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Stateless Nation / Nationless State: History, Anomaly and Devolution in Scottish and Northern Irish Writing

Aaron Kelly

Both Scotland and Northern Ireland have long been the site of dominant, sedimented discourses claiming their historical anomaly within a broader framework of the normal development of the nation state. It is devolution in both cases which supposedly helps wrestle Scotland and the North of Ireland toward a liberal, democratic historical norm. For example, with regard to Scotland, David McCrone's work is paradigmatic in establishing a sense of a pre-devolution Scotland without its own political institutions as a *stateless nation*, a nation without a state. By implication, then, Scotland stands as an anomaly, a miscarried version of the normative process by which historical development reconciles nation with state, state with nation. By extension, devolution permits at least some democratic redress. And in relation to the normal model of the nation state, so too Northern Ireland appears anomalous. For is Northern Ireland a nation? Not really, it is rather, at the very least, the collision of two nations, and, in the Peace Process, the duty of care of two nation states (the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic). So the Northern Irish state, according to the normative model of historical development, is a state without a nation, a *nationless state*. Perhaps most notably, David Lloyd deems the 'post-colonial moment' of collision to produce an *anomalous state* in regard to the North.[1] This essay seeks to contest the effort to regard Scotland and the North of Ireland in terms of peculiarity and anomaly and suggests instead that specificity and intensity should be the terms of engagement. In particular, I challenge the democratic credentials of mainstream devolution by first undermining the normative historical paradigms upon which its enfranchisement is based. Such paradigms of historical development, I suggest, both maintain and repress specific sets of social inequality that are perpetuated rather than restituted by institutional devolution of power in contemporary Britain. By examining the live antagonisms of Scottish and Northern Irish writing it is also possible to resist peculiarising both cultures and societies, and in doing so, to refract instead the questions they raise back upon the codes of historical

[1] David Lloyd, *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-Colonial Moment* (Dublin, 1993), 10.

normality against which they are judged and to undermine those paradigms of normalcy.

In terms of Scottish writing, the sitting of a devolved parliament on 12 May 1999 and the onset of the twenty-first century have elicited numerous re-positionings and re-periodizations of Scotland and its culture. In an example that is typical, Catherine Lockerbie, director of the Edinburgh International Book Festival, has commented in conversation with Alan Massie that

> now devolution has been achieved, people don't have to prove they are Scottish writers anymore . . . I think we've moved on from the days of the stereotypical writer. Young writers don't have to write those quasi-political novels. I think we'll find something more interesting and individual from them, rather than following that old path. The chip on the shoulder has been turned into a twiglet if you like and the Scottish cultural cringe has certainly diminished.[2]

There are a number of complacent assumptions in this statement concerning the relationship of culture, pre- and post-devolution, to politics and socio-economics which need to be unpacked. Firstly, the designation of pre-devolution writing as 'quasi-political' seems disingenuous given that the standard critical narrative positions the post-1979 cultural realm as the space wherein authority and identity are devolved in a manner that actually adumbrates the institutional devolution of power in 1998 through the Scotland Act.[3] Secondly, Lockerbie's comment raises a question as to precisely what that 'quasi-politics' might be. Lockerbie's assertion explicitly suggests that it was the *national* question which so pre-occupied culture before devolution and, even more mechanistically, that writers such as James Kelman (who is Lockerbie's main target) were primarily engaged in proving their Scottishness in a fashion that confirms some pre-ordained and 'stereotypical' paradigm. Implicitly underpinning Lockerbie's views is a teleological narrative which avers that devolution demarcates some (vaguely defined) normativity that has now been broached and which may set aside, in some new dispensation, those former 'quasi-political' antagonisms. And the

[2] Massie, Alan. 'Sir Walter's Scoterati', *Scotland on Sunday* 16 June 2002. *Review*, 1

[3] The most brilliant and nuanced analyses of such cultural politics are proffered by Cairns Craig's *Out of History: Narrative Paradigms in Scottish and British Culture* (Edinburgh, 1996) and *The Modern Scottish Novel: Narrative and the National Imagination* (Edinburgh, 1999); and Michael Gardiner's *The Cultural Roots of British Devolution* (Edinburgh, 2004).

consequence of such normalization, for Lockerbie, is to be the re-issuing of the 'individual' untainted by a now resolved Scottishness.

Similarly, Christopher Whyte, in an essay specifically on masculinity in contemporary Scottish culture, has maintained that 'In the absence of an elected political authority, the task of representing the nation has been repeatedly devolved to its writers . . . one can hope that the setting-up of a Scottish parliament will at last allow Scottish literature to be literature first and foremost, rather than the expression of a nationalist movement'.[4] The main, and indeed laudable, purpose of Whyte's analysis is to critique violent masculine paradigms but it is notable that the reactionary crisis of gender identity perceived by Whyte is located in a broader national malaise and disempowerment that, once more, may be resolved by devolved political power. Both Lockerbie and Whyte assume that pre-devolution culture compensates for some national democratic deficit that is redressed by devolution so that, with the nation restored and political institutions returned, literature may also reclaim its privileged autonomy. Herein resides a misguided reduction of the *political* to the *national* and a concomitant advocacy of a disengaged, individualised art. According to such a proposition, just as Scotland attains a normative model of national development that confirms yet paradoxically obsoletes its nationhood, so too its literature tautologically reproduces itself as literature in an economy of normalcy beyond politics and history.

It is this literary concern with wrestling Scottish writing from a supposedly anomalous 'quasi-politics' that is embedded in the long-established sedimentation of sociological, socio-economic and political discourse positioning Scotland as peculiar, as the miscarried version of a European national developmental norm, that I have sought to identify. David McCrone formulates Scotland's peculiarity thus:

> In terms of its structural position in the historical development of the capitalist world economy Scotland is doubly unique. Britain as a whole was the first state to have a thoroughgoing capitalist revolution; second, Scotland's capitalist revolution occurred within a country lacking the political and institutional structures of statehood. Further . . . such a transformation occurred before the ideological input of nationalism which was to inform the political and economic features of capitalist industrialisation in much of Europe . . . Scotland crossed 'the great

[4] Christopher Whyte, 'Masculinities in Contemporary Scottish Fiction', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 34, no. 3 (1998), 274–85, 284.

> divide' to become an industrialised society without the benefit or hindrance of nationalism, which usually acted as a political or ideological vehicle for much of the European bourgeoisie. Further, Scotland's economy was rarely if ever self-contained and independent. It was an open economy, reliant on external capital and technology, and subject to the vagaries of the broader economic and political environment, whether of Britain or a wider European capitalist economy.[5]

So, according to the teleological narrative of this argument, where England developed and matured organically, Scotland retarded and splintered. Equally, Tom Nairn also perceives Scotland as an anomaly outside the norms of historical progress and concludes that 'an anomalous historical situation could not engender a "normal" culture'. In this kind of interpretation, the politics of Scottish culture are never experienced in the terms of their own specificity and intensity, for live, disruptive and constitutive antagonisms, such as social class, instead become the depleted tokens of someone else's normality. Nairn comments: 'The opposite of mature all-roundedness is presumably infantile partiality, or fragmentariness'.[6] In a confirmation of the bourgeois narrative underpinning the progressive model of historical development, the insinuation ghosting such pronouncements is that Scotland would have been normal if only it had evolved a mature and well-rounded middle-class. The implication is that nations, peoples, individuals or classes which do not produce culture in its normative form are not merely different but abnormal, aberrant and, according to the bourgeois narrative of historical development, immature or not fully formed social subjects or constituencies. For Theodor Adorno, the effort to diagnose a social formation according to a grammar of health and normalcy itself betrays a bourgeois narrative of historical development: 'the dichotomy of healthy/sick is as undialectical as that of the rise and fall of the bourgeoisie, which itself derives its norms from a bourgeois consciousness that has failed to keep pace with its own development'.[7] Adorno's account of the bourgeoisie's periodic incapacity to plot its own historical dynamic of perpetual change permits a fundamental revision of the bourgeois narrative

[5] David McCrone, *Understanding Scotland: The Sociology of a Stateless Nation* (London, 1992), 35.

[6] Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism* (London, 1981), 155, 157.

[7] Adorno, Theodor W. 'Reconciliation Under Duress'. *Aesthetics and Politics: Debates Between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno*, trans. Ronald Taylor (London, 1977), 151–76, 156.

underscoring the disposition of Scotland according to historical paradigms of prior malformation and belated normalcy. The effort by both Lockerbie and Whyte to reaffirm the return to good health of both the individual and literature in Scotland assumes its proper context and significance in a vast bourgeois realignment more globally. The critical and historical positions adopted by Lockerbie and Whyte, and Nairn and McCrone, should not be regarded, as they ostensibly and locally appear, as a remedial struggle against a deformed nationalism. Rather, they gain their full meaning and belie their deepest affinities by signalling a wrangle to thread the final and telling stitch to the suture of bourgeois hegemony.

That said, Kelman's post-devolution fiction is notably set outwith Scotland: the fragmentary reports of *Translated Accounts* seep through the confines of an undesignated regime that is possibly Turkey or somewhere in Eastern Europe, whilst *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* addresses the experiences of the Scottish migrant Jeremiah Brown in the United States. In the terms of analysis established by Nairn and McCrone in relation to Scotland and history, and Lockerbie and Whyte with regard to Scottish literature, it is highly tempting to concede this re-orientation of Kelman's work as an admission that Scottish matters have finally been resolved, that devolution constitutes a paradigm shift from which it is time to move on. Lockerbie's appraisal that Kelman's 'writing is angrier than ever, but I think that course has run'[8] seeks to dismiss Kelman on the basis that he is out of synch with this national resolution and the temporal and spatial closure of its narrative, yet it is also troubled by the persistence and indeed intensification of political energies that Lockerbie's model of a new literature can neither explain nor periodize. The refusal of Kelman's work to be placed by a Scotland made normal by these narratives of pre- and post-devolution society is highly instructive for it signals that the politics and aesthetics of his writing are incommensurate with both the nationalist appropriation of culture before 1999 and the post-nationalist arrogation of culture thereafter. In particular, it is the stringent class politics of Kelman's writing which remains recalcitrant to such co-option. It is the ideological task of nationalism to assert the primacy of the nation in abeyance of identifications such as class, and hence to seek to annex the voice of a writer such as Kelman as a *national* one rather than a precisely situated *class* articulation. And the post-nationalist literature anticipated by Lockerbie and Whyte should not be regarded as the rebuttal of the ideological work

[8] Quoted Massie, 'Sir Walter's Scoterati', *Scotland on Sunday* 16 June 2002. *Review*, 1.

undertaken by nationalism but rather its ultimate outcome: according to such logic, the nation as an already agreed concept and the normal *telos* of historical development permits the expression of the autonomy of both literature and the individual. If nationalism betrays its bourgeois hegemony in its effort to sublate and recode the working-class politics of a writer such as Kelman in its own terms, then such a stratagem achieves not its negation but its apotheosis in post-nationalism. For post-nationalism pursues the final repression of class in its discourse of cultural difference, its normative society of differentiated individuals. Therein, class antagonism is rewritten as cultural diversity, a revalued sign of the post-nation's healthy polyphony, so that, divested of its own terms and context, the language of class becomes simply one register amongst others of a cultural relativism that rewords bourgeois hegemony as social pluralism.

So how might Kelman's work facilitate a reconsideration of the democratic credentials of the newly devolved Scotland? Well, Kelman's work has always been driven by the social inequalities and fracture of late capitalism, the disruption of traditional working-class communities and solidarities and an attendant loss of meaning from the world and its events and institutions. In analyzing the predicament of Kelman's characters, 1979 is a crucial watershed since it signalled not only the contentious defeat of the first referendum on Scottish devolution but also, compounding the Scottish working class's lack of democratic control over its own future, the British General Election victory of Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher's neo-liberal economic policies set about a vigorous assault upon the organised labour of Britain's industrial heartlands – a campaign that was never endorsed by a democratic majority in Scotland (or for that matter Wales or large areas of working-class England). Significantly, then, state power and its institutions, which decimated the lives and communities of working-class Scotland, were beyond the immediate understanding or experiential grasp of its victims; it was very much absented and elsewhere (literally hundreds of miles away). Kelman observes in Kafka's work that 'society can be regarded as a labyrinth of authorities whose powers are functional'.[9] So too in his own historical moment, Kelman must confront a labyrinthine state and bureaucracy that is rendered extremely difficult to map, comprehend or resist due to the dialectic of the *presence* of its oppression and the *absence* of its anonymous and unaccountable institutions. Kelman's project in his novels and short stories is an attempt to piece together a renewed sense of the disparate

[9] James Kelman, *And the Judges Said: Essays* (London, 2002), 279.

remoteness of state power, to reconvene an oppositional social tribunal that interrogates the state's various apparatuses: coercive, welfare, educational and so on. It is therefore highly apposite that Kafka should remain such an influence of Kelman's writing since Kafka was perhaps the first twentieth-century writer to comprehend fully how power functions in terms of discrepancy between the presence of the lived, daily grind of its effects and enforcements and the absence of the locus and source of its vast systemic reach. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari assert:

> If Kafka is the greatest theorist of bureaucracy, it is because he shows how, at a certain level (but which one? it is not localizable), the barriers between offices cease to be 'a definitive dividing line' and are immersed in a molecular medium that dissolves them and simultaneously makes the office manager proliferate into microfigures impossible to recognize of identify, discernable only when they are centralizable: another regime, coexistent with the separation *and* totalization of the rigid segments.[10]

Similarly, Kelman's work confronts the interminable and banal microfigures and microeffects of power and yet also attempts to discern the causal structures behind these proliferations. However, with devolution, one would expect – according to the national teleology of democratic redress – that this gap of representation (both cultural and political) would be reduced, that power returns to the nation and its people (and hence the historical forces which lead to devolution coincide with the *telos* of national self-determination). But Kelman's post-devolution fiction is, if anything, inflected with even more disjuncture and displacement than before. In answering why this might be so, it is useful to return to the terms of Deleuze and Guattari's work on Kafka and specifically the theory of minor literature that they establish from Kafka's position as a Czech Jew writing in German. Deleuze and Guattari argue: 'A minor literature doesn't come from a minor language; it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language . . . in it language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialization'.[11] In these terms, if Kelman's work contains a devolving dynamic then it does so by *deterritorializing* Standard English through a working-class Glaswegian constituency and not through a Scottish or national

[10] Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London, 2004), 235–6.

[11] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. *Franz Kafka: Towards A Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (London, 1986), 16.

lens. By contrast, the devolution of political institutions within Britain can be understood in terms of a fundamental *reterritorialization* of power: namely, the dominance free-market economics which underpins the move to create a European super-state portioned into highly rarefied neo-regional units.

Hence, the supposed political and national emancipation institutionally offered by devolution may also be interpreted into terms of the micro-economic restructuring and realignments of global capitalism. Certainly devolution is irreducible solely to the peremptory logic of global capitalism but nor is it indissociable therefrom. So the context of Scottish devolution requires circumspection given that the re-imbrication of British political institutions shares its historical moment with vast forces that run counter to popular-democratic energies: particularly, the collapse of popular belief in the efficacy of representative or parliamentary democracy. Kelman's post-devolution fiction confirms that in institutional terms what is ostensibly a deterritorialization is ultimately a profound reterritorialization. That is, not a democratizing movement towards an eventual national *independence* or regionalized and micropolitical enfranchisement but rather a shift to an increased *interdependence* of economic micro-units within global capitalism and its shadowy institutions. Indeed, it is therefore highly symptomatic that in an effort to reconcile nationalism and globalization in an official party document, Kenny MacAskill, the Justice spokesperson of the Scottish National Party, seeks to try and balance competing and ultimately contradictory demands in proposing 'Independence in an Interdependent World'.[12] In MacAskill's terms, a reconstituted nationalism for the post-devolution SNP recognises and endorses 'the internationalisation of the world economy'[13] and seeks to place Scotland with welcome complicity in a coalition encapsulated by his chapter heading: 'Devolution, Globalisation, and a New World Order'. It is the deterritorializing energy of social class in Kelman's fiction that stands defiantly outwith the global reterritorialization of a devolved Scotland. To that end, the radical shift in Kelman's style in *Translated Accounts* does not offer some sense of a Scotland at home with itself, the homecoming of some authentic voice as nationalist appropriations of his work would have had it, but instead very boldly displaces his work across what the broken language of that novel terms the 'terrortories'[14] of global space. *Translated Accounts* does not proffer

[12] Kenny MacAskill, *Building a Nation: Post Devolution Nationalism in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2004), 23.

[13] Ibid., 27.

[14] James Kelman, *Translated Accounts: A Novel* (London, 2001), 175.

a Scotland made normal by a democratic redress but instead forces Scottish culture to consider its own implication in globalized networks of power and injustice, and it casts profound doubt on the representative limits of freedom and democracy by filtering through its fragmentary languages the constitutive oppressions that haunt a new global dispensation.

Additionally, in *You Have to be Careful* Jeremiah suffers a terminal displacement: 'I had a home, I had another home, maybe homes are ten a penny, I have had fucking millions of them. Except in the land of my birth'.[15] Interestingly for Kelman, since he does not usually use quotation marks in his work, even for dialogue, the word 'hame' is used in inverted commas in the novel on occasion. In contrast to Lockerbie and Whyte's reconciled Scotland or Nairn and McCrone's Scotland made institutionally and historically normal, 'hame' is for Jeremiah always displaced and his repeated attempts to define and claim it only serve to defer it still further, for its normative global codes of belonging are inaccessible to his class experience. Tellingly, the Scots vernacular 'hame' signals only its own deferral and displacement rather than its belonging and accommodation in some reconciled national language and culture.

In addition to the spatial and linguistic displacements of *Translated Accounts* and *You have to be Careful* that unsettle the celebration of a newly reconciled Scotland, both novels also exhibit a profound temporal disjuncture. *Translated Accounts* asks: 'Is there a curfew for dead spirits?'.[16] Both novels articulate the persistence of historical ghosts or unfinished business, the refusal of injustices to be reconciled in the terms of the power that has produced them in the first place. As such, both books remain resolutely out of step with what Francis Fukuyama terms *the end of history*. Fukuyama regards the present as the fulfillment of history and its reformist, ameliorative promises, and he naively equates post-cold war global capitalism (and indeed American imperialism) with democracy, to create, in his own terms at least, a utopia of a world supposedly beyond political division, ideological conflict or historical change.[17] Echoing such sentiments in his conversation with Catherine Lockerbie, Allan Massie proclaims that in Scotland now 'there isn't much interest in writing for a cause because there isn't much of a cause worth fighting for'.[18] This effort to periodize post-devolution Scotland in accordance with a more global doctrine of history as culminated progress and reconciliation is forcefully lacerated by

[15] James Kelman, *You Have to be Careful in the Land of the Free* (London, 2004), 68.

[16] *Translated Accounts*, 25.

[17] See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London, 1992).

[18] Alan Massie, 'Sir Walter's Scoterati', *Scotland on Sunday* 16 June 2002. *Review*, 1.

both *You have to be Careful* and its journey to the heart of American imperialism and by *Translated Accounts*, wherein the discourse of historical progress is exposed as a reassuring fantasy of self-determined autonomy that displaces the acknowledgement of real horror: 'We progress. I also would progress. A comfort came from this. I again was aware of the bodies but as in a dream, or dream-like, my own state'.[19] Hence, Kelman's post-devolution fiction, with ist focus on class and the global injustices that systemically connect the world, gives the lie to the spurious dream of a Scotland reconciled in its own state.

Dietmar Böhnke, the author of what is not only the first full-length critical study of Kelman's work but also a well-judged and considered one, is keen to situate Kelman's work in relation to devolution and to a new and specifically *national* dispensation:

> this recent development and what will follow from it can indeed be regarded as an – at least indirect – outcome of the more confident mood in Scottish culture and especially literature of the past years and decades . . . the concern of Kelman (and other contemporary writers) with Scottish national identity, which I found to be at the centre of his work, certainly played a part in bringing about this new situation.[20]

In this kind of interpretation Kelman's work coincides with a national and institutional devolution that is to be understood in terms of historical 'development' and progress. Specifically, Böhnke equates postmodernism with this 'devolutionary process'[21] and he invokes as a definition of the postmodern the work of Linda Hutcheon. Hutcheon formulates postmodernism as fundamentally *ex-centric*: that is, a deterritorialising liberation of difference from the constraints of power, metropole, hierarchy, totalising unity and so on: 'The local, the regional, the non-totalising are reasserted as the center becomes a fiction – necessary, desired, but a fiction nonetheless'.[22] In such terms, devolving power from the centre to the margin or periphery appears an intrinsically postmodern emancipation and enablement, thus conjoining postmodernism and popular-democratic fulfilment. This essay, on the other hand, has sought to affirm the resistance of Kelman's work to the institutional

[19] *Translated Accounts*, 1.

[20] Dietmar Böhnke, *Kelman Writes Back: Literary Politics in the Work of A Scottish Writer* (Berlin 1999), 6–7.

[21] Ibid., 12.

[22] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London, 2000), 12.

devolution of power in Scotland; rather than contributing to that devolution of power, his recent work confirms his continuing resistance to the global realignment and reterritorialization of bourgeois, liberal democracy. Perhaps the canonical advocacy of postmodernism's supposed emancipatory credentials is proffered by Jean-François Lyotard through his lauding of micro-narratives over a putatively repressive meta-narrative, and his account of the individual as a node where social practices intersect yet cannot be mapped onto one another or integrated into the social totality.[23] In this kind of analysis, society is heterogeneous and non-totalizable and any attempt to consider the individual in terms of problematics such as social class (or nationality or gender for that matter) become reductive of that complexity. A. J. P. Thomson, for example, uses Lyotard to question the attenuation of Scotland's complexity by a nationalist narrative: 'This circumscription of Scotland's political prospects is also a wrong done to politics itself, when politics is considered to be not the implantation of pre-determined political programmes but, as it is for Lyotard, the space of conflict and debate itself'.[24] Conversely, Kelman's writing demonstrates implacably that social class does reductively impede some celebration of the heterogeneous and autonomous individual but rather it exposes how class is the very structural and constitutive ground upon which such bourgeois identities are formed. Kelman's work tries precisely to reconvene a sense of the global totality producing these new micro-political codes, hybridities, and structures. In postmodernism's Lyotardian heterogeneity of individual and event, and in Lockerbie's and Whyte's post-nationalist accounts of devolution, we find ultimately not a popular, democratic *deterritorialization* but instead the *reterritorialization* of that most mainstream of things, the individual, the formative ideological building block of bourgeois society.

In terms of the North of Ireland, devolution of necessity is wedded to the Peace Process – the involvement of the British and Irish governments with multinational investment and US interventions. As with Kelman's work, key moments in post-devolution Northern Irish culture also retain fundamental suspicions and negations of the dominant assertion of the opening of the North

[23] See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, 1988); *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Cambridge 1991); *Libidinal Economy,* trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (London, 1993).

[24] A. J. P. Thomson, 'Phrasing Scotland and the Postmodern', in Eleanor Bell and Gavin Miller (eds), *Scotland in Theory: Reflections on Literature and Culture* (Amsterdam, 2004), 69–81, 80.

to a new liberal-democratic global dispensation. Alan Gillis' poem 'Progress'[25] offers a succinct but sustained meditation on the ethical aporais of the narrative of historical development and it is worth quoting in full:

> They say that for years Belfast was backwards
> and it's great now to see some progress.
> So I guess we can look forward to taking boxes
> from the earth. I guess that ambulances
> will leave the dying back amidst the rubble
> to be explosively healed. Given time,
> one hundred thousand particles of glass
> will create impossible patterns in the air
> before coalescing into the clarity
> of a window. Through which, a reassembled head
> will look out and admire the shy young man
> taking his bomb from the building and driving home.

The poem neatly undermines the linear narrative transporting a society deemed to be 'backwards' into a present dispensation of progress. By cleverly reversing the linear narrative Gillis indicates the ethical absences of such a teleology of history, the unresolved injustices that cannot be undone by moving backwards and forwards along its temporal continuum. The understated and resigned refrain, 'I guess', signals simultaneously the dominance of this doctrine of progress and a deep circumspection as to its merits. The ironised 'we can look forward' divests the phrase of its easy complicity with the readymade futurity offered by the state-sponsored aspects of the Peace Process. The poem loads the phrase with irony by overdetermining its seemingly everyday, common sensibly true anticipation in the terms of that overarching march of progress. This looking forward is exposed as an act of fundamental forgetting, an effort to repress the restive *adikia* that troubles and haunts the linear narrative of development. And that teleology of progress anticipates its healing will be fulfilled 'given time', where time is a given, where this temporal narrative enthrones its own inevitability.[26] Where this narrative of progress offers 'clarity' it does so

[25] Alan Gillis, *Somebody, Somewhere* (Oldcastle, Co. Meath, 2004), 55.

[26] In *Specters of Marx*, a book which takes as it epigraph Hamlet's complaint that 'The time is out of joint', Derrida reworks Martin Heidegger's concept of *adikia* to suggest that we inhabit a disjuncture in history that is not only *temporal* but also *ethical* and to stress the need to reconvene a historical tribunal that comprehends our phantasmagoric present and its injustices, to 'set things right', as Hamlet would have it. There is a

only by remaking and 'reassembling' events in its own terms and voiding them of their own ethical and historical import and context. But whilst the poem ends with 'home' it is evident that the linear model of history as progress cannot finally reconcile nor resolve the historical events that it seeks to order in an ultimately 'impossible' manner. The poem's deep irony insists that another means of doing justice to the past is painfully necessary since otherwise ethical displacement and injustice must inexorably continue their *revenant* or return seeping through the aporia of the movement of progress even as that dominant narrative of history wishes to trammel or repress them.

The fact that the poem proceeds from what 'they say' not only permits the poetic voice to dissociate itself from the doctrine of progress and pursue its task of brushing that history against the grain with biting irony, as it also indicates that the dominant management of the Peace Process and its supposed democratic redress is conducted by 'they' whilst the victims are disallowed by such a narrative from being subjects of the historical events in which they are involved. In terms of this arrogation of events by the narrative of history as progress, Derrida's account of the archive is illuminating. Drawing upon the etymology of the word 'archive' in the Greek *arkhē*, Derrida formulates the archive as at once *commencement* and *commandment*, as entailing the principles of history, of where things commence, and of commandment and law. In the second, determining sense of the *arkhē*, Derrida argues that the law can be found in the archive: 'there where men and gods command, there where authority, social order are exercised, in this place from which order is given'.[27] Most particularly, Derrida asserts that it is the *archons* who have the primary power to interpret the archive: 'it is at their home, in that place which is their house [*arkheion* as 'house,' 'domicile,' 'address'] . . . that official documents are filed'.[28] In Gillis' poem 'Progress' it is therefore telling that the 'home' arrived at is produced by 'they', by the *archons* and guarantors of a narrative of history as progress that records and re-orders the ethical dilemmas of events in the history of the North which denies those events and their participants their own context and specificity. Derrida neatly avers: 'Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and access to the archive, its constitution, and its

profound fear in the end of history narrative of the ghostly return, what Derrida terms the *revenant*, an insecurity that history is not dead and buried and cannot simply be co-opted to secure the encirclement of the present state of affairs.

[27] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago, 1995), 9.

[28] Ibid., 10.

interpretation'.[29] Gillis' 'Progress' similarly gauges and indicts the democratic credentials of a devolved Northern Ireland by uncovering the state-sponsored aspects of the Peace Process and its model of progressive history as serving the interests of the *archons*, the keepers of this history of the powerful that would re-member, re-order and forget the voices of the vanquished.

Comparable issues of the claims of ethics and archives are distilled in Robert McLiam Wilson's 'The Dreamed', a magic realist tale in which an old man becomes accustomed to the dead combatants, initially from the Second World War and then from all wars, returning to life through the portal of his bed at night. The old man had escaped fighting in the Second World War through his working as a researcher in the War Office Research Unit. Embedded in the bureaucracy of war, he became inured to the mechanized, economic costing of war and death:

> He had grown used to casualty figures and projections of all kinds. He had seen economic breakdowns of casualty figures. How much British casualties cost the economy, how much it cost on average to kill Germans. He was perturbed in only a minor way . . . He had a great gift for not thinking. He distrusted empathy, he distrusted the way his eyes could fill with reasonless tears. Why weep over suffering that didn't belong to him? What was the possible use of such a habit? . . . When the Americans dropped two of their spectacular new ideas on Japan he felt the blast a little more . . . When he started to read government documents about the Jews, he found it harder to avoid reflection. When accounts appeared in newspapers, his head itched again. When he saw photographs, his mouth dried for what felt like forever.[30]

The story in a very meaningful way does serve to pass sentence on that bureaucratization of war and society as its ghosts return to trouble the promise of history's progress, a spectral return of the departed and their unpaid ethical debt. However, as the war dead miraculously return to life and seek a setting things right, an ethical realignment, there is also a more troubling structure to Wilson's story. The first returnee from the dead, a French soldier named Sylvain, takes it upon himself with the old man's assistance to see to it that all

[29] Ibid., 4.

[30] Robert McLiam Wilson, 'The Dreamed', in Ian Jack (ed.), *Granta* 81 (Spring 2003). 303–22, 308.

of the soldiers who return to life are provided for and reintegrated into society. And whilst the story on one level allows for a utopian return and redress for history's victims, there is an unavoidable and iterative parallel between the economics and bureaucratization of war and death felt by the old man in his job in the War Office and Sylvain's ordering of the redrafted lives of the returned war dead:

> As the years passed the bureaucracy of the departed had become magnified, monstrous. Much of it was in the form of open, charitable trust. Fundraising mostly took place within the group of departed but several investment companies were set up and increased the proceeds judiciously. Businesses run by the departed burgeoned. No man leaving the old man's house needed to look for work . . . By 1952, almost all the returnees were paying a semi-formal tariff on their income to one of Sylvain's organizations. By 2001, the old man made a guess that the simple income of the returnees must amount to a minimum of 192 million pounds. That did not count the investment accounts and various businesses.[31]

'The Dreamed' harbors a tension between the desire to reclaim lost lives, to set right injustice, and the ordering of the archive, the return of the men to a world that has not been systemically transformed and which, in the above passage quoted, co-opts all things to its economic and historical progress, including justice, so that it is profits which are accrued 'judiciously'. Sylvain's archive and its bureaucratic order confirms Derrida's point that 'archivization produces as much as it records the event'.[32] The return of the dead, in Sylvain's system, recodes injustice and reorders the departed lives in the ongoing, self-perpetuating history that had sent them to war and killed them in the first instance. Hence, the story says of the Old Man:

> One thing he particularly abhorred was Sylvain's habit of documentation. Sylvain had kept scrupulous archives . . . he knew all the numbers, all the fractions. He knew the exact total of returned men. He knew the monthly rate of returnees, their nationality predominances and sequences, costs per man.[33]

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[31] Ibid., 316.

[32] Derrida, *Archive Fever*, 17.

[33] Wilson, 'The Dreamed', 317.

That the story's more utopian, ethical urges are attenuated by the order of history may be viewed as pessimistic; yet it may also be redeemed in the light of Fredric Jameson's sense of the *diagnostic* and *critical-substantive* role of what he deems as the *negative* modality necessary to properly utopian thought: 'the system would have to be already transformed'.[34] This negative sense of utopia, Jameson maintains, is strongly political so that 'it is most authentic when we cannot imagine it. Its function lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future – our imprisonment in a non-utopian present without historicity or futurity – so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped or confined'.[35] In this light, the utopian urge for redress in 'The Dreamed' is disappointed by, yet also therefore utterly indicts, the ideological closure of developmental history, the selfsame iteration of its paradigm. And the story is, in some way, able to flow through the aporias and repression of that history. We are informed of the old man:

> He still wondered how these documents read. What kind of literature did they represent? What kind of testament? He knew that the vastness of the bureaucracy was Sylvain's attempt to dilute the occult strangeness of the whole phenomenon. He knew that the Frenchman had always hoped that double-entry book keeping would render everything more thinkable . . . The only statistic that the old man could quote verbatim from this strange archive was that nearly two hundred of the men had ended up long or short term in psychiatric institutions for trying to tell the truth.[36]

So the departed are allowed jobs, careers, social advancement, profits, economic success – anything, in fact, but their 'truth'. They have been archived in both past and present in terms of a historical order that will allow anything but an acknowledgement of their experiences and the ethical questions which they raise in their own terms and context. Yet their truth, what the story itself recognizes as their 'trace', remains and rightly and insistently voices a restive disquiet with the dominant order and its requisition of their lives.

If Wilson's 'The Dreamed' castigates the *archons*, the keepers of history's dominant order of things, and demonstrates that nothing has changed ethically

[34] Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review* 25 (Jan – Feb 2004), 46.
[35] Ibid, 38.
[36] Wilson, 'The Dreamed', 318.

in the systemic closure of that order despite the return of the dead, then Eoin McNamee's *The Ultras* is a post-devolution novel that sharply focuses such critique directly on the state itself. As with much of McNamee's work, the novel weaves its fictions in and out of real events, in this case the life and death of Robert Nairac, an SAS soldier killed on active service in Northern Ireland. The police officer, Agnew, who retrospectively investigates the activities of the secret services and their involvement in murder in the North during the conflict uncovers a shadowy intelligence group whose very existence is denied: 'The forsworn brethren, the Ultras. Ultra meaning beyond. Ultra meaning extreme. The word had a cabbalistic tone to it . . . They created secrets and forced everyone else to live in them'.[37] Indeed, according to the *OED*, *ultra* connotes both 'lying spatially beyond or on the other side of', and 'going beyond, surpassing, or transcending the limits of'. As with the 'they' in Gillis' poem 'Progress', *The Ultras* implies that, in spite of its efforts to map the injustices and morally unfinished business of the past, the official archive, its *archons* and its law override ethical remembrance. McNamee's penumbral, conspiratorial milieu and its 'ghostly infrastructure'[38] returns us also to Kelman's fiction and the sense that power is fundamentally non-representative in the new North. As with Kelman's Kafkaesque mappings, so too McNamee must seek to straddle a 'moral void' in history and the new dispensation yet retain a commitment that 'everything was connected', that a historical tribunal must be established capable of passing judgment on inequality and ethical aporia.[39] The ethical, utopian yearning in the work of Gillis, Wilson, McNamee and Kelman undermines the dominant account of devolution as the culmination of a history of progress, and the unrealized nature of that ethical desire further serves to condemn the systemic history which makes such an ethical redress impossible. As such, this writing offers a stringent confrontation with post-devolution power in all its forms, even as those forms seek simultaneously to overwhelm us and to withdraw from our grasp and understanding completely. Such work deterritorializes itself from the complacent modification of a post-devolution, liberal-democratic Scotland, and from a Northern Ireland progressed beyond history, and it both anticipates and demands a more fundamental and revolutionary transformation. As *You Have to be Careful* insists: 'There are times when the world changes'.[40]

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[37] Eoin McNamee, *The Ultras* (London, 2004), 216.

[38] Ibid, 10

[39] Ibid, 150; 10.

40 Kelman, *You Have to be Careful*, 90.