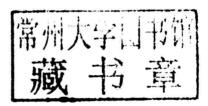
ContemporaryLiterary Criticism

CLC 388

# Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights, Short-Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and Other Creative Writers

Lawrence J. Trudeau EDITOR



Produced in association with Layman Poupard Publishing



#### Contemporary Literary Criticism, Vol. 388

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WCN: 01-100-101

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Gale 27500 Drake Rd. Farmington Hills, MI, 48331-3535

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 76-46132

ISBN-13: 978-1-4103-1234-1

ISSN: 0091-3421

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### **Preface**

amed "one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years" by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (*CLC*) series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 3,000 authors from 91 countries now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Before the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially necessary to today's reader.

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Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews selected from hundreds of review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning an author's career from its inception to current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other works that offer insight into the author's works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

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Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hébert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82. Print.

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## **Contemporary Scottish Novelists**

The following entry provides criticism of recent novelists whose works reflect trends in Scotland's literature, including a reassessment of Scottish nationalism and Scottish history, examination of the impact of political and social change on individuals and communities, and formal experimentation.

#### INTRODUCTION

In the last four decades writers from Scotland have produced novels addressing a broad range of national, social, political, and cultural issues, from depictions of working-class life, such as James Kelman's *The Busconductor Hines* (1984), to reexaminations of history, exemplified by James Robertson's *Joseph Knight* (2003). In addition, contemporary Scottish novelists have explored a variety of transgressive behaviors and dysfunctional communities, often—as in Irvine Welsh's *Trainspotting* (1993) or Jackie Kay's *Trumpet* (1998)—taking unexpected approaches to such issues as addiction, prejudice, and gender identity. The writers discussed in this entry articulate a complex national consciousness that loosely defines them as a group and has attracted the attention of literary critics.

The late-twentieth-century flowering of Scottish literature was tied to renewed interest in Scottish nationalism, which includes the contentious issue of a distinctive Scottish identity and history, along with the argument for increased political independence. In the twentieth century, many in Scotland have advocated the return of home rule—that is, the reestablishment of a Scottish parliament that would have local jurisdiction—or even a total withdrawal from Great Britain. In 1945 the pro-independence Scottish National Party won its first seat in Parliament, advocating for "devolution," a process by which certain powers would devolve from the British Parliament to a Scottish parliament. The first referendum on devolution, held in 1979, was defeated, which some attributed to Scotland's failure to maintain and expand its identity as a culture. During the 1980s, Scotland underwent a national self-critique that found its expression in part through literature. Robert Morace (2011) argued for the ambivalence of "devolution" as a signifier. In his analysis of the work of Robertson, Morace noted that the term suggests "both progress and regression," and "signifies both a break with the past three centuries of Union and a return of the repressed, of a Scotland that had existed solely as a 'state of mind.'

In addition to the psychological effects of the failed referendum, many in Scotland suffered under the ascendancy of Conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher, whose

focus on privatization, deregulation, the marginalization of labor unions, and the dismantling of welfare programs ultimately contributed to increased poverty and alienation. Lack of employment and the fragmentation of traditional social networks fostered disaffection among Scotland's young people, who were affected by Thatcher's economic policies and rejected her government's social conservatism. This bleak situation formed the background against which Scottish novelists began crafting new directions for their national literature. The early work of Muriel Spark is generally understood to prefigure later shifts in Scottish literature. Her novel, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (1961) with its complex narrative and psychological concerns, anticipated the stylistic and thematic experimentation that characterize Scottish novels of the following decades. William McIlvanney published two influential novels in the 1970s: Docherty (1975), a moving and realistic story of one miner and his family during the Great Depression, and the crime novel Laidlaw (1977), which introduced an unconventional detective working in a gritty urban setting.

Many contemporary Scottish novelists produced works that reflect the experience of working-class people struggling under the economic problems of the late twentieth century. Kelman's The Busconductor Hines portrays the inner life of a working-class character, who attempts in his ruminations to connect personal experience with a larger sphere of meaning as he struggles to keep his job and his family. The novel employs free indirect speech, third-person narration that integrates a character's internal thoughts seamlessly into the narrative. Kelman's stylistic experimentation also included the incorporation of Hines's Glaswegian dialect, resulting in a mixture of high and low speech that lends texture to the novel and suggests the continued relevance of Scottish language traditions. Janice Galloway was the first woman to be widely recognized as belonging to the recent cohort of Scottish novelists. Her debut work, The Trick Is to Keep Breathing, appeared in 1989, and like The Busconductor Hines, it utilizes sophisticated literary techniques and focuses on the inner experience of a working-class character. Galloway's protagonist struggles with depression, an eating disorder, family dysfunction, a lost love, and a tangle of sexual relationships. A. L. Kennedy covered similar themes in her first novel, Looking for the Possible Dance (1993), which explores a young Scottish woman's relationships with men in general and her father in particular. Kirsten Stirling (2006; see Further Reading) analyzed the role of lying in that work and in Kennedy's 1995 novel So I Am Glad. Stirling argued that Kennedy's "inquiry into the status of lies and freedom ... covers a whole spectrum of possibilities, from the shared lie which becomes beautiful, to the communal lie which becomes horror." Martyn

Colebrook (2013) found different approaches to the problems of postindustrial society in Lanark (1981) by Alasdair Gray and The Bridge (1986) by Iain Banks. He argued that "Gray places responsibility on the society from which the individual is produced whereas Banks adopts a contrasting position by emphasizing the role of the individual in changing the society around them, or at least making an attempt to extricate themselves from this society." McIlvanney's The Kiln (1996) explored the midlife reflections of Tam Docherty, a grandson of the family introduced twenty years earlier in McIlvanney's first novel. Gerard Carruthers (2006; see Further Reading) maintained that the work "investigates those large imponderables of the late twentieth century, value and reality, and interrogates both from the perspective of what it means to be part of a community as well as a creative artist."

The decade of the 1990s was marked by two high-profile and highly controversial works: Trainspotting, the debut novel by Irvine Welsh, and Kelman's How Late It Was, How Late (1994). Both are chronicles of decay, focusing on characters at the margins of a disordered society. Although some commentators praised the originality, edginess, and social realism of the two novels, others sharply criticized their bleakness and pervasive use of obscenity. When How Late It Was, How Late became the first Scottish novel to win the Booker Prize, many critics expressed outrage, and their well-publicized objections underscored the differences between the British literary establishment and the aggressive, boundary-breaking novelists of Scotland. Jennifer M. Jeffers (2005) contended that Trainspotting depicts "the situation for those economically stymied by Thatcherite era policies and opportunities, and culturally adrift with a borrowed language and an invented heritage." In an analysis of How Late It Was, How Late and other works by Kelman, Mary McGlynn (2002) argued that the author's "reworkings of narrative control, genre conventions, and lexical norms generate a form which inextricably links critiques of Britain's class system and a literary canon with its own notions of the working-class writer." Another provocative work, Alan Warner's first novel, Morvern Callar (1995), features a heroine who finds her boyfriend dead, chops up his body, appropriates his money, and publishes his novel under her own name. Jordana Brown (2006; see Further Reading) argued that the novel was widely misinterpreted, and that the protagonist's actions are not amoral but instead reflect her quest for a spiritual identity that Scotland cannot give her.

Contemporary Scottish writers have also produced innovative genre novels, particularly in the areas of crime fiction, science fiction, and fantasy. The most widely recognized category of Scottish genre fiction is "Tartan noir," a style that Matthew McGuire (2014; see Further Reading) glossed as a "fusion of US hard-boiled fiction with the political and cultural specificity of Scotland in the late twentieth century." The term was coined by James Ellroy (or suggested to him by Ian Rankin himself) to describe Rankin's best-

selling Inspector Rebus series, which follows the brilliant but complicated Detective Sergeant John Rebus as he investigates crimes in contemporary Edinburgh. Whereas the detective fiction pioneered by such writers as Arthur Conan Doyle focused primarily on individual cases, Rankin's novels, influenced by American writers, take a broader approach. Christopher Kydd (2010; see Further Reading) argued that Rankin is interested in "wider networks of criminal activity, institutional corruption, and cases of pervasive, culturally-ingrained societal injustice in which every member of the amoral urban community is complicit." In his study of the early Rebus novels Knots and Crosses (1987) and Hide and Seek (1990), Kydd analyzed how Rankin reveals the poverty, corruption, and crime that persist in the ghettos of the "famously cultural, refined, picturesque, tourist-populated, and historical city" of Edinburgh. Matthew Wickman (2013; see Further Reading) emphasized the influence of such writers as Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler on McIlvanney's novel Laidlaw. He contrasted Sherlock Holmes's "hermeneutical triumphalism"-his status as a "master reader" able to "discern salient patterns amidst a heap of extraneous details"—with Laidlaw's eponymous protagonist, who more closely resembles the typical hard-boiled American sleuth, involving himself in "the situation he analyses" and contaminating the crime scene. Eleanor Bell (2008) identified this feature as a critical element of modern crime fiction. Just as Rebus must continue despite his own mistakes and the impossibility of definitively containing evil, Bell argued, "the ethical challenge placed on the reader is to attempt to make sense of the 'messy complexities' of these texts, yet with the ultimate knowledge that such readings must always remain provisional." Peter Clandfield (2012) studied the representation of female detectives in the works of authors Denise Mina and Karen Campbell. He credited Mina and Campbell with combating not only the inherent sexism of the crime genre, but also the threat of "merely replacing the 'hard man' with the 'hard woman' or of making over an old-boys' club into a gender-neutral network of careerists still obstructive of genuine justice."

Scottish science-fiction writers have also used their works as vehicles for a critique of modern life. Whereas Rankin and others accomplish this by emphasizing the dark, ignored aspects of society, science-fiction authors often employ the technique of estranging the present by projecting it into the future. The best-known example of estrangement in recent Scottish literature can be found in Banks's sciencefiction novels that focus on "the Culture," which William Stephenson (2013) described as "a non-hierarchical, loosely affiliated collective of humans, quasi-humans and machines (mostly sentient drones and super-powerful Minds) living in symbiosis." Stephenson examined Banks's contradictory representation of the Culture as both a pacifistic utopia and a militaristic machine. He emphasized the gap between self-image and practice in the Culture novels, a problem he associated with the activities of Western powers during the Cold War and the War on Terror. John Garrison

(2012) found parallels between the portrayal of future societies in Banks's work and Scotland's present-day relationship with Britain and the rest of the world. Lisa Harrison (2012) discussed the work of relative newcomers, including Matthew Fitt's *But n Ben A-Go-Go* (2000) and Andrew Crumey's *Sputnik Caledonia* (2008). She argued that Fitt and Crumey seek to dismantle stereotypes associated with Scotland and its culture and history. Harrison suggested that these authors' "conception of a future Scotland devoid of such stereotypes obliquely calls into question their power to define the boundaries of 'Scottishness.'"

A new wave of women authors emerged at the turn of the twenty-first century. Kay's first novel, Trumpet, is a narrative of race, gender, and jazz, based on the true story of Billy Tipton, a musician who was assigned female at birth but who lived his adult life as a man. Louise Welsh debuted in 2002 with The Cutting Room, a Gothic-tinged psychological thriller about the sexual underworld. Gavin Miller (2006) placed that work among "a strand of post-war Scottish writing that focuses on the phenomenology of personal relations, and on how, in particular, other people may be depersonalized, rather than encountered in an 'I-thou' relationship." The Accidental (2005), Ali Smith's first widely recognized novel, was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 2005. Using postmodern techniques such as narrative fragmentation and intertextuality, the book traces the effects of a curious event on the members of an ordinary family, engaging readers in a puzzle about the nature of representation. Julia Breitbach (2012) noted that Smith's work "emphatically promotes the power of words to also reach beyond the stereotypical smooth surfaces of postmodern consumer culture, visual overkill, and free-floating signifiers-pointing toward, indeed, a more authentic, immediate way both of experiencing contemporary reality and of speaking, or writing, about it." Women writers who debuted in the 1980s and 1990s gained further recognition for their work in the twenty-first century. Galloway received the Scottish Book of the Year Award in 2002 for Clara (2002), a complex fictional portrait drawn from the life of pianist and composer Clara Schumann. Kennedy won the same award in 2007 for Day, a work that concerns the consciousness of a World War II tailgunner and prisoner of war, who later works as an extra in a movie about prisoners of war. Both novels reflect a trend in twenty-first-century Scottish fiction toward the exploration of history, rather than the explication of current conditions, and toward a larger engagement with the world outside of Scotland. Another work in this vein is Robertson's Joseph Knight, a novel about the slave trade in eighteenth-century Scotland. Robertson examines Scottish complicity in British imperialism and calls into question certain assumptions upon which modern Scottish nationalism is based. Carla Sassi (2007) argued that the novel "articulates a celebration of literary justice which, unlike legal justice, performs an appeal to a universal, rational order of justice" in which the private and the public are indivisibly connected.

Cynthia Giles

#### REPRESENTATIVE WORKS

#### **Iain Banks**

The Wasp Factory. London: Macmillan, 1984. Print.

Walking on Glass. London: Macmillan, 1985. Print.

The Bridge. London: Macmillan, 1986. Print.

\*Consider Phlebas. London: Macmillan, 1987. Print.

\*The Player of Games. London: Macmillan, 1988. Print.

\*Use of Weapons. London: Orbit, 1990. Print.

The Crow Road. London: Scribner, 1992. Print.

Complicity. London: Little, Brown, 1993. Print.

Feersum Endjinn. London: Orbit, 1994. Print.

\*Look to Windward. London: Orbit, 2000. Print.

The Algebraist. London: Orbit, 2004. Print.

#### John Burnside

The Dumb House. London: Cape, 1997. Print.

Living Nowhere. London: Cape, 2003. Print.

Glister. London: Cape, 2008. Print.

#### Karen Campbell

The Twilight Time. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2008.

After the Fire. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009. Print.

Shadowplay. London: Hodder, 2010. Print.

#### **Andrew Crumey**

Sputnik Caledonia. London: Picador, 2008. Print.

#### **Matthew Fitt**

But n Ben A-Go-Go. Edinburgh: Luath, 2000. Print.

#### Janice Galloway

*The Trick Is to Keep Breathing*. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1989. Print.

Clara. London: Cape, 2002. Print.

#### Alasdair Gray

Lanark: A Life in Four Books. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1981. Print.

1982, Janine. London: Cape, 1984. Print.

#### CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH NOVELISTS

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A History Maker. Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994. Print.

#### Jackie Kay

Trumpet. London: Picador, 1998. Print.

#### James Kelman

The Busconductor Hines. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1984. Print.

A Chancer. Edinburgh: Polygon, 1985. Print.

A Disaffection. London: Secker and Warburg, 1989. Print.

How Late It Was, How Late. London: Secker and Warburg, 1994. Print.

Translated Accounts. London: Secker and Warburg, 2001. Print.

Kieron Smith, Boy. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2008. Print.

#### A. L. Kennedy

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So I Am Glad. London: Cape, 1995. Print.

Everything You Need. London: Cape, 1999. Print.

Paradise. London: Cape, 2004. Print.

Day. London: Cape, 2007. Print.

#### William McIlvanney

Docherty. London: Allen and Unwin, 1975. Print.

Laidlaw. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977. Print.

The Big Man. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985. Print.

The Kiln. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996. Print.

#### **Denise Mina**

†Garnethill. New York: Carroll and Graf, 1998. Print.

†Exile. London: Bantam, 2000. Print.

†Resolution. London: Carroll and Graf, 2001. Print.

Still Midnight. London: Orion, 2009. Print.

#### Ian Rankin

‡Knots and Crosses. London: Bodley Head, 1987. Print. ‡Hide and Seek. London: Orion, 1990. Print. ‡Wolfman. London: Century, 1992. Pub. as Tooth and Nail. New York: St. Martin's, 1996. Print.

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‡Black and Blue. London: Orion, 1997. Print.

‡Set in Darkness. London: Orion, 2000. Print.

‡Fleshmarket Close. London: Orion, 2004. Print.

‡The Naming of the Dead. London: Orion, 2006. Print.

‡Exit Music. London: Orion, 2007. Print.

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And the Land Lay Still. London: Penguin, 2010. Print.

The Professor of Truth. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013. Print.

#### Ali Smith

Hotel World. New York: Anchor, 2001. Print.

The Accidental. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2005. Print.

Girl Meets Boy: The Myth of Iphis. New York: Canongate, 2007. Print.

#### **Muriel Spark**

The Comforters. London: Macmillan, 1957. Print.

Robinson: A Novel. London: Macmillan, 1958. Print.

The Ballad of Peckham Rye. London: Macmillan, 1960. Print.

The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. London: Macmillan, 1961. Print.

The Driver's Seat. London: Macmillan, 1970. Print.

Not to Disturb. London: Macmillan, 1971. Print.

The Hothouse by the East River. London: Macmillan, 1973. Print.

Territorial Rights. London: Macmillan, 1979. Print.

The Finishing School. New York: Doubleday, 2004. Print.

#### Alan Warner

Morvern Callar. London: Cape, 1995. Print.

These Demented Lands. London: Cape, 1997. Print.

The Sopranos. London: Cape, 1998. Print.

The Man Who Walked. London: Cape, 2002. Print.

The Dead Man's Pedal. London: Cape, 2012. Print.

#### **Irvine Welsh**

Trainspotting. London: Secker and Warburg, 1993. Print.

Marabou Stork Nightmares. London: Cape, 1995. Print.

Filth. London: Cape, 1998. Print.

Glue. London: Cape, 1998. Print.

Porno. London: Cape, 2002. Print.

The Bedroom Secrets of the Master Chefs. London: Cape,

2006. Print.

Crime. London: Cape, 2008. Print.

Skagboys. London: Cape, 2012. Print.

The Sex Lives of Siamese Twins. London: Cape, 2014.

Print.

A Decent Ride. London: Cape, 2015. Print.

#### Louise Welsh

The Cutting Room. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2002. Print.

\*These novels are part of the Culture series.

†These novels are referred to as the Garnethill trilogy.

‡These novels are part of the Inspector Rebus series.

#### POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

#### Stephen Bernstein (essay date 2000)

SOURCE: Bernstein, Stephen. "James Kelman." *Review of Contemporary Fiction* 20.3 (2000): 42-79. Print.

[In the following excerpt, Bernstein approaches Kelman's novels in the context of his overall achievement as a writer, tracing the emergence of a single vision expressed through subject, style, and political commitment.]

#### EARLY NOVELS

During the period from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, when Kelman's first collections of stories were appearing, he was also working on the longer narratives that would become *The Busconductor Hines* and *A Chancer*. In a 1984 interview Kelman states that he had begun "at least a couple of pages" of *The Busconductor Hines* ten years earlier, and in a part of the same interview conducted a year later the thirty-eight-year-old Kelman tells his twenty-one-year-old interviewer, Duncan McLean, that he had been at work on *A Chancer* "when I was your age" ("James Kelman Interviewed" 72-73), which would date some of the novel's composition as early as the late-1960s. These dates help one to see how it is that even in his first two novels Kelman approaches the genre with striking skill and assurance, as the lengthy incubation periods of both narratives

allowed their author to master a number of technical and thematic challenges.

The Busconductor Hines is the first published of these two novels and stands as a fully realized project. The novel presents an account of the life of its eponymous character, Rab Hines, as he works on the buses, spends time at home with his wife and son, and makes various journeys about Glasgow. The subject matter is unsensational though the novel moves toward a series of increasingly decisive moments: Hines's fear, as he sits home alone, that his wife has left him; or his last showdown with his bosses at the bus company. What Kelman is at least as interested in, though, is the movement of Hines's mind, and it is in this novel that one finds the full flowering of a technique of focalization Kelman began to use as early as the first story in his first book. In "The Cards," as Jake Duncan is fired from his job on the buses, the third-person narrator reports, "Duncan felt the blood roaring through his head. Christ what an insult. It really was" (Old Pub 8). The second and third sentences of this passage demonstrate the flexibility of the third-person point of view that Kelman goes on to develop at such length in Hines [The Busconductor Hines] and later novels. An offshoot of the French style indirect libre, or free indirect speech, this technique allows the language and mood of the character at hand to color the the narrator's diction. But while "The Cards" adheres pretty closely to a traditional style indirect libre, in Hines it has metamorphosed into something quite different. Nearly every page of the novel affords examples of a style that allows the point of view to shift freely from third to first person and back again. Sometimes this circuit is brief: "[Hines] grinned at the pair of them. Perhaps a brief account of the future was in order. Then you're a grandfather and dead thank christ. He shook his head" (115-16). But at others the narrative voice might move into Hines's mind for lengthy periods:

Now what he really does wish to know is a problem. Upon receipt of a genuine problem he can provide an answer. Books were tried. Books are fucking hopeless. Maybe he was reading the wrong ones. Not at all. He was reading particular books after a particular method. Now this method, this method is relevant, it is relevant to eh o jesus jesus jesus how long to journey now sir is it nearly over now sir or only just beginning sir I mean aye, the younger Hines, the wee man, he keeps fucking sprouting sir he cant be stopped, he keeps on at it, the growing, he was thinking of watering his milk—Hines—he was thinking of a million things but what he will probably do is leave everything to nature, toss him a few items and let him get ahead with it.

(101)

Passages like this exemplify Kelman's desire to eradicate the narrator, or at least to achieve an almost seamless movement between the third and first persons. This process concerns not only narrative technique but politics as well, since the point for Kelman is to get away from values imposed by the external narrator so that his fiction can explore the world of the individual character in a manner uncolored by ideological biases. As he puts it, "Getting rid of that standard third party narrative voice is getting rid of a whole value system" ("Interview with James Kelman" 4). Whether such objective writing can exist in its purest form is beside the point; the project for Kelman is at least to push toward that realization, as the "'third party voice' ... is totally biased and elitist, economically secure, eats good food and plenty of it, is upper middle class paternalist" ("Interview with James Kelman" 5). The result of the formulaic adoption of this voice is fiction wherein writers never question their values, endorsing and transmitting them repeatedly through the "commonsense" assumptions of their narrators. Kelman, meanwhile, will attempt a traversal of voices and registers such that, as the critic Cairns Craig puts it, "the text ... constructs a linguistic unity which resists the fragmentation and isolation that the novels chart as the experience of their characters. ... [T]he text enacts at a linguistic level what it points to as absent in the world, a communality that transcends the absolute isolation of the individual human being" ("Resisting" 104).

To be sure, both The Busconductor Hines and A Chancer relentlessly dramatize a world of chilling isolation, even though it is only in *Hines* that the narrative technique I have just been discussing is used at length. If that novel is an extremely inward narrative, A Chancer is a very outward one. Kelman describes its composition as "writing with one arm tied behind your back" ("Interview with James Kelman" 8) since the narrative does its best to stay resolutely out of the thoughts of its protagonist, Tammas. Even here, though, there is room for some inwardness, as late in the novel Tammas thinks over a bet: "You had to make your selection and stick to it. There was nothing else you could do. There was nothing else, nothing at all. A mistake to even think like that" (296). The rest of the time, though, the third-person narrator reports Tammas's actions in a strenuously blank style, Kelman's attempt to rid his prose of the value-laden descriptives that convey ideological baggage. Taken together these various narrative strategies give proof of Cairns Craig's assertion that "The vitality of Kelman's prose comes precisely from his refusal to accept any standard for the narrative voice in his novels: narrator, character, language—all explore what happens when you cease to accept fixed positions in a structure but move restlessly between them" (Out of History 94-95).

But what of the stories Kelman has to tell in these narratives? As *The Busconductor Hines* relates the events of several days of Rab Hines's life, it delineates the realities of anxiety, boredom, comedy, suffering, and compassion in his world. Hines is a thinker persistently concerned with the ontological dimensions of his existence at the same time that he must limit these habits of mind in order to conduct his daily business. The result of this balancing act is a demeanor that results in constant charges against Hines of sarcasm and verbal cruelty. Due to repeated lateness and absences, his job is in jeopardy; because of earlier

firings, this is his last chance working for the transport company. On top of these problems the days of the two-man conductor/driver system are ending, and Hines cannot qualify to go to driver's school. His marriage, loving as it is, is in trouble as well, largely due to the couple's precarious financial situation and poor living conditions. Hines loves his wife Sandra and four-year-old son Paul but with a love powerless to have any strong effect on the difficulties of his job or on how he can manage those difficulties. He occasionally entertains the idea of emigration to Australia, but not with any particular seriousness.

Amid these problems and concerns the narrative moves toward a set of showdowns. Fearing Sandra has left him Hines spends a long evening alone in their apartment, finally breaking down and crying. She returns and there is a warm reconciliation, but the recognition of difficulties remains. Shortly after this crisis Hines is involved in a controversy over whether he should report for a disciplinary hearing on his own time or while on the clock. The argument becomes, briefly, a cause célèbre as an impromptu union meeting is held and a strike vote taken. In the event Hines suddenly quits; the novel ends with him back on the bus, working one of the final shifts of a two-week notice.

To underscore the importance of a family, Kelman begins and ends almost every chapter of The Busconductor Hines (the only one of his novels to have chapters) with domestic scenes. These help make clear the level of commitment in the family structure as well as the immense pressures Hines faces to continue in his various roles. Some talk in the novel about buying a gun casts a shadow over possible outcomes, but like so many of Hines's mental journeys the plan-if it even is one-goes nowhere. Another recurrent image in the novel is water, from the cauldron of boiling water Sandra prepares to pour into a small bathtub on the opening page, to the rain that forces Hines and his co-workers into a park shelter to drink, to the swimming pool he takes Paul to near the end of the novel. There is no traditional baptism or absolution in these images, however; they appear as a tacitly ironic commentary on the fallen world the novel so relentlessly depicts. It is only Hines's sense of humor that finally seems to have any possibility of saving him and his relationships, but the novel does not close with any promise of future happiness.

A Chancer ends on a provisionally happier note, but not without having first painted a comparably dark picture of the possibilities in life. The young protagonist Tammas is the novel's chancer, a gambler who nevertheless resents the name: "That's terrible. Naw, no kidding ye" (286). Kelman presents Tammas, as I've said, almost completely externally, a tactic that puts readers in an interesting position. On one hand, we can follow Tammas's movements and actions very clearly; he is in virtually every scene in the novel. But at the same time, Tammas's thinking remains, if not mysterious, at least opaque. The logic of