Sense of Place: Narrative Perspective in the Short Stories of James Kelman[<https://journals.openedition.org/jsse/378>]\*." *Journal of the Short Story in English* 42 (Spring 2004): 75–89.

Surveys the "complex structure of interaction" Kelman constructs between narrator, character, and reader and the full range of techniques employed to this purpose (not only free indirect style). Strong on the intimacies of place and situation in the short fiction: however sensitive characters are "to how people position themselves and their interaction in terms of location, no order can be imposed on their disordered existence." Developed in Macarthur 2007.

Macarthur, J. D. *Claiming Your Portion of Space: A Study of the Short Stories of James Kelman*. Tokyo: Hokuseido, 2007. [ISBN: 9784590012209]

Accessible book-length study exploring Kelman's style, lineage, and innovations in the short-story form, with special attention to his "fusing" of realism and modernism (in the tradition of Anton Chekhov, Virginia Woolf, William Carlos Williams), and a range of international connections (Sam Selvon, Frank Sargeson, Georg Büchner, Tatsuji Miyoshi). Views Kelman's fiction as "unrelentingly pessimistic and nihilistic" but superbly realized in its minute awareness of location and "place."

Murphy, Terence Patrick. "Durational Realism? Voice Over Narrative in James Kelman's *An Old Pub Near the Angel, and Other Stories*." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33.3 (2003): 335–355. [doi:10.1353/jnt.2010.0003]

Detailed exploration of the manipulation of "novelistic tempo" in early Kelman stories. While techniques of "durational realism" entail "a drastic reduction in what Bakhtin labels fictional "energy and event," they also afford Kelman "much greater space to explore the independent ideological life of his working class characters." Available by subscription.

## Critical Contexts

Literary scholars have been gripped, provoked, and inspired by Kelman's writing from early in his career. The subsections below map loose "clusters" of critical interest and debate, highlighting common themes of his reception and areas of broad consensus and disagreement. It should be noted that these themes and debates reflect the interests and categories of literary critics, rather than those of the author. In an unpublished 2002 interview, Kelman expressed misgivings about several of the terms and theories which have been prominent in critical responses to his work: "I don't have much time for either the concept modernism or

postmodernism, or postcolonialism—I’m never comfortable with these terms at all. I don’t think they hold up much, eh, philosophically. Maybe this is presumptuous or pretentious even, but I kind of see them as literary criticism, or art criticism, that can’t get beyond its own context” (unpublished interview with David Borthwick, Scott Hames, Liam McIlvanney and Katherine Meffen, 29 May 2002). There is a sense in which Kelman’s own erudite self-awareness (of technique, of language, of literary, and philosophical precedents) holds the “explanations” of academic voices slightly at bay. (We could note, again, his long experience of being patronized by over-confident and under-read reviewers, asking Kelman if he’s heard of Joyce or if he ever revises his work (see Kelman 2007, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction\*) Needless to say, the individual essays and books cited in each section range freely across these notional clusters of critical interest, and several works appear in multiple subsections.

### Scottish Contexts

Much of Kelman’s critical reception situates his work in a Scottish literary and political context, with varying degrees of precision and understanding. Gifford 1991, McMillan 1995, Bell 1996, and Craig 1999 are incisive accounts of Kelman’s novelty and continuity with Scottish literary paradigms which precede his work (alignments that Kelman has, at different points in his career, both resisted and embraced). While not focused specifically on Kelman, Watson 1995 is a suggestive account of a demotic-modernist Scottish tradition into which his work fits persuasively. Böhnke 1999 is focused (indeed, considerably over-focused) on Kelman’s Scottish identity. Macdonald 2002 and Gardiner 2006 are more penetrating and critical explorations of Kelman’s place in a national(ist) literary and intellectual tradition. Carruthers and McMunigall 2002 is a valuable corrective-to-the-corrective, highlighting less obvious ways in which Kelman’s writing can be productively situated in a Scottish context while avoiding some of the over-readings evident in earlier criticism. Zagratzki 2000 is perhaps closest to Kelman’s own preferred sense of belonging to a radical and resistant oral tradition, linking his Scottish blues to Afro-American music and orature. (These affinities directly anticipate Kelman’s 2016 novel *Dirt Road*.) Kelman’s views on the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence can be found in his essay online “\*Towards Scottish Self-Determination[<https://christiebooks.co.uk/2014/02/towards-scottish-self-determination-james-kelman/>]\*.”

Bell, Ian A. “Imagine Living There: Form and Ideology in Contemporary Scottish Fiction.” In *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*. Edited by Suzanne Hagemann, 217–233. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996. [ISBN: 9780820431604]  
Situates Kelman within “a radical literature of resistance and reclamation” in post-1970s Scottish fiction, whose leading figure is Alasdair Gray. Both Kelman and Gray attempt “to deconstruct the certainties of the Scottish identity as presented in the discourse of popular

historiography and embedded in popular culture, and take on the grander questions of national identity in an oblique way.” See also Bell 1990, cited under \*By Period and Form: Earlier Fiction (to 1994)\*.

Böhnke, Dietmar. *Kelman Writes Back: Literary Politics in the Work of a Scottish Writer*. Berlin: Galda & Wilch, 1999. [ISBN: 9783931397210]

The first (short) book on James Kelman, adapted from a student dissertation arguing “that the concepts of Scottish national identity, Scottish nationalism and internationalism are very much present” in his work. The resulting quasi-nationalist image of Kelman is rather simplistic, sidelining a range of “non-Scottish” affinities and ethical concerns (see Nicoll 2000, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Modernist and Existential Contexts\*).

Craig, Cairns. “Dialect and Dialectics.” In *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination*. Edited by Craig Cairns, 75–116. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999. [ISBN: 9780748608935]

Locates Kelman’s innovations within a much broader Scottish quandary of novelistic style: “Scots is not at home in the novel; English is not at home in Scotland.” Kelman’s isolated working-class protagonists “are the site in which the community’s voices happen,” but their “heterocentricity” is internal rather than truly communal, severed from any possible vision of class liberation (or indeed historical change). Develops Craig 1993 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Voice and Narrative Technique\*).

Gardiner, Michael. “Kelman’s Interventions.” In *From Trocchi to Trainspotting: Scottish Critical Theory Since 1960*. Edited by Michael Gardiner, 152–177. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006. [ISBN: 9780748622337]

Positions Kelman in a Scottish intellectual tradition spanning Thomas Reid, John Macmurray, Alexander Trocchi, and R.D. Laing. Views Kelman’s interest in Kafka via Deleuze/Guattari (“minor literature”) and reads *How Late It Was, How Late* as “schizo narrative.”

Gifford, Douglas. “Discovering Lost Voices.” *Books in Scotland* 38 (Summer 1991): 1–6.

An extended profile drawing on previous *Books in Scotland* reviews dating from 1983 in which Gifford noted the excitement and importance of Kelman’s work in the Scottish context (see also issues 12, 15, 19, 24 and 30 of *Books in Scotland*). Viewed as a significant advance and resurgence of Scottish realism, Kelman’s anger and artistry is briefly compared to James Barke, Edward Gaitens, Robin Jenkins, George Friel, Gordon Williams, Alan Spence, and William McIlvanney.

Macdonald, Graeme. “A Scottish Subject? Kelman’s Determination.” *Études Écossaises* 8 (2002): 89–111.

Questions “the ends of Scottish cultural criticism” and Kelman’s place within it, viewing his work as “perfectly displaced” to explore “the capacity and limits of literature to represent anything at all, nevermind nation/culture/individual”. Engages critically and productively with Bell 1990 (cited under \*By Period and Form: Earlier Fiction [to 1994]\*), Milne 1992 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Modernist and Existential Contexts\*), Craig 1993 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Voice and Narrative Technique) and Nicoll 2000 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Modernist and Existential Contexts\*).

McMillan, Dorothy. “Constructed Out of Bewilderment: Stories of Scotland.” In *Peripheral Visions: Images of Nationhood in Contemporary British Fiction*. Edited by Ian A. Bell, 80–99. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1995. [ISBN: 9780708312605]  
Explores Kelman’s impact and appropriation in 1990s Scotland, amid critical reflections on the resurgence of national literary identity. Owing to his dominant influence on younger Scottish novelists, Kelman’s wry questioning of a “totalising myth of Scottishness” has ended up, “through no fault of his own, seeming to embody such a myth.”

McMunnigall, Alan, and Gerry Carruthers. “Locating Kelman: Glasgow, Scotland and the Commitment to Place.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 56–68.  
A revisionist exploration of Kelman’s Scottishness, challenging “some of the longstanding lazy critical thinking in Scotland about literary traditions and their absence.” Argues that Kelman has little in common with his hedonistic inheritors in the 1990s “new Scottish renaissance” (Irvine Welsh, Alan Warner, Duncan McLean) but fits an older and deeper national tradition concerned with “community, language and literature as cornerstones of human relationships.”

Watson, Roderick. “Alien Voices from the Street: Demotic Modernism in Modern Scots Writing.” In *The Yearbook of English Studies*. Vol. 25. Edited by Andrew Gurr, 141–155. London: Maney, 1995.  
Draws on Bakhtinian theory to show that “the energy of the demotic voice . . . has characterized the Scottish literary tradition over the centuries.” The creative estrangements of Scots mark a continuity between the post-1970s work of Kelman, Tom Leonard, W. N. Herbert and Robert Crawford, seen to extend backward through Sydney Goodsir Smith, Hugh MacDiarmid, and even Robert Burns. Available \*online [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3508823]\* by subscription.

Zagratzki, Uwe. “‘Blues Fell This Morning’: James Kelman’s Scottish Literature and Afro-American Music.” *Scottish Literary Journal* 27.1 (Spring 2000): 105–117.  
Highly original and suggestive essay linking the low, angry, resilient voices of Kelman’s Scottish “oral literature” to the African American blues tradition. Kelman adopts postcolonial strategies to counter Anglocentric linguistic norms, and his “situated” stream-of-consciousness “breathes the immediacy and actionality of black talk.”

### *Voice and Narrative Technique*

Kelman's writing is marked by extraordinary control over the reader's perception of "voice," a style he developed in order to achieve specific aims in dramatizing moment-to-moment consciousness. Kelman describes his first published novel *The Busconductor Hines* (1984) as "a first person narrative written in the third person," where the novelist "has to sort of switch from one sort of dialogue into narrative voice without the reader being precisely aware of where it happened" (McLean 1985, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, Nonfiction\*). These innovations have fascinated literary scholars (while baffling some reviewers) and are motivated not only by Kelman's artistic aims but by his ethical stance. Recounting his early development in the essay "And the judges said . . ." Kelman explains that "in prose fiction I saw the distinction between dialogue and narrative as a summation of the political system; it was simply another method of exclusion, of marginalising and disenfranchising different peoples, cultures and communities" (see Kelman 2008, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, Nonfiction\*). No real grasp of Kelman's work can be achieved without considering questions of "voice," authority, and narrative technique, and these topics have been central to Kelman's critical reception. Murphy 2006 charts Kelman's early narrative experiments and development, while Leonard 2013 (first published in 1976) captures the important influence of his friend Tom Leonard on Kelman's thinking about language as poetic object, exclusive property, and medium of "being." Craig 1993 is a highly influential reading of Kelman's "solution" to the dialogue/narrative problem in a Scottish context, which has stimulated counter-readings such as Spinks 2002 and Kelly 2013 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Class, Realism, and Representation\*). The specificities of Kelman's linguistic practice, and its fundamental realism, emerge clearly in comparative studies such as Freeman 1997 and Milne 2003. Gardiner 2010 and Lambert 2011 explore trans-national and postcolonial dimensions of Kelman's challenge to "global" (or imperial) English, drawing parallels with the unruly and "rotten" English of Ken Saro-Wiwa and Amos Tutuola. Hames 2010 explores the verbal novelty and invention which frequently accompanies Kelman's acute attention to linguistic "reality", while Craig 2010 explores the dialectic between freedom and constraint which governs Kelman's (Chomskyan) philosophy of language. More specialist studies of Kelman's vocal techniques are listed in the \*Stylistic and Narratological Approaches\* section of this article.

Craig, Cairns. "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman." In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*. Edited by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, 99–114. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993. [ISBN: 9780748604159]

Rich and influential reading of Kelman's "fusion of the spoken with the written," thus "overcoming the distinction between English (as the medium of narration) and Scots (as the medium of dialogue) which has proved a constant dilemma to Scottish writers." Craig's view that "unity of voice replaces unity of political or social purpose" in Kelman's fiction is

disputed in Spinks 2002 and Kelly 2013, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Class, Realism, and Representation\*).

Craig, Cairns. "Kelman's Glasgow Sentence." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 75–85. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Examines "the tension between the predetermination and the freedom of language" in Kelman's first three novels, drawing partly on Noam Chomsky's vision of the human language capacity as both infinitely generative and structurally constrained.

Freeman, Alan. "Realism Fucking Realism: The Word on the Street—Kelman, Kennedy and Welsh." *Cencrastus* 57 (Summer 1997): 6–7.

Comparative exploration of Kelman-influenced Scottish novelists (A.L. Kennedy, Irvine Welsh) in which the pursuit of linguistic authenticity "leads to hyper realism; and hyper-realism inevitably leads back to the medium of language, highlighting realism as just one way of seeing reality."

Gardiner, Michael. "Kelman and World English." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 99–110. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Views Kelman's refusal of state culture and "core English" through the lens of "minor literature" (Deleuze and Guattari), comparing his experiments with "inter-language" with novels by Amos Tutuola, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and Sam Selvon.

Hames, Scott. "Kelman's Art-Speech." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 86–98. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

A counter-reading of Kelman's linguistic mimeticism, exploring the creative and generative dimension of his "art-speech," reading *A Disaffection* through the prism of Russian Formalist estrangement and Kafka's "Josephine the Singer."

Lambert, Iain. "This Is Not Sarcasm Believe Me Yours Sincerely: James Kelman, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Amos Tutuola." In *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives*. Edited by Michael Gardiner, Graeme Macdonald, and Niall O'Gallagher, 198–209. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. [ISBN: 9780748688654]

Draws suggestive parallels between *Translated Accounts* and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (and via Saro-Wiwa, the fiction of Tutuola). The estranging language of *Translated Accounts* "forces the reader to slow down and occupy the position of a non-native speaker functioning in a second language," a technique placing Kelman's readers "far from the linguistic and political centre through the abrogation of a statist prestige variety of language."

Leonard, Tom. "The Locust Tree in Flower, and Why It Had Difficulty Flowering in Britain." In *Definite Articles: Selected Prose 1973-2012*. Edited by Tom Leonard, 74–82. Edinburgh: Word Power Books, 2013. [ISBN: 9780956628374]

Expansive personal essay, first published in 1976, on the suppression in Britain of a (broadly modernist) poetic orientation to voice "after" William Carlos Williams. This tradition (including sound poets and concrete poets) heightens awareness of lexis, syntax, and phonology, treating language as substance, object, and reality in its own right. Includes a deft critique (overlapping with Kelman's essays) which views the prestige of standardized language as exclusive class property, offering the social elite transcendent access to truth, beauty, art.

Milne, Drew. "The Fiction of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh: Accents, Speech and Writing." In *Contemporary British Fiction*. Edited by Richard J. Lane, Rod Mengham, and Philip Tew, 158–173. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003. [ISBN: 9780745628677]

Looks beyond surface parallels between Kelman and Welsh to unpack "divergent analyses of accent politics and of writing's potential to articulate political change." Kelman belongs with the "modernist dissidence" of Kafka, Beckett, and Camus, where Welsh offers "something more like a populist postmodern blend of William Burroughs and Quentin Tarantino."

Murphy, Terence Patrick. "'Getting Rid of that Standard Third Party Narrative Voice': The Development of James Kelman's Early Authorial Style." *Language and Literature* 15.2 (2006): 183–199. [doi:10.1177/0963947006063746]

Highly detailed reconstruction of Kelman's distinctive narrative style, from his "heterodox view of the relationship between voice and narrative" to specific techniques of typography and punctuation. Demonstrates how Kelman's revisions to various early stories seek "elimination of those elements of irony and parody that result from the narrative voice seeking to interpose itself between the reader and the thoughts of his working-class characters." Available by subscription.

Spinks, Lee. "In Juxtaposition to Which: Narrative, System and Subjectivity in the Fiction of James Kelman." *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 85–105.

Richly theorized analysis of Kelman's narrative politics, which "deny us a specific hierarchy of discourses to clarify and stabilise moral judgements," illustrated with a dazzling reading of Romantic subjectivity in *A Disaffection*. For Spinks, Kelman refuses and "assaults" the forms of metanarrative "linguistic equality" that Craig 1993 finds in his narrative style.

### **Class, Realism, and Representation**

Class conflict and marginalization are central to Kelman's writing and to the critical debates it has stimulated. Resisting the pressures of literary assimilation—including the policing of

working-class speech—came with his earliest impulse to become a writer: “the stories I wanted to write would derive from my own background, my own socio-cultural experience” he recalls in “The Importance of Glasgow In My Work.” “I wanted to write and remain a member of my own community” but “whenever I did find somebody from my own sort of background in English Literature there they were confined to the margins, kept in their place, stuck in the dialogue” (Kelman 1992, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction\*). Thus, the hierarchy of narration and dialogue becomes a direct analogue for economic inequality and working-class dispossession: through his reading, young Kelman discovers that “narrative belonged to them and them alone. They owned it.” The representative conventions of literary fiction are thus conceived as a battleground, in which Kelman—an “us” mastering the discourse of “them”—strategizes a complex relationship with the truth of his social experience. He seeks to restore economic detail, authentic language, and everyday intellectualism to literary fiction, while avoiding stereotypes of working-class life (particularly Glaswegian working-class life). At the same time, the narrative style of his work refuses to affirm the governing structures of “agreed,” consensual reality (assumed as given in classic literary realism), ensuring his characters retain a degree of fretful autonomy from the determinations of class society. Thus, Kelman’s social and ethical “commitment” is both fierce and fiercely complex: he is a politically radical artist but not a hack propagandist nor a “social realist” urging sympathetic concern for the disadvantaged. Kelman’s project centers on the frank treatment of working-class experience (including mental and intellectual experience) from the inside, on its own independent terms, rather than as mediated by the tolerances and expectations of an implied middle-class reader. Klaus 1989, Craig 1993, Baker 1996, and Kirk 1999 examine Kelman’s working-class subject matter and representation of dramatic changes to British class society in the 1970s and 1980s. A key point of debate is whether Kelman can envisage any social hope (of advance in the class struggle) to match his trenchant critique of the violence of capitalist society. Macdonald 1996 and Maley 2000 compare Kelman’s realist style with those of Émile Zola and Irvine Welsh. Kelly 2013 and Karl 2014 situate Kelman’s writing in (somewhat abstract) contemporary political and theoretical debates, while Maley 1996 and McCormick 1996 explore the class character of language: both the vigorous demotic of Kelman’s fiction and the impersonal terms in which it is usually praised by academic critics.

Baker, Simon. “‘Wee Stories With a Working-Class Theme’: The Reimagining of Urban Realism in the Fiction of James Kelman.” In *Studies in Scottish Fiction: 1945 to the Present*. Edited by Suzanne Hagemann, 235–250. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1996. [ISBN: 9780820431604] Reads Kelman’s Glasgow realism against the local grain, finding in Kelman “the dynamics of post-imperial, deindustrialising urban life as it is lived in all the decaying, abandoned towns of the English commonwealth”; a reading pursued via suggestive comparisons with modern Welsh fiction.



Craig, Cairns. "Resisting Arrest: James Kelman." In *The Scottish Novel Since the Seventies: New Visions, Old Dreams*. Edited by Gavin Wallace and Randall Stevenson, 99–114. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993. [ISBN: 9780748604159]

Argues that "Kelman's description is not of a working-class *community* so much as of a working-class world in which individuals are isolated from each other." Reads Kelman's hybrid first-person/third-person narrative technique as constructing a "unity of voice," which transcends and perhaps masks this absence of solidarity. Disputed by Spinks 2002 (cited under \*Critical Contexts: Voice and Narrative Technique\*) and Kelly 2013.

Karl, Alissa G. "Things Break Apart—James Kelman, Ali Smith and the Neoliberal Novel." In *Reading Capitalist Realism*. Edited by Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge, 64–88. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014. [ISBN: 9781609382346]

Suggestive and densely theorized reading of *How Late It Was, How Late* as a neoliberal novel, "in which textual, corporeal, and social forms undergo, yet never fully complete" the disintegration of political collectivity and state power. The "intractability and insecurity" of Sammy's leaky body "is metonymic of the social and economic conditions under which [it] is permeable and insecure yet also scrutinized."

Kelly, Aaron. *James Kelman: Politics and Aesthetics*. Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2013. [ISBN: 9783039111305]

Penetrating book-length study drawing on Jacques Rancière and T.W. Adorno. Argues that Kelman's political aesthetic "undermines the governing logic of the class system in which both the individual and the representative conventions of community secure the hierarchical regulation of identity formation." Thus, Kelman's fiction is "part of a counter-history of working-class writing which has always sought to make the working class more than itself" by "refusing to accept appropriate modes and languages." Densely theorized but rewarding.

Kirk, John. "Figuring the Dispossessed: Images of the Urban Working Class in the Writing of James Kelman." *English* 48.191 (1999): 101–116. [doi:10.1093/english/48.191.101]\*  
Situates Kelman in longer traditions of working-class writing (Scottish and not), while highlighting his aversion to overt political tub-thumping, naturalist representation, and Marxian dogma. Explores the depiction of workplace struggle in *The Busconductor Hines* and *A Disaffection*, deflecting the charge of "political pessimism" in Kelman's fiction (see Craig 1993 and later Macarthur 2007, cited under \*By Period and Form: Short Story and Drama Criticism\*). Available by subscription.

Klaus, H. Gustav. "James Kelman: A Voice from the Lower Depths of Thatcherite Britain." *London Magazine* 29.5–6 (1989): 39–48.

Emphasizes Kelman's focus on "the workless and the homeless, the casually and menially employed, the cadgers and the dodgers" of de-industrializing Britain, and the "humanist core"

of his artistic vision. Explores Kelman's refusal to romanticize working-class culture or fix his political loyalties to a "theoretical proletariat," attending instead to mundane daily life. Insightful discussion of the first three novels and a range of stories; elements are repeated in Klaus 2004 (cited under \*Introductions and Overviews\*).

Macdonald, Graeme. "Writing Claustrophobia: Zola and Kelman." *Bulletin of the Émile Zola Society* 13 (1996): 9–20.

Compares Kelman's realist style with Émile Zola's claim "to have reproduced the 'authentic smell of the people' in *L'Assomoir*." Views Kelman's narrative innovations as elaborating Zola's *style indirect libre* and explores a common dramatic interest in survival and claustrophobia among "the urban 'submerged.'"

Maley, Willy. "Swearing Blind: Kelman and the Curse of the Working Classes." *Edinburgh Review* 95 (1996): 105–112.

Explores the social dynamics of profanity and offense ("'Fuck' is both taboo and totem, it is both unspeakable and unduly fetishized"), insisting on a national as well as class context for Kelman's linguistic transgressions. Contrasts Kelman's use of language with the "macho posturing" of his critics and imitators.

Maley, Willy. "Denizens, Citizens, Tourists and Others: Marginality and Mobility in the Writings of James Kelman and Irvine Welsh." In *City Visions*. Edited by David Bell and Azzedine Haddour, 60–72. Harlow, UK: Longman, 2000. [ISBN: 9780582327412]

Argues that "Kelman does not deal directly with class as such," instead viewing class through the prism of the (bourgeois) individual subject. Both Kelman and Welsh have "a radical and progressive dimension" in their treatment of class experience, but also "have a tendency to succumb to stereotyping."

McCormick, Michael. "For Jimmy Kelboats." *Chapman* 83 (1996): 30–33.

An ambivalent response from a self-described "uneducated yob from the back of beyond" who enjoys and strongly identifies with the class experience depicted in Kelman's fiction yet feels excluded from the critical discourse in which it is celebrated.

### **Gender and Masculinity**

As Carole Jones observes, "James Kelman writes almost exclusively about men" (Jones 2009). The politics of gender and representation has been a focus of scholarly interest from early in his career, one of few areas in which the author is often criticized as well as praised. While some media clichés about Kelman's writing would falsely associate him with a "hard man" tradition, the readings listed in this section tend to emphasize the anxious, redundant, decentered, and

“leaky” modes of masculinity which predominate in his fiction. Jones 2007 and Jones 2009 offer an excellent overview of this terrain, directly engaging (and partly incorporating) the insights of Knights 1999 and McMillan 2002. Both of the latter sources criticize the “usurpation” of ideologically feminine subject-positions by Kelman’s male victims and helpless fathers. Jones 2015 is a richly theorized elaboration of earlier writings on a masculine subject constructed through the loss and incomplete mourning of patriarchal ideals. Hames 2007 explores codes of “existential” masculinity in Kelman’s fictions of stasis and isolation, through comparison with the more hopeful, communal, and action-oriented manhood found in William McIlvanney. Whyte 1998 sketches a suggestive Scottish context for the re-framing of masculinity, class, and nationhood in the 1990s. McNeill 2012 proposes a more positive and even utopian reading of Kelman’s frustrated wankers.

Hames, Scott. 2007. “Dogged Masculinities: Male Subjectivity and Socialist Despair in Kelman and McIlvanney.” *Scottish Studies Review* 8.1 (2007): 67–87.

Surveys gendered qualities of Kelman’s “existential” literary politics in exploring his treatment of masculine subjectivity and inwardness. Examines differing codes of masculine action and self-contempt in Kelman’s “Greyhound for Breakfast” and a similar story by William McIlvanney.

Jones, Carole. “Kelman and Masculinity.” In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 111–120. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Helpful overview of Kelman’s complex engagement with masculinity: his “male narratives are about self-doubt, stasis and paralysis, leavened with spare but persistent humour.” Probably the best place to begin exploring this topic and related debates.

Jones, Carole. “James Kelman—‘that was him, out of sight’: Masculine Models and Limitations.” In *Disappearing Men: Gender Disorientation in Scottish Fiction 1979-99*, 31–61. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009.

Wide-ranging analysis of Kelman’s ambivalent “masculinism,” exploring how his fiction “highlights the predicament of the white working-class man—his claiming of male authority while being excluded from the hegemonic male ideal which betokens power.”

Jones, Carole. “James Kelman’s Melancholic Politics.” *Scottish Literary Review* 7.1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 89–112.

Reads Kelman via Judith Butler’s theorization of melancholia and subjectivity: the anxious inner lives of Kelman’s protagonists are formed through an unacknowledged mourning of masculine autonomy. Reads *Mo Said She Was Quirky* “as concluding a trajectory of masculine loss” in Kelman’s novels. Available \*online [<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/582221>]\* by subscription.

Knights, Ben. “‘The Wean and That’: Paternity and Domesticity.” In *Writing Masculinities: Male Narratives in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, 180–194. London: Palgrave, 1999.

Views Kelman’s men as “lacking control over their own boundaries: their identity is subject to invasion from without as well as lack of governance within.” Sharp critical reading of *Hines* and victimhood: “in telling his story of helplessness and dependency he has usurped a conventionally feminine position,” though “his way of dealing with powerlessness inscribes a male narrative”.

McMillan, Neil. “Wilting, or the ‘Poor Wee Boy Syndrome’: Kelman and Masculinity.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 41–55.

Analysis of gendered power relations in *The Busconductor Hines* and *A Disaffection*, which “persistently identify womanliness with negative bourgeois aspirations” (as colluding with capitalism), while at the same time representing masculinity as lack and suffering.

McNeill, Dougal. “The Auld Bollocks, or, James Kelman’s Masculine Utopics.” *\*International Review of Scottish Studies* 37 (2012). [doi:10.21083/irss.v37i0.1732]

Thoughtfully counters negative readings of Kelman’s men, exploring “representations of a masculinity that exceeds structures of regulation” by focusing on the candid figure of the masturbator: “a figure connected to both fantasy—and thus ideological—systems of representation and to the materiality of the body itself.” A sustained and productive critical engagement with Jones 2007 and Jones 2009; the “utopian” focus chimes with McNeill 2008 (cited under \*By Period and Form: *How Late It Was, How Late* and the Booker Prize Controversy\*).

Whyte, Christopher. “Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 34.2 (1998): 274–285. [doi:10.1093/fmls/XXXIV.3.274]

Critically examines the “dysfunctional urban male” pervasive in contemporary Scottish fiction, and related questions of class representation. Codes of demotic masculinity have become a privileged signifier of Scottishness, offering a complex and appealing “textual invisibility” to Scottish bourgeois critics and literary readers (a pattern to which Kelman’s critical success is briefly linked). Available by subscription.

### **Stylistic and Narratological Approaches**

Narrative technique is at the core of Kelman’s artistry and political intervention, so it is not surprising that his innovative, exacting, and sometimes beguiling handling of narrative voice should attract the attention of specialists. His fiction remakes literary convention (in ways clearly indebted to the modernist techniques of Joyce, Kafka, Stein, and others) in a range of inter-

related ways: saturating third-person narration with first-person experience; using localized, oralized, and non-standard language to blur and expand the frontier of the “character zone” (effects of *skaz*); granting the authority of “external” reportage to the intimate narration of moment-to-moment consciousness (interior monologue, or perhaps dialogue; or “inner speech”). His controlled and variable narrative style is at its most effective when unperceived: Kelman often curtails the reader’s perception of any distinction between authorial and character discourse (see Klaus 1994 on “speaker-narrators,” cited under \*Introductions and Overviews\*), between outward and inward speech, between immanent mental experience and the reporting of thought. The sources in this section deploy a specialist vocabulary drawn from the fields of narratology, linguistics, and stylistics in analyzing and reconstructing these techniques. (The Bakhtin vogue of 1990s Scottish criticism is clearly evident and remains suggestive.) Gilbert 1999 applies J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory to the hollowed performative language of *How Late It Was, How Late*. Murphy 2003, Murphy 2006, and Murphy 2007 are lucid and detailed studies of Kelman’s early fiction, which accessibly explain the various stylistic frameworks employed. Renfrew 1997, Vice 1997, and Bittenbender 2000 make helpful use of M. M. Bakhtin/V. N. Vološinov in accounting for effects of dialogism, parody, and *skaz*. Rodger 1992 and Müller 2011 take a more descriptive approach to Kelman’s language, focusing on the representation of Glasgow voices and specific syntactic and grammatical markers of local speech. (By contrast, Vice 1997 argues that mimetic speech-realism is largely beside the point of Kelman’s writing; see also Gilbert 1999 and Hames 2010, cited under \*Introductions and Overviews\*.) Partly echoing Murphy 2007, Scott 2009 explores the constraints of Kelman’s demotic narrative style, as well as its strengths in authenticating the “folk-novel.”

Bittenbender, J. C. “Silence, Censorship and the Voices of *Skaz* in the Fiction of James Kelman.” *Bucknell University Review* 43.2 (2000): 150–165.

Takes up Bakhtin’s view of “the liberating forces of *skaz*”—where oralized expression has assumed the authority of writing, often to humorous or ironical effect—to read Kelman’s fictions as “virulent protests against sterile systems of limitation and linguistic authority.”

Gilbert, Geoff. “Can Fiction Swear? James Kelman and the Booker Prize.” In *An Introduction to Contemporary Fiction: International Writing in English Since 1970*. Edited by Rod Mengham, 219–234. Cambridge, UK: Polity, 1999. [ISBN: 9780745619576]

Employs J. L. Austin’s speech-act theory to explore performative language (and its failure) in *How Late It Was, How Late*. The performative utterance is “logically parasitical on ordinary circumstances”—a coherent “given” world refused by Kelman’s aesthetic, ushering “a turn towards a non-representational writing.”

Müller, Christine Amanda. *A Glasgow Voice: James Kelman’s Literary Language*. Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011.

Detailed empirical study of Kelman's literary language, centered on its closeness to Glasgow speech (based partly on corpus analysis). Surveys relevant debates in Scottish language, stylistic and sociolinguistic studies of non-standard orthography and swearing, and adapts para-linguistic models to interpret "body language" in Kelman's stories and novels.

Murphy, Terence Patrick. "Durational Realism? Voice Over Narrative in James Kelman's *An Old Pub Near the Angel, and Other Stories*." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 33.3 (2003): 335–355. [doi:10.1353/jnt.2010.0003]

Lucid analysis of "durational realism" in Kelman's earliest stories, where the narrating voice seems concurrent (or simultaneous) with the thoughts it conveys. Viewed via Bakhtinian "dialogism" and stylistic frameworks drawn from Michael Toolan and Gérard Genette, this technique is shown to realize "limited local movement forward in time to describe an arc of everyday experience" (as in Joyce's *Dubliners*) but also restricts narrative tempo. Available by subscription.

Murphy, Terence Patrick. "'Getting Rid of that Standard Third Party Narrative Voice': The Development of James Kelman's Early Authorial Style." *Language and Literature* 15.2 (2006): 183–199. [doi:10.1177/0963947006063746]

Detailed account of Kelman's key narrative techniques, chiefly "internal dialogic monologue," drawing on stylistic frameworks (Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short) with some comments on Kelman's affinity with Bakhtin. Focuses on changes to stories revised between publication in *An Old Pub Near the Angel* (1973) and *Not Not While the Giro* (1983), including "typographical and textual re-blocking as well as the reconfiguration of the relations between narrative voice, character zone and dialogic monologue." Available by subscription.

Murphy, Terence Patrick. "\*From Alignment to Commitment: The Early Work of James Kelman[[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Terence\\_Murphy4/publication/240641815\\_From\\_Alignment\\_to\\_Commitment\\_The\\_Early\\_Work\\_of\\_James\\_Kelman/links/55125d120cf20bfda5125a9/From-Alignment-to-Commitment-The-Early-Work-of-James-Kelman.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Terence_Murphy4/publication/240641815_From_Alignment_to_Commitment_The_Early_Work_of_James_Kelman/links/55125d120cf20bfda5125a9/From-Alignment-to-Commitment-The-Early-Work-of-James-Kelman.pdf)]\*." *Cultural Logic* 10 (Summer 2007).

Reconstructs Kelman's early narrative style using stylistic frameworks including Roger Fowler and Leech and Short, to show Kelman's continuities with "Joyce's strategic use of monitored speech." With close attention to Kelman's earliest stories, finds "occasional lapses into inauthentic choices . . . in the sudden appearance of the voice of the narrator in the zones of character interiority and in the parodic mimicry of the main character's speech." Overlaps with Murphy 2006.

Renfrew, Alastair. "Them and Us? Representation of Speech in Contemporary Scottish Fiction." In *Exploiting Bakhtin*. Edited by Alastair Renfrew, 15–28. Modern Language Series 2. Glasgow: Strathclyde, 1997. [ISBN: 9780951416433]

Explores Kelman's vocal debts and differences with Tom Leonard before a close examination of his "concentration on *inner speech*, steadfastly identified with the patterns of actual speech, and rendered in a free indirect form." Argues (via Bakhtin) that Scotland's "social heteroglossia . . . is transmuted by Kelman into a literary and cultural *schizoglossia*" and illustrates the variable and subtle "relationship between authorial and character speech" in *How Late It Was, How Late*.

Rodger, Liam. "Tense, Aspect and *The Busconductor Hines*—the Literary Function of Non-Standard Language in the Fiction of James Kelman." *Edinburgh Working Papers in Applied Linguistics* 3 (1992): 116–123.

Emphasizes the linguistic variation of Kelman's fiction, conceived as moving between "unadorned" and scrupulous description in standard English, the "everyday conversational language" of characters ("varieties of Glaswegian English/Scots"), and "the realm of parody and intertextual allusion." Draws on the stylistics of Leech and Short in examining "free indirect thought" in *The Busconductor Hines*, concluding that Kelman's fiction "is written in neither standard nor non-standard dialect" but "written *out of both*."

Scott, Jeremy. "How Late It Was, How Late for James Kelman's 'Folk Novel.'" In *The Demotic Voice in Contemporary British Fiction*, 92–124. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2009. [ISBN: 9780230217577][doi:10.1111/j.1741-4113.2005.00148.x]

Critically explores Kelman's use of demotic narrative style and the strengths and limitations of his various vocal techniques. Reads Kelman's "demotic direct discourse" in the spirit of the Bakhtinian *carnavalesque*: as "dialogic, subversive and transcending the division between written and oral through the absorption of the latter by the former." Available by subscription.

Vice, Sue. "Dialogism and Reported Speech in James Kelman's." In *Introducing Bakhtin*. By Sue Vice, 91–111. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1997.

Dialogic analysis of *How Late It Was, How Late*, which reads Kelman's "free direct discourse" via the narratology of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, and explores aspects of indirect discourse in narratorial reports which preserve "the colour and manner of speech." A rich engagement with Bakhtin and Vološinov, whose emphasis on "expressive" and stylized speech supports the argument that Kelman's most famously transgressive novel "does not, despite, or because of, appearances, aim for a realistic portrayal of spoken dialect."

### **Modernist and Existential Contexts**

Kelman's stylistic affinities with key modernist figures such as James Joyce, Franz Kafka, Samuel Beckett, Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and the early fiction of Ernest Hemingway have been clear from early in his career, though he prefers to locate his work in "two literary

traditions, the European Existential and the American Realist.” In fact, the interplay between these two traditions—and their respective emphases on fluid subjective experience and the minutiae of material reality; on the drama of “being” and the problem of textual mimesis; on the re-making of literary language and fidelity to demotic speech—only underscore the relevance to Kelman’s writing of that critical and literary movement we call “modernism” (a term Kelman distrusts). Milne 1992 is the strongest single reading of Kelman in this broad terrain, and the best place to begin. Shanks 2008 and Shanks 2008a examine Kelman’s debts to Joyce and Beckett (influences more often claimed than closely studied). Milne 2001 and Travis 2019 explore (and challenge) Kelman’s politics of form viewed through a modernist critical prism. Nicoll 2000 and Nicoll 2001 look squarely and incisively at Kelman’s existentialism, as a counter-reading to alleged nationalist appropriation of his literary politics. Nicoll 2010 is the clearest short explanation of the literary-philosophical heritage and stylistic implications of Kelman’s existentialism. Engledow 2002 mounts an original existential reading of Kelman’s critically neglected first novel (though published second), *A Chancer*, while Boxall 2010 highlights the continuing and perhaps heightened modernist influence in Kelman’s more recent novels.

Boxall, Peter. “Kelman’s Later Novels.” In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 31–41. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632] Reads the intimate dislocations and split subjects of *Translated Accounts*, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* and *Kieron Smith, Boy* in the wake of Emily Dickinson and Samuel Beckett. Includes some brilliant passages of sustained close reading.

Engledow, Sarah. “Studying Form: The Off-The-Page Politics of *A Chancer*.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 69–84.

Counters the apparent formalism of *A Chancer* by taking seriously the skill, freedom, and capitalist subversion of gambling, framed in existential terms. Viewing his risky lifestyle “as an expression of his agency, rather than his alienation,” we see Tammias successfully “sidestep the cultural expectations of his community without engaging in Meursault-style repudiation of its values” (compare Camus’s *The Stranger*).

Milne, Drew. “James Kelman: Dialectics of Urbanity.” *Swansea Review* 13 (1992): 393–407.

Locates Kelman within “a broader tension between what might crudely be called proletarian realism and experimental modernism,” emphasizing Kelman’s debts to Beckett and Kafka while linking his early writing with “international modernist attempts to understand and represent the metropolis” (Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Joyce; via Benjamin and Adorno).

Milne, Drew. “Broken English: James Kelman’s *Translated Accounts*.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2001): 106–115.

Reads the most “difficult” and discomfiting Kelman novel as a heightening of his literary modernism. *Translated Accounts* “reinvents the Kafkaesque” and anchors its troubling



emotional weight in “negative worlds” modeled by Beckett’s *The Unnameable*. Further affinities with Harold Pinter, John Berger, and Vaclav Havel counter a distorting critical emphasis on Kelman’s Scottishness.

Nicoll, Laurence. “‘This is Not a Nationalist Position’: James Kelman’s Existential Voice.” *Edinburgh Review* 103 (2000): 79–84.

Argues against the reductive “nationalising” of Kelman’s politics and art in earlier criticism and shows that Kelman’s opposition to cultural “colonisation” derives not from Scottish patriotism, nor the influence of precursors such as MacDiarmid, but his deep allegiance to the existential tradition.

Nicoll, Laurence. “Gogol’s Overcoat: Kelman *Resartus*.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2001): 116–122.

Rejecting simplistic readings of Kelman’s Scottishness (including Böhnke 1999, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Scottish Contexts\*), Nicoll posits an alternate genealogy for Kelman’s aesthetic of “negative apprehension.” Viewed in existential terms, his work aligns more readily with 19th-century Russian writing (Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Gogol), and its movement “from the historical to the daily, from the abstract to the concrete, from the general to the specific.” A development of Nicoll 2000.

Nicoll, Laurence. “Kelman and the Existentialists.” In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 121–130. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Outlines Kelman’s debts and contribution to the existential tradition, treated both as a philosophical school (Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Sartre, Camus) and a more personal “counter-canon” of marginal literature centered on “the problematic everyday” (Katherine Anne Porter, Flannery O’Connor, Tillie Olsen, Sherwood Anderson). The best starting point on this topic.

Shanks, Paul. “Joycean Form in James Kelman’s Early Fiction.” In *What Rough Beasts: Irish and Scottish Studies in the New Millennium*. Edited by Shane Alcobia-Murphy, 183–195.

Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2008. [ISBN: 9781847185365]

Detailed study of Kelman’s early interior monologues in the wake of Joyce’s *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, and the more subtle and controlled effects of free indirect discourse in *The Busconductor Hines*. This approach follows Kelman’s own, well-merited claim in McLean 1985 (cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction\*) that “what what I do in *Hines* Joyce does not do in *Ulysses*, but I really do think he would have liked to have done that (*Laughter*).”

Shanks, Paul. “The Unnamed Itinerant in Samuel Beckett’s Novellas and James Kelman’s *Lean Tales*.” *Scottish Studies Review* 9.2 (2008a): 109–127.

Focused exploration of Kelman's often-claimed but under-researched affinities with Beckett (echoes which Kelman himself tends to downplay). Close readings of the "minute epiphanies" of *Lean Tales* show effects of negation, silence, indeterminacy and ellipsis which smack strongly of Beckett's novellas.

Travis, Anna. "\*Interior Monologue as Social Critique in James Kelman's *How Late It Was, How Late* [<https://journals.openedition.org/ebc/6857>].\*" *Études britanniques contemporaines* 56 (2019).

Views the narrative style of *How Late* ("direct interior monologue") in late modernist and Althusserian terms. Rather than "producing an interior monologue which performs a philosophical dismantling of the self as a coherent self-contained subjectivity" (as in Beckett), the novel "presents a stark return to literary presentations of the individual struggling to attain authenticity, whilst fatally determined by their social context."

### **Kelman's Activism and Polemics**

The sources in this section examine Kelman's work as a principled controversialist and public campaigner, exploring his widely admired political activism and alleged weaknesses of his polemical style. Carter 2010 is a sympathetic overview of this ground, with Freeman 2002 and Eagleton 2003 the sharpest critiques (see also Nicoll 2010, cited under \*Critical Contexts: Modernist and Existential Contexts\*). Nicoll 2000 explores the rhetorical limitations imposed by Kelman's existentialism, and Klaus 2005 explores the presence in Kelman's fiction of his essentially anarchist view of power, authority and representation. Miller and Rodger 2011 is a book-length study and appreciation of Kelman as a committed local activist; it includes a wealth of archival detail. Miller and Rodger 2012 develops this reading to highlight wily "tactics" and the activism of everyday survival in Kelman's fiction.

Carter, Mia. "Kelman's Critical and Polemical Writing." In *Edinburgh Companion to James Kelman*. Edited by Scott Hames, 53–64. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010. [ISBN: 9780748639632]

Explores the rhetorical strengths and disruptions of Kelman's essays, and the place of passionate ethical commitment in his "angry" public image. Sympathetic while noting that "aspects of his style attempt to convert vehemence into rational argument."

Eagleton, Terry. "James Kelman." In *Figures of Dissent: Critical Essays on Fish, Spivak, Zizek and Others*. By Terry Eagleton, 263–265. London: Verso, 2003. [ISBN: 9781859843888]  
Reviews the essays of Kelman 2008 (cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, Nonfiction\*), admiring the activist's commitment while decrying the author's stridency: Kelman "caricatures

the opposition and buys his victories on the cheap.” Countered in Gearhart 2010, (cited under \*By Period and Form: *How Late It Was, How Late* and the Booker Prize Controversy\*).

Freeman, Alan. “The Humanist’s Dilemma: A Polemic Against Kelman’s Polemics.” *Edinburgh Review* 108 (2002): 28–40.

Takes Kelman to task for sweeping “us and them” rhetoric in his political essays. In his polemics, “complexity of perception is complicity with the enemy and engagement with individuality, the crucial balancing element in Kelman’s fiction, is set aside.” (Echoes Douglas Dunn’s 1993 review of Kelman 1992 (cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, and Nonfiction\*): “it’s remarkable for a novelist . . . especially a fine one, to be seen trading with blatantly Manichaeian counters.”) Countered in Miller and Rodger 2011.

Klaus, H. Gustav. “Anti-Authoritarianism in the Later Fiction of James Kelman.” In “*To Hell with Culture*”: *Anarchism and Twentieth-Century British Literature*. Edited by H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight, 162–177. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005. [ISBN: 9781423741732]

Clearly presents the anti-bureaucratic side of Kelman’s literary politics through readings of *A Disaffection*, *How Late*, and *Translated Accounts*. “Steeped in the anti-expert Scottish common-sense philosophy,” Kelman (and his narrators) scorn the “mystifications and hair-splitting arguments” of officials, lawyers, and guilty intellectuals.

Miller, Mitch, and Johnny Rodger. *The Red Cockatoo: James Kelman and the Art of Commitment*. Dingwall, UK: Sandstone Press, 2011. [ISBN: 9781905207763]

Engaging study of Kelman’s campaigning and activism, seeking to counter any suggestion (as in Freeman 2001) that Kelman’s “nonfiction writings are a pollutant that diminishes his stature.” Includes a detailed documentary study of the 1990 “Self-Determination and Power” conference held at the Pearce Institute in Govan, Glasgow (famously attended by Noam Chomsky), in which Kelman played a key organizing role.

Miller, Mitch, and Johnny Rodger. “The Writer as Tactician: The Everyday Practice of James Kelman.” *Scottish Literary Review* 4.1 (2012): 151–168.

Re-centers Kelman’s activism and nonfiction (thus overlapping with Miller and Rodger 2011). The moral vision of Noam Chomsky, Kelman has argued, centers on “the apparently obvious point that people can think for themselves” (Kelman 2008, cited under \*Kelman Essays, Interviews, Nonfiction\*). Applying this lens to the fiction, we glimpse Kelman’s protagonists as continuous with his own work as a campaigner: “active, independent users” of urban space and urban language, wily and relentless tacticians of everyday living (as theorized by Michel de Certeau).

Nicoll, Laurence. “‘This is Not a Nationalist Position’: James Kelman’s Existential Voice.”  
*Edinburgh Review* 103 (2000): 79–84.

A blast against early Kelman criticism’s “inability to think outwith a critical taxonomy the parameters of which are set by concepts of ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism,’” which (Nicoll argues) lead to drastic misreadings of Kelman’s political thought. Traces Kelman’s anticolonial stance and “politicised aesthetic” to an existential conception of freedom, which entails specific stylistic and rhetorical prohibitions (e.g., banning metaphor as well as essentialist social and national labels).